THE

Pinnacle

NOV/DEC 2026

OF SANDY & BEESTON

Christmas Tree Festival

– details inside

Sharing the Good News from the:

Anglican, Baptist & Methodist Churches in Sandy & Beeston

The Pinnacle

The Pinnacle is published bimonthly by Sandy Parochial Church Council on behalf of the Anglican, Baptist and Methodist churches of Sandy and Beeston. It is available **FREE** from your local churches.

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Front Cover Image:
The Nativity stained glass window in St Swithun's Church Lady Chapel, designed and installed by Percy Beacon in 1922

Picture Credit: Trevor Warrs

Welcome to the November/December 2026 edition of *The Pinnacle*. This magazine supports the mission and ministry of the Anglican, Baptist and Methodist churches within the Sandy and Beeston communites.

Have a story to tell?
Then do contact us, we'd love to hear from you.

Adrienne, Mark, Stephen & Marina
Email: sandybeestonpinnacle@gmail.com

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Dear friends ...

Some of you might know that I am the new Methodist minister in this part of Bedfordshire, and I love Christmas. I love the cooler, fresher weather as autumn gives way to winter; the bustle and excitement of choosing presents for friends and family; and, especially, seeing our Sandy and Beeston communities adorned with Christmas lights and decorations. In many of our homes, too, we will soon be putting up and decorating a Christmas tree, filling the winter darkness with light.

That light takes us back to the first Christmas. The Star of Bethlehem shone through the darkness, guiding weary travellers towards the manger and pointing them towards hope. Today, we echo its glow in our own homes, winding warm lights around evergreen branches and framing our windows with a welcoming brightness. Where one magnificent star announced Jesus' arrival, countless smaller lights now brighten the cold shadows of winter and create spaces of shared joy.

Each ornament we hang and every candle we light can remind us of that first Christmas night. When we place the crowning star on the tree, we connect our celebrations with the ancient journey to Bethlehem. Our decorations are more than festive trimmings: they point to a light that cannot be extinguished. As we illuminate our homes and communities, may we welcome that same sense of wonder, warmth and peace into our daily lives, and carry the timeless story of the Nativity into the future.

God bless

Rev Zena Smith, Beacon Methodist Church Minister

Baptisms, Marriages & Funerals

FUNERALS

Bill Lawrence 1 September, St Swithun's Church
Phil Hutson 4 September, St Swithun's
Anne Percy 7 September, St Swithun's
Colin Price 30 September, St Swithun's
Maureen Gurney 12 October, St Swithun's
Sylvia Lesley Herbert 12 October, G&H Seamers

WEDDINGS (all St Swithun's Church)

Shirley Hanks & Michael Houlding
26 September, St Swithun's Church
Niall Gilbert & Sin Mei Leung
10 October, St Swithun's Church

St Swithun's Church

Harvest

Heritage Open Day

Christmas Tree Festival

All Saints & All Souls

On **Sunday 1 November** we have an **All Saints Together at 10** service at 10am. The **All Souls' Memorial Service at 4pm** is a chance to reflect on loved ones we have lost and light a candle for them.

Pamper & Prayer

We are holding a **Pamper & Prayer** session on **Saturday 21 November at 2pm** in the Church Rooms. £2. Book at sandyparishchurch.org

Christmas Bazaar & Tree Festival

Our **Christmas Bazaar** is on **Saturday 28 November, 12noon–3pm** with stalls, activities, raffle, Father Christmas and refreshments. On the same day we are opening our 3-day **Christmas Tree Festival** with different trees on display decorated by individuals, local groups and businesses. At **5.30pm** Singthusiasm Sandy will perform Christmas songs followed by **Carols around the Piano** with mulled wine at **6pm**. More information on **p12**.

Christmas Services & Concerts

Details of our **Christmas Services** including the Mayor's Carol Service, Lessons & Carols, Nativity Service, Carols in the Churchyard, Midnight Mass and Eucharist Service, are on **p9**. Details of our two choral concerts in December are on **p15**.

Late summer and autumn activites

We held our **Heritage Open Day** on Saturday 12 September with a number of workshops including bellringing, flower arranging and art.

We collected donations for the Need Project at our **Harvest Together at 10 Service** on 4 October.

The church opened on Thursday 15 October for people to light candles as part of the **Wave of Light** for Baby Loss Awareness Week. Pink and blue ribbons were made available to tie on the church railings.

Pizza & Chat

Our young people's group is held on the last Wednesday of the month from 6–8pm. It's a chance for 11–18-year-olds to meet, eat pizza, play games and talk about life, faith and the big questions.

Tuesday fellowship groups

We have two Tuesday groups in Sandy homes, one from 8.15–10am and another at 6.30pm. All are welcome to join for tea, coffee, fellowship, Bible discussion and prayer. For more details, speak to Andrew Holford 07915 125875.

Wednesday Communion

There is a Holy Communion Service at 10.30am each Wednesday in the Church.

Weddings, Funerals & Baptisms

Please contact Rev Jodie to arrange.

Pastoral Care

Contact Rev Jodie or a Church Warden for home visits, prayer and Holy Communion.

St Swithun's Parish Church
30 High St, Sandy SG19 1AQ
sandyparishchurch.org

07845 735880
revjodiebrown@gmail.com
For service times, see pp18–19

Bike 'n' Hike 2026

Two teams from St Swithun's took on this year's Bike 'n' Hike challenge. Andrew Barber and I travelled by car on a recollection/remembrance journey, covering 20 churches and chapels in total, but sadly most were shut, so I'll focus on those that were open. We started at St Swithun's, which was ready to welcome visitors to the Heritage Day. Then on to Blunham Parish Church, which was holding a coffee morning. We walked across the field to St Denys, Little Barford, a little church with no electricity, left marooned by plague and now sadly boarded up due to vandalism (pictured). We travelled on to Eynesbury Methodist chapel, attended by St Neots quad Anne Browning, and St Neots parish church where two of my grandchildren were christened and a visiting group was attempting a 3-hour bell peel. Next stop was the United Reform for a cup of tea, then on to Little Paxton where my friend of 60-plus years was christened and we enjoyed sandwiches in the sun. We popped over the A1 to Southoe and arrived as the local MP was cutting a ribbon to reopen this as a hub church. A wedding was taking place at Buckden Parish Church so we walked to the Methodist and Buckden Towers, where we used to take young church members on away days and my mother enjoyed being sung to on her 90th birthday. After tea and cake at The George we headed to the church at Diddington, set in the park, with another wedding. Our final visit was to Eaton Socon where we paid our respects to Rev Tim Robb who sadly died this year.

Thank you to all who sponsored us and Terry and Marina Rugg, who walked from Willington to Great Barford, Blunham, Tempsford and Sandy with their two border collies, visiting 10 churches over 10 miles. You can read a full report of our endeavours at sandyparishchurch.org

Jean Peckham

Sandy Baptist Church

As life gets busy heading towards Christmas, Remembrance Day gives us a chance to pause and join the town on Bedford Road to remember those who gave their lives for us.

Our first Christmas event is a family Christmas activity afternoon on Saturday 12 December 2.30–4.30pm with crafts, activities and refreshments. It will end with Carols around the Christmas tree at 4.15pm. All free and everyone is welcome.

Our Nativity service and Carols by candlelight will be followed by mince pies and non-alcoholic mulled wine.

At our recent harvest service we looked at how difficult life has been for our UK farmers and how the Farming Community Network (FCN) provides practical help, training and emotional support on all things farming. The produce was passed onto the Need Project and the monetary offering to FCN.

In October Alex Cameron spoke about the work CHIPS (Christian International Peace Service) are doing with young people and families (for over 10 years) in Brixton, where gangs are prevalent and knife crime is high. CHIPS aims to bring reconciliation and healing. Although it takes a long time to see a difference, there are signs of reduced crime and a better understanding in the area they are working in. Her talk, 'Where does Peace Start?' is on the website.

Also in October, Neil Whitmill shared about prophetic art. Neil brought his paints and there were opportunities to have a go as well as to receive.

A new ladies' bible study has started on Tuesday 1pm in the hall – all ladies welcome to come along.

The church members voted to remove the old disused heating system and install electric heating in the main church building. We are hoping to get the heaters in, in time to celebrate Christmas in the big church.

Our website is regularly updated with activities and sermons. And we have our own YouTube and WhatsApp channels; Facebook and Instagram.

Groups

Little Angels Toddler group (term time Tuesdays 9.45am) contact jennykvass@gmail.com

Bible Study Groups Sunday 6.30pm; Tues 1pm (ladies); Weds 7.30pm

Prayer Meeting Mondays 7.30pm

Men's breakfast (full English) second Saturday in month at 8.30am. Contact Phil via deacons@sandybaptistchurch.org

Ladies' breakfast third Saturday in month at 9am. Text 07766 089794

Sandy Baptist Church
Bedford Road, Sandy SG19 1EJ
sandybaptistchurch.org
Martin Jones 07565 001708
Pastoral Care:
minister.sandybaptist@gmail.com
deacons@sandybaptistchurch.org
Hall Hire:
sandybaptisthallhire@gmail.org
Service times on pp24–25

Beacon Methodist Church

Beacon Methodist Church at Sandy

It was lovely for Sandy Chapel to host the launch service for Beacon Methodist church on 6 September, where Rev Zena Smith preached to her new circuit for the first time.

We have since been challenged to write poetry about the Holy Spirit at our Tea@3 service. Further, Zena's first Feast your Faith is coming up where we discuss challenging questions over a meal.

As a church we have offered help to the families involved in the recent devastating fire in the local area, seeing God's hand in the chance connections that He orchestrated on the day.

Looking forward to the Advent season, we are holding our Christingle on Christmas Eve as well as Tea@3 Carols by candlelight. We will begin Advent by decorating our Christmas tree.

Jenny Endersby

Beacon Methodist Church at Beeston

On 6 September the new multi-site Beacon Methodist Church was launched, serving the Beeston, Sandy and Upper Caldecote communities. We will continue to work more closely with each other, but local events and church services will see little change.

Our Harvest Festival service was well attended, with the church decorated in an array of autumn colours. We continued our members' tradition of bringing eggs to the service, which were given to Sue Ryder's Hospice at Moggerhanger.

Our recent monthly coffee morning was in aid of MacMillan Cancer Research and was well supported. We were joined by Park House Sandy residents and a local walkers group.

In the coming weeks we're preparing for the Christmas season – a busy time in the Christian calendar and our first Christmas as a multi-site church.

Cynthia Dent

Fellowship Group

Held at Sandy, Thurs 2–3pm.

Coffee Mornings

Community coffee mornings are held at Beeston, 10am–noon on the first Thursday of the month; and at Sandy on the third Wednesday from 10am.

Beacon Methodist Church at Sandy, St Neots Road, Sandy SG19 1BP
Tel: 01767 683498
zena.smith@northbedsmethodist.org.uk

Beacon Methodist Church at Beeston, 4 The Baulk, Beeston, Sandy SG19 1NR
northbedsmethodist.org.uk

Service times on pp24–25

Sandy Christmas Services

Sunday 6 December:
3pm Mayor's Carol Service, St Swithun's

Sunday 13 December:

10.30am Nativity Service, Sandy Baptist

Sunday 20 December:
2.30pm Carol Service & Christmas Tea, Beacon Methodist at Beeston
3pm Tea@3 Carol Service, Beacon Methodist at Sandy
6pm Lessons & Carols, St Swithun's
6.30pm Carols by Candlelight, Sandy Baptist, followed by mince pies & mulled punch

Christmas Eve:
3pm Nativity Service, St Swithun's
4pm Christingle Service, Beacon Methodist at Sandy
6pm Carols in the Churchyard, St Swithun's
11pm Midnight Mass, St Swithun's

Christmas Day:
10am Family Eucharist, St Swithun's
10am Christmas Day Service, Sandy Baptist

THE GIFT OF CHRISTMAS
Services at St Swithun's, Sandy
Mayor's Carol Service 6 December 3pm
Celebrate Christmas with our Town Mayor Cllr Paul Sharman
Lessons and Carols 20 December 6pm
A traditional Carol service with Bible readings
Nativity Service Christmas Eve 3pm
Bring the children and join the fun as we tell the Christmas story together!
Carols in the Churchyard Christmas Eve 6pm
Wrap up warm, bring a torch and sing your favourite carols under the winter sky.
Midnight Mass Christmas Eve 11pm
Step into Christmas with a beautiful service of Holy Communion as the clock strikes midnight.
Family Eucharist Christmas Day 10am
Leave the turkey roasting while you celebrate Christmas in church during this joyful service of Holy Communion.
THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

Charity updates

The Need Project

This ongoing and increasing ministry relies on the love, prayers and generous donations from the local church community.

Operating out of Sandy Baptist Church, it provides families in need in the Sandy & Beeston communities with support, food, toiletries and other provisions.

Urgent needs include cereals, tinned meat and fish, UHT milk, fruit juice, coffee (small jars), squash, canned, bottled and packeted food, pulses, cleaning products, larger-size nappies and toiletries.

Donations can be left in the box in the entrance of all our churches, or brought to Sandy Baptist Church during The Need project top-up shop on Tuesday mornings.

NEED provision is available for anyone who is struggling to make ends meet for whatever reason. Please speak to a church warden who will refer you to the NEED project coordinators. theneedproject.org.uk

The Leprosy Mission

Since Chris Stratta launched our 2026 'I AM Nisha' project in January we have sent off a fantastic £22,929 towards our £25,150 pledge for the 'I Am Nisha' Project, which aims to end child leprosy. This is funding school screening of 30,000 children, plus support for reconstructive surgery, prosthetic limbs and vocational training for ten children.

There are many ways you can help support our Project via collecting boxes, donations and supporting our various fundraising activities.

Upcoming events

• Fundraising Dinners – Bookings are being taken for two evening dinners at China Express on Wednesday 9 and Thursday 10 December.

• Christmas Lights Outing – This is being planned.

Past events

Further donations for our **coffee morning** took the total raised to a fantastic £2,037: the first time we've reached £2,000. On 8 September, 48 supporters enjoyed an afternoon **cruise along the River Ouse**, with refreshments, on the John Bunyan Community Boat with £130 raised from the raffle. On 25 September, 55 supporters went to **Buckingham Palace** with £153 proceeds from the raffle. For our second visit to **Peckover House** in Wisbech on 9 October 30 people took part and the raffle raised £63. Our **Autumn Quiz Evening** on 23 October was attended by 58 supporters and raised a splendid £332. Our An Englishman's Home **Autumn Quiz** has now closed and the winner will be announced shortly.

• The TLM Shop Christmas Catalogue is available

• Fundraising Stall continues on our drive at 2 Leeds Smith Drive, weather permitting, daily 10am to 5pm. All contributions welcome.

Colin Osborne

Royal British Legion

The Royal British Legion website states: 'Our ambition is to bring society together to recognise, remember and support the Armed Forces community'. That's a big community, including anybody who has served in the Army, Navy or RAF, their families and bereaved – an estimated 6 million people.

Support is another big word – from helping folks in life and work after leaving the Forces to issues about housing, employment, physical or mental health, living independently or 'fitting in'. This kaleidoscope of support requires RBL to call upon a global network of specialists, professionals and partner organisations to help with diverse challenges and very different needs from when RBL was founded in 1921.

Remembrance Sunday this year is 8 November when I'll be in the crowd at the Bedford Road Memorial to see the parade (10.30am), join the 11am silence and attend the following service at St Swithun's. Remembrance Services are also being held at The Beacon Methodist Churches at Sandy (10.30am) and Beeston (11am) that day.

Let's remember them, this November. My Dad did his National Service in WWII in the Royal Navy. At the war's end, his Captain had chronic PTSD, but nobody knew what this was or how to treat it. The only "medication" available was London Dry Gin – lots of it – so night after night the Captain took his medicine by the bottleful. It was usually delegated to 19-year-old Junior Officer Snow to half-carry his Captain to his quarters, remove the pink elephant that Delerium Tremens meant the Captain could see sitting on his bunk and put him to bed. Only by paralysing himself with alcohol could the Captain escape the torpedoes, the terror and the fatalities that tormented him. I am so glad that we have the RBL now.

RBL Sandy meet at The Conservative Club at 7pm on the third Wednesday of every month. Men and women of all ages are welcome, whether or not they have served in the Armed Forces.I've been to these evenings and they are fun.

Stephen Snow

For information about the Royal British Legion, visit: britishlegion.org.uk or branches.britishlegion.org.uk/branches/sandy

The Bishop of Bedford on his retirement

At the end of December The Right Reverend Richard Atkinson OBE retires from his position as Bishop of Bedford. Previously the Archdeacon of Leicester from 2002, Richard was appointed as our Bishop in March 2012 and was awarded an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours that same year for services to unemployed people in Rotherham, South Yorkshire.

I took a long shot and posed three questions to the Bishop. To my delight he kindly replied and these are his answers in 'Shredded Wheat' form with nothing added or taken away:

Q1 Has a replacement Suffragan Bishop for Bedford been appointed?

A replacement Suffragan Bishop of Bedford hasn't yet been appointed. The appointment is in the hands of the new Bishop of St Albans, The Rt Revd Dr Andrew Rumsey, and he will take that forward before long. The appointment of a Suffragan Bishop requires the consent of the Diocese Commission and, once that has been achieved, there will be an appointment process culminating in the interview of three or four candidates by the bishop and an advisory panel. This will progress before long and will lead to the next Bishop of Bedford. Given that the last two bishops have been called 'Richard' and the previous one had the surname 'Richardson', there is a rumour that the next bishop has to also be called Richard, but that is not the case!

Q2 What are your greatest hopes and concerns for Bedfordshire and particularly Luton's future?

I have very much enjoyed my 14 years in Bedfordshire. It is a wonderful if understated county. As we know, we have a reputation

for generosity, good community relations not least in Luton, and a rich bedrock of community and voluntary organisations. My greatest hope for the county is that it will continue to be a place where all can flourish and all can benefit from the growing opportunities, not least Universal, happening in our midst. I do have a concern that as the significant infrastructure projects are taken forward including East West Rail, Universal United Kingdom Resort, Tempsford New Town and more, that the necessary infrastructure will not be provided quickly enough. As someone who has also been involved in diocesan education and the family of church schools, I'm also concerned that the outcomes from education in our county are not as strong as they ought to be in many places.

Q3 On your appointment you mentioned a commitment to supporting the poor, marginalised and vulnerable. Over the 14 years, have any organisations or charities helped particularly with this?

A particular joy has been my involvement and association with many of the wonderful charitable and voluntary organisations in our county. It's invidious to pick out one or two, but among those I celebrate are the work of Emmaus up in Carlton, NOAH in Luton, the various foodbanks across the county and the Road Victims Trust. I have been closely associated with the Luton Roma Trust, which works with a particularly marginalised community. Equally important has been my commitment to support those churches situated within the more deprived and marginalised communities in Bedfordshire and Luton Borough. In particular, we have benefited from the ministry of some dedicated and inspired clergy.

Richard finished his email by saying: "I would also want to celebrate the life of the churches of all denominations for their faithful witness and ministry. The challenges are significant, but there are many signs of hope of what God is doing amongst His people and, if nothing else, that is what gives me hope for the future in what is, certainly at present, a very uncertain world".

I'll finish with a thank you to Richard for this, and I'm sure we all wish him and his wife a great retirement.

Stephen Snow

Bishop Richard is a keen supporter of the Historic Churches Trust Bike 'n' Hike fundraiser

Christmas Tree Festival

Since 2014, St Swithun's has held a wonderful Christmas Tree Festival involving all our local schools, many community groups and businesses from the town.

From Saturday 28 November to Monday 30 November, St Swithun's Church will become the backdrop for a beautiful display of decorated Christmas trees. The trees will be crafted by children and youth groups as well as charities, community groups, local businesses and individuals. Some trees are traditional, some modern and others will raise a smile.

Up to 50 trees in different shapes, sizes and variety of materials should make a fabulous spectacle and bring many people from the Sandy community into the church.

This year's Christmas Tree Festival is open from 12noon–7pm over the weekend and 3–7pm on Monday 30 November with refreshments available. There is no charge for entry to the Festival, but donations towards the work of St Swithun's Church are gratefully received.

Local choirs and musicians provide live music including songs from Singthusiasm Sandy on the opening Saturday at 5.30pm followed by carols around the piano with mulled wine at 6pm.

It is free for all schools, community groups, charities, non-profit-making organisations and individuals to display a tree, while businesses are charged £35. If you'd like to take part, application forms are available to download from sandyparishchurch.org or from the Town Council offices in Cambridge Road, and must be returned by Wednesday 25 November.

The Christmas Tree Festival is a wonderful way to start the season of goodwill, so do drop by to enjoy the fabulous creations. Further enquiries: 07866 339416 or 07845 735880, email: sandytreefestival@yahoo.co.uk

Corinne Hetherington

Christmas Concerts

Singthusiasm Sandy

There are two great Christmas choral concerts at St Swithun's Church this December.

A fun evening of Christmas and other songs can be enjoyed from **Singthusiasm Sandy** on **Saturday 12 December at 7.30pm**. Donations to St John's Moggerhanger and St Swithun's Church with refreshments.

singthusiasm.com

The **St Swithun's Singers** are well into their preparations for Christmas and have been working on the programme for their concert for several weeks. It will be held on **Wednesday 16 December at 7.30pm**. Doors open at 7pm with refreshments available. The concert is a non-ticketed event, but donations can be made at the door and are gratefully received – all profits go towards the work and upkeep of our very beautiful church.

The programme contains an extremely eclectic mix of sacred and secular festive music, plus a seasonal reading by Lesley Jones and music from the wonderful Trevor and Gilian Hughes. In the second half, the choir will be presenting a Christmas musical *The Inn Crowd*. This is a delightful work, full of catchy melodies. As it will only be a week until Christmas Day, please come along to share in the real spirit of this glorious season. We are very much looking forward to seeing you.

Elizabeth Gammell, Musical Director, The St Swithun's Singers

stswithunssingers.uk

St Swithun's Singers

Tales from the River Ivel banks

Our beautiful river ends its 21-mile journey at Tempsford by discharging into the River Great Ouse. This, in turn, heads North East to Kings Lynn and The Wash. Next time you go to Hunstanton or Skegness think of the Ivel as you paddle in the surf. You may be standing in water originating from Sandy!

On my travels, I found a hillock with the Ivel to its East and the Great Ouse to its West. From the summit I could see the very end of the Ivel as her waters flowed silently into the Great Ouse. Naturally I took some snaps but felt strangely pensive. I adore the Ivel but, right here, her race is run. "All good things come to an end," my Dad used to say.

Very good things. The Ivel has fed this county by powering flour mills and delivered coal to heat houses on horse-drawn barges, To this day, it hydrates our land (I've watched cows in the Riddy drinking from it) and sustains all manner of wildlife from plants to fish and creatures that predate on them. There is a sense of living in God's perfect creation to be found on the banks of the Ivel, be it at Baldock, Langford, Biggleswade or Tempsford. But here, at the River's terminus, a shadow falls over the water as we brace ourselves for Tempsford New Town.

In May 2024 our MP, Richard Fuller, and Tom Wooton (Mayor, Bedford Borough Council) founded the North Bedfordshire Water Management Alliance to bring together Anglian Water, The Environment Agency, Upper Ouse Water Management Board, the NFU, Bedford Borough Council and BedsGOVET. Here is a consortium of government departments, environmental charities and people working our land who are all stakeholders in The Ivel, The Great Ouse and their tributaries.

The waters of our beautiful River Ivel silently converge with the River Great Ouse at Tempsford and flow onwards to The Wash

Let us pray they have the resilience and determination to fight corporate penny pinching and ensure Tempsford New Town is built with sufficient resources to properly manage their needs for water, sewage output and flooding control.

Stephen Snow

Matthew 2: 1–12

Picture the scene. A log fire. Cards and stockings adorn the mantelpiece. Neatly wrapped presents under the Christmas tree. Ah, the tree. Baubles. Tinsel. Lights. Oh yes, the lights. Now gently cast your gaze towards the top of the tree. What sits atop it? That's right. The one direct vestige of faith in this picture of secularity: the Christmas Star – otherwise known as the Star of Bethlehem.

Of the canonical gospels, the star is only ever mentioned in Matthew, and begins at chapter 2: 1–2 thus, 'Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him".' Given its unique status in Matthew, this has led to some debate about, not only the true nature of the celestial body, but even the veracity of the entire story.

Over the years, astronomers and scientists have attempted to theorise on the star's origin: It was a planetary conjunction… a comet… a supernova… a double occultation, etc, etc. Confused? Yeah, so was I. Aside from the scheming of Herod, the story continues: 'After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star,

they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy' (2: 9–10). Allow me if you please, to proffer an alternative hypothesis: that God, our Heavenly Father, the maker of heaven and earth – who can do anything – created a sign that signalled the birth of His Son.

Naturally, it is our nature to question, to understand why things happen the way they do. But when dealing with heavenly bodies and the will of God, it is not always helpful to look at things through human eyes. We cannot presume to understand the heavenly through human understanding alone. So, this Christmas, keep your eyes on Jesus, not the star – no matter how pretty it looks on top of the tree. The key point is He became man in order that we may be sanctified. Now that's something worth celebrating. Happy Christmas!

Mark Pittwood

Oh Little Town of Bethlehem

Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem

Foretelling the birthplace of Jesus 700 years before He was born, the prophet Micah declared "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times" (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:4–6).

Situated on Palestine's West Bank, less than 10 miles from Jerusalem, Bethlehem was also the ancestral home and traditional birthplace of King David. When the time came for Mary to give birth, Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus decreed that a census be taken, which required every citizen to return to his or her hometown to register. Joseph went with Mary to Bethlehem "because he belonged to the house and line of David" (Luke 2:4). In Bethlehem, Mary gave birth to Jesus. "She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them" (Luke 2:7).

Built in the 4th century by Emperor Constantine, the Church of the Nativity is the oldest continuously operating church in the Holy Land and now a World Heritage Site. In the underground Grotto of Nativity a 14-pointed silver star marks the traditional spot of Jesus' birth with the inscription, Hic De Virgine Maria Jesus Christus Natus Est (Here Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary).

The city includes Manger Square, the Milk Grotto Chapel (where Mary is said to have nursed Jesus) and the nearby Shepherd's Field in Beit Sahour, where shepherds raised lambs destined for temple sacrifice in Jerusalem and angels announced our Saviour's birth (Luke 2: 10–14).

Despite its historical prominence, Bethlehem has endured a troubled history with Herod executing all male infants, sending Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus fleeing to Egypt. No Jews currently reside in Bethlehem. About 90% of the 28,500 population is now Muslim and 10% Christian. Due to terrorism and unrest, the FCDO currently advises against all but essential travel to Bethlehem.

Marina Rugg

Inside the Church of the Nativity

Manger Square at Christmas

UNDERSTANDING ...

ADVENT

The origin of the word Advent derives from the Latin *adventus*, meaning 'coming' or 'arrival'.

During Advent we remember the birth of Jesus (his arrival) and are expectant of his return (the Second Coming). But there is a third aspect to Advent, which lies in the present – celebrating Christ in our lives – thus, Advent brings the past, present and future together.

Advent typically commences on the Sunday nearest to 30 November, and lasts for four weeks, culminating in Christmas Day. In these secular times, the most common way to celebrate Advent is by having an Advent calendar, but opening up a piece of cardboard each day to find some chocolate behind it, does not exactly befit the creator of everything, and the salvation of us all.

A more potent symbol is the Advent Wreath, which consists of four candles set on a circular evergreen wreath (which symbolises eternal life and God's everlasting love). The three purple candles, which mirror the colour of the vestments our dear Reverend wears at this time, signify penitence and preparation, and one rose-coloured candle. The candles are lit progressively for each Sunday in Advent, and are generally known as the 'Prophecy Candle' (first Sunday), 'Bethlehem Candle' (second Sunday), 'Shepherd's Candle' (the rose-coloured candle lit on the third Sunday), and finally, the 'Angel's Candle' on the fourth Sunday of Advent, representing hope, peace, joy and love – a beautiful way to truly honour the birth of the Messiah and the promises of our Saviour.

Advent is to Christmas what Lent is to Easter – preparatory time. It also marks the beginning of a new liturgical year. Thus the symbolism of the candles perfectly chimes with the period – a time to remember, be thankful, and look forward. May these sentiments be at the forefront of our hearts and minds as we move into and celebrate Advent 2026.

Mark Pittwood

My favourite Carol

I love this carol because it sums up what Christmas is all about – how we should gather to celebrate the birth of Christ the Lord. Singing the beautiful descant to the third verse is always a tremendous privilege, then waiting to sing the last verse until the first chimes of midnight mass on Christmas Eve fills my heart with joy.

Elizabeth Gammell, Leader, St Swithun's Church Choir.

O Come All Ye Faithful

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold Him
Born the King of Angels:
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.

God of God, light of light,
Lo, he abhors not the Virgin's womb;
Very God, begotten, not created:
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens of Heaven above!
Glory to God, glory in the highest:
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.

Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning;
Jesus, to thee be glory given!
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing!
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.

Love protects

The theme of this November's Safeguarding Sunday is 'Love protects'.

Although St Swithun's chose to celebrate our safeguarding work in May, we hold this theme close to our hearts not just one Sunday in the year but every Sunday – and in fact, every day.

When you hear the word 'safeguarding', what comes to mind? Policies? Paperwork? Training sessions? Safeguarding might feel like a box-ticking exercise to keep the charity regulators happy. However, safeguarding isn't about compliance at all, but about the very heart of what it means to follow Jesus.

In its simplest terms, safeguarding is the protection of those in our care. Safeguarding isn't an external pressure or 'thing to do'; it's an act of love. And love is central to our faith here at St Swithun's.

So, while I carry on filling in the forms, ticking the boxes and attending training (in

fact we have a whole team fully checked and trained), our congregation continues to adopt the 'Love protects' theme and remains committed to looking after everyone to make St Swithun's a genuinely welcoming and safe pace to be.

Sandy Stopher,
Parish Safeguarding Officer

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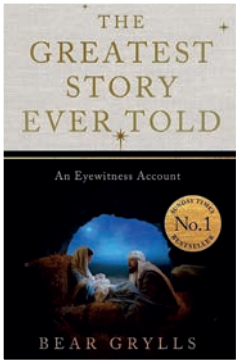
What Christmas means to me

Christmas is fundamentally about hope, the unwavering love of God and stripping away rigid religion to find a real, personal relationship with Jesus, declares Bear Grylls in an interview on Youtube (htb.org).

Bear is a devout Christian who views faith as the "backbone" of his life and marriage, and he frequently shares his perspective on the true meaning of this season through his annual Christmas messages on social media and in interviews together with his book, *The Greatest Story Ever Told*.

"Christmas is a source of hope amid hardship", he declares, urging people to look past the commercial aspect of Christmas and celebrate it as a time for hope. He notes that people experience the season in vastly different circumstances – whether dealing with fear, heartbreak, or the first Christmas after losing a loved one. For him, the constant message of God's love provides solace regardless of life's challenges.

Bear is famous for distinguishing between "being religious" and having faith. In a well-known Christmas address delivered to the Scouts at Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB) Church, he stated: "Having a Christian faith doesn't mean you have to be all religious, I'm not. And guess what, nor was Jesus. In fact, if you read about Him, he was totally fun, ridiculously free, loved a party and always hung out with the so-called low life."



He views the Christmas story as the arrival of a "backbone, companion, and friend" who makes people stronger, freer, and more capable of living an adventurous life. He often describes Jesus not as meek and mild, but as a wild, strong and rugged figure who survived 40 days in the desert and walked voluntarily toward hardship.

Bear loves to highlight that the very first people to see baby Jesus were not the religious elite or the highly educated, but simple shepherds. He calls them the "wild ones" who lived out on the land, symbolising that the beauty of Christmas is meant for everyone, especially those outside normal society.

Marina Rugg

Church Services

NOV	TIME	SERVICE	CHURCH
Sunday 1	8.15am	Holy Communion	St Swithun's Parish Church
	10am	Together at 10 Joint Service	St Swithun's Parish Church
	10.30am	Communion Service	Sandy Baptist Church
	10.30am	Joint Beacon Methodist Worship Service	Beacon Methodist at Upper Caldecote
	4pm	All Souls Memorial Service	St Swithun's Parish Church
Wed 4	10.30am	Holy Communion	St Swithun's Parish Church
Sunday 8	8.15am	Holy Communion	St Swithun's Parish Church
	9.30am	Traditional Communion	St Swithun's Parish Church
	10.30am	Remembrance Day Service	Beacon Methodist at Sandy
	11am	Remembrance Day Service	Beacon Methodist at Beeston
	10.45am	Remembrance Service + RBL	St Swithun's Parish Church
Wed 11	10.30am	Holy Communion	St Swithun's Parish Church
Sunday 15	8.15am	Holy Communion	St Swithun's Parish Church
	9.30am	Traditional Communion	St Swithun's Parish Church
	10.30am	Communion Service	Sandy Baptist Church
	11am	Worship Service	Beacon Methodist at Beeston
	11am	Contemporary Service	St Swithun's Parish Church
	12.30pm	Feast Your Faith plus meal	Beacon Methodist at Sandy
Wed 18	10.30am	Holy Communion	St Swithun's Parish Church
Sunday 22	8.15am	Holy Communion	St Swithun's Parish Church
	9.30am	Traditional Communion	St Swithun's Parish Church
	10.30am	Sunday Service	Sandy Baptist Church
	10.30am	Sunday Service	Beacon Methodist at Sandy
	11am	Worship Service	Beacon Methodist at Beeston
	11am	Contemporary Service	St Swithun's Parish Church
Wed 25	10.30am	Holy Communion	St Swithun's Parish Church
Sunday 29	8.15am	Holy Communion	St Swithun's Parish Church
	9.30am	Traditional Communion	St Swithun's Parish Church
	10.30am	Sunday Service	Sandy Baptist Church
	10.30am	Advent Service	Beacon Methodist at Sandy
	11am	Worship Service First in Advent	Beacon Methodist at Beeston
	11am	Contemporary Service	St Swithun's Parish Church

DEC	TIME	SERVICE	CHURCH
Wed 2	10.30am	Holy Communion	St Swithun's Parish Church
Sunday 6	8.15am	Holy Communion	St Swithun's Parish Church
	10am	Together at 10 Joint Service	St Swithun's Parish Church
	10.30am	Communion Service	Sandy Baptist Church
	10.30am	Joint Beacon Methodist Worship Service	Beacon Methodist at Upper Caldecote
	3pm	Mayor's Carol Service	St Swithun's Parish Church
Wed 9	10.30am	Holy Communion	St Swithun's Parish Church
Sunday 13	8.15am	Holy Communion	St Swithun's Parish Church
	9.30am	Traditional Communion	St Swithun's Parish Church
	10.30am	Nativity Service	Sandy Baptist Church
	10.30am	Sunday Service	Beacon Methodist at Sandy
	11am	Worship Service	Beacon Methodist at Beeston
	11am	Contemporary Service	St Swithun's Parish Church
Wed 16	10.30am	Holy Communion	St Swithun's Parish Church
Sunday 20	8.15am	Holy Communion	St Swithun's Parish Church
	9.30am	Traditional Communion	St Swithun's Parish Church
	11am	Contemporary Service	St Swithun's Parish Church
	2.30pm	Carol Service & Christmas Tea	Beacon Methodist at Beeston
	3pm	Tea@3 Carol Service	Beacon Methodist at Sandy
	6pm	Lessons & Carols	St Swithun's Parish Church
	6.30pm	Carols by Candlelight	Sandy Baptist Church
Christmas Eve	3pm	Nativity Service	St Swithun's Parish Church
	4pm	Christingle Service	Beacon Methodist at Sandy
	6pm	Carols in the Churchyard	St Swithun's Parish Church
	11pm	Midnight Mass	St Swithun's Parish Church
Christmas Day	10am	Family Eucharist	St Swithun's Parish Church
	10am	Christmas Day Service	Sandy Baptist Church
Sunday 27	8.15am	Holy Communion	St Swithun's Parish Church
	9.30am	Traditional Communion	St Swithun's Parish Church
	10.30am	Sunday Service	Sandy Baptist Church
	10.30am	Joint Service at Trinity Biggleswade	Beacon Methodist at Biggleswade
	11am	Contemporary Service	St Swithun's Parish Church

What's On

To list your church or community event in our next issue, email Stephen at sandybeestonpinnacle@gmail.com by 15 December

NOVEMBER

Every Wednesday, 9.30am
Wellbeing Walk
Meet at the Bandstand for a 10am guided short walk (1hr) or longer walk (1½hrs) with refreshments in the Library

Thursday 5, 10am–noon
Community Coffee Morning,
Beacon Church at Beeston
Enjoy coffee, tea and a chat or play card & board games

Sunday 8, 10.45am
Remembrance Parade & Service with Royal British Legion
Parade musters at Swan Lane at 10.30am, marching at 10.45am to the War Memorial for 11am two minutes' silence, then on to St Swithun's Church for the service at 11.45am

Tuesday 10, 7.30pm
Sandy Historical Research Group AGM & Quiz Night, Beeston Methodist Church Hall
Know Your Onions Quiz Night with a local history theme. Free entry. More details Richard Barlow on 01767 226392.

Saturday 14:
8.30am
Men's Breakfast,
Sandy Baptist Church Hall
Email: phil.vass@sky.com to book a full English breakfast

10.30am–3.30pm
Craft Fayre,
Sandy Conservative Club
Stalls and refreshments

Monday 16, 6–8.30pm
Christmas Wreath Making,
Sandy Library
Wreath-making workshop with Jenny from Hillside Market Garden, materials supplied, cost £30 on booking

Wednesday 18, 10am
Coffee Morning,
Beacon Methodist at Sandy
Chat over coffee in the Church

Saturday 21:
9am
Ladies' Breakfast,
Sandy Baptist Church Hall
Enjoy fellowship over breakfast. Text 07766 089794 to book your place

2pm
Pamper & Prayer Session,
St Swithun's Church Rooms
Sample Temple Spa products & take part in reflective activities. Book for £2 at sandyparishchurch.org

Monday 23, 6–8.30pm
Christmas Craft Fayre & Pop Up Beauty Bar, Maple Tree Primary School
Handmade crafts, gifts & goodies plus beauty treatments

Saturday 28:
12noon–3pm
St Swithun's Christmas Fayre
Craft & gift stalls, Santa's grotto, raffle, bottle tombola, gift bags, games & refreshments. Raffle/tombola prizes, bottles & cakes gratefully received

2.30pm
Sandy Flower Club Christmas Wreath Workshop, Everton Village Hall
£45 including materials, email book at sandyflowerclub@gmail.com

5.30pm
Christmas songs from Singthusiasm Sandy, and Carols Around the Piano, St Swithun's Church
Enjoy Christmas songs from Singthusiasm Sandy followed by Carols Around the Piano with mulled wine at 6pm

Saturday 28–Monday 30 Nov
St Swithun's Christmas Tree Festival
Weekend 12noon–7pm; Monday 30, 3–7pm; full details on p14

Sunday 29, 12noon–5pm
Sandy Christmas Lights Switch-on, Sandy Market Square
Christmas market, funfair, Santa's grotto, refreshments, live entertainment school performances & carnival stars

DECEMBER

Every Wednesday, 9.30am
Wellbeing Walk
(See Nov for details)

Thursday 3, 10am–noon
Community Coffee Morning, Beacon Church at Beeston
Enjoy coffee, tea and a chat or play card & board games

Saturday 5, 2–5pm
Christmas Fayre, Quince Court
Lots of lovely Christmas stalls

Sunday 6, 3pm
Mayor's Christmas Carol Service, St Swithun's
Join our Town Mayor Cllr Paul Sharman for a special service with seasonal readings & performances from local schools

Saturday 12:
8.30am
Men's Breakfast, Sandy Baptist Church Hall
Email: phil.vass@sky.com to book a full English breakfast

2.30–4.30pm
Christmas Activity Afternoon
Sandy Baptist Church
Crafts, activities & refreshments with carols around the Christmas tree at 4.15pm. Everyone welcome, all free

7.30pm
Singthusiasm Sandy Concert, St Swithun's Church
Enjoy a programme of Christmas songs. More information on p15

Wednesday 16:
10am
Coffee Morning, Beacon Methodist at Sandy
Chat over coffee in the church

7.30pm
St Swithun's Singers Christmas Concert, St Swithun's Church
Sharing an evening of festive music. More details on p15

Friday 18, 11am
Carols at Tescos with Churches Together
Fundraising for charities in the Sandy Tesco foyer

Saturday 19, 9am
Ladies' Breakfast, Sandy Baptist Church Hall
Enjoy fellowship over breakfast. Text 07766 089794 to book your place

For details of church Christmas services, please see p8

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