

The Vicar's Letter



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

A merry Christmastide to you all and every good wish for the new year.

It will probably not shock you to learn that, although this is my January reflection, the printing schedule means that I am writing it in mid-December -

indeed, on the day of two carols services. This is no big issue: as I say every year, Christmas does not end on December 25th: it begins then, and sets off a month of celebration - basking in the glow of the Incarnation. But of course we can do this in ways other than the mainstream offerings of turkey and tinsel. To truly celebrate Christmas is to quietly lay our heart by the crib-side, and to seek purpose and peace in the company of the holy child. Christ is the mirror for how we wish to be. In this season, we look upon a child, and pray that we too may be unburdened of all that hardens our hearts to the ways of God; that we may return to a child-like state whereby we may not only watch him grow over the coming weeks and months, in the cycle of the Christian year, but grow with him. So that, when the time comes for us to carry a cross, as he did, we may do so with his love and strength.

I was asked recently by a parishioner how I wrote my sermons. 'Slowly' was my reply. But he wanted a less flippant answer than that and pressed me further. In truth, there is a process which I try to follow. This is not to say that I have never written a sermon at 10 o'clock on a Saturday night, with a glass of Glenfiddich for company. But I try to avoid doing so, if I can possibly help it.

When I was a recently ordained young curate, I had an older colleague who had been trained for the priesthood in a monastery. The monks had taught him, whenever he was due to preach a sermon on a coming

Sunday, to begin on Monday morning, read, study, pray, think and write the sermon....then tear it up. And do the same on the Wednesday. And then repeat on the Friday (but not necessarily tearing this one up). I don't follow that pattern to the letter, but I do try to apply its underlying principles, and begin on a Monday morning by spending time with the appointed readings, and then revisiting them again and again, throughout the week, letting the images and ideas percolate - or the flavours develop, as one would a fine wine, or dram of whisky (maybe my Glenfiddich is not so out of place after all). The point is that it takes time, and if I have ever said anything of any worth, it has usually been by taking this approach. God works away, and stitches things together, and sends things along which aren't immediately obvious.

But it is not just about the end product. What matters as much is the labour, the working out, which goes into the writing. Which is why I would never write a sermon using AI. The effort is our means of growth. The traditional 'bidding prayer' for Anglican carols services invites us to 'read and mark in Holy Scripture the tale of the loving purposes of God'. That line is a reference to the glorious collect from the Book of Common Prayer which bids us pray that we might 'hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest' the Word of God, 'that by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life'.

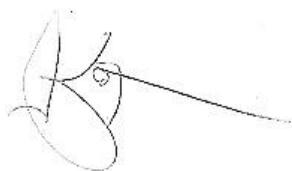
That fabulous cascade of verbs reminds us that we are not just to read and learn the scriptures, but - first of all to Hear them - to listen to Christ addressing us through them - and then to mark them - that is, to attend to them, give our time and patience to them, to wait upon them - and to inwardly digest them - a phrase which deliberately evokes the idea, expressed in the Psalms that to really read scripture one must chew on it, like a cow chewing the cud.

This intensely physical image sits well within our Christmas season, when we celebrate the Word becoming flesh. We are encouraged to see our encounter with sacred scripture as an incarnation of its own. When

the word becomes flesh by our cooperation, our nurturing of it within ourselves - not just our digestion of it, as the Collect puts it, but our gestation of it, by allowing God's word to grow within us, and indeed reshape us.

Truth and wisdom take time. Discernment takes effort. There are, in other words, no short cuts to being reformed into the likeness of Christ, which is our life's work, through the Spirit. As Rowan Williams put it, we must reject 'the view that 'God can only be honoured by a kind of dishonouring of the human'. We are warned off the instant answers of Artificial Intelligence, and the simplistic claims and easy slogans of those hunting for support on the political stage. He has made our humanity, with its unmechanical messiness, its mysterious interiority, its complications and frustrations, a means of our salvation. A good new year's resolution might then be to slow down, and take our time, and resist the dehumanising, shallow immediacy of modernity.

In friendship and faith,



Jim

St Mark's Church Mission Statement



To be the people of God in this place and to work to make God more real in our community.

The January Charity : Crossways/ITAC



It Takes a City (ITAC) is a small local charity which is rapidly growing and making a significant difference to the people who rough sleep in the city. ITAC was originally set up in 2019 to bring people together from all parts of the city, including other charities in the homelessness sector, colleges, both universities, businesses and the faith community, to collaborate and convene to find innovative ways to end rough sleeping. But just as work started to take off, the world changed with Covid-19 and during 2020 ITAC worked with the City Council to bring all the rough sleepers into accommodation under the national “Everyone In” scheme. A new model for the emergency accommodation service was developed using accredited security guards to manage the provision alongside a small team of very experienced support staff. From this initial service ITAC has gone on to develop other services that support some of Cambridge’s most vulnerable rough sleepers – often people who have been evicted or banned from other services in the city.

Crossways is ITAC’s Gold Quality Mark award-winning emergency winter accommodation. It is open 24/7 from November until the end of March each year, providing safety, dignity and comfort for 20 people who would otherwise be sleeping on the streets during the winter months. ITAC works in partnership with a range of specialist agencies to improve the mental, physical and sexual health of their residents with the goal of helping residents secure and maintain longer term move-on accommodation. ITAC continues to support people after they leave Crossways via their Survive & Thrive service.

Homelessness looks quite different for women – fear drives them to stay out of sight, often sleeping in hidden areas like locked graveyards or derelict building, riding night buses, or simply walking at night and

sleeping in the day. Homeless women often do not use services because they are fearful of who they might meet.

ITAC opened The Haven 18 months ago to encourage women to engage with this gendered service in the city centre. Women can drop in - no referral is needed, and 2 nights a week the service offers a safe, welcoming overnight space for vulnerable women, where they can enjoy a meal, snacks and hot drinks, get a shower, do their laundry, and get essential items like toiletries, sanitary products and warm clothing and shoes. The Haven is open on Friday mornings to enable the women to connect with services that work daytime hours, like the Access surgery nurse and the CGL drug and alcohol team.

ITAC could not do any of this important work without the support and generosity of the community, including our amazing volunteers and the many groups that collect donations.

Thank you to St Mark's congregation for your ongoing support. We are thrilled that Barry Read has now joined the staff team as our Volunteer Co-Ordinator and provides a warm welcome and support to all our volunteers.

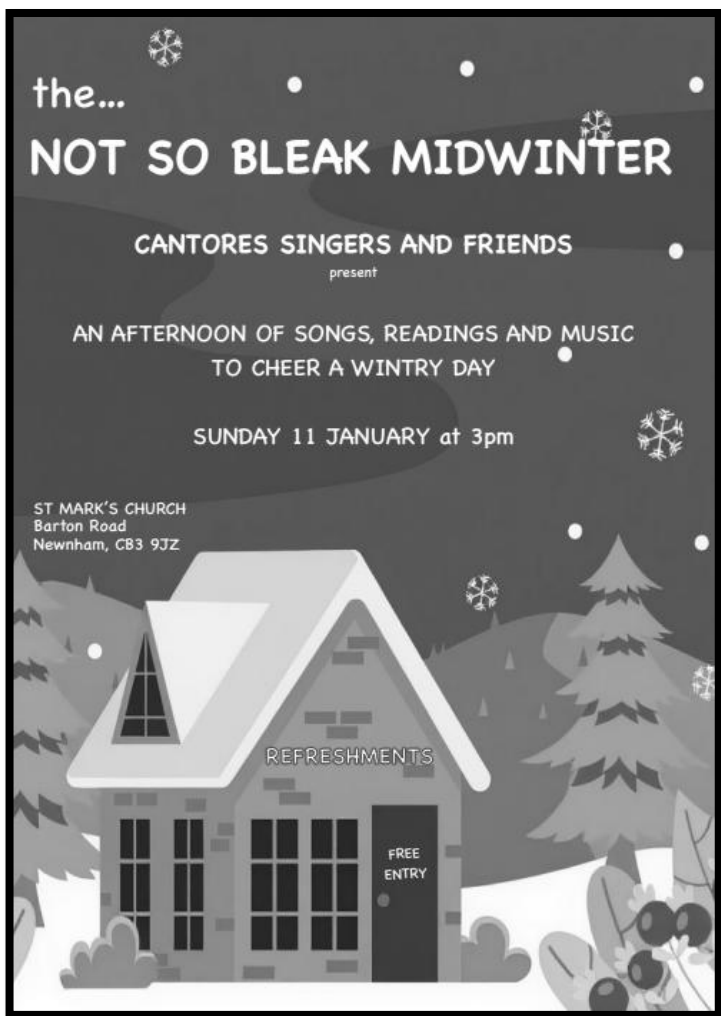
To find out more about our work, please visit ittakesacity.org.uk.

We appreciate your generous donations to support our work.

Lis Silver, CEO

The February Edition of Seek

In the next edition we will be greeting the New Year. Contributions will be very welcome. Please send them to Jane Plows at janemp@virginmedia.com (01223 350120) by Sunday 18th January.



Also in the **Arts & Events Productions for your Diary:**

Friday 13th February time tbc: BOUND BY LOVE - a words and music concert with Jane Bower and friends.

Charity of the Month Scheme : Charities Nominated for 2026

Our church Charity of the Month tradition is now entering its 22nd year, having been established back in 2004 at the suggestion of Stuart and Rita Lingard and Jeffery Lewins. The planned annual programme, shown opposite, enables members of the congregation to bring to our notice charities which particularly interest them - large and small, national and international - and it always produces an excellent mix of very worthwhile causes, which are generously supported.

So, as we go into Year 22, once again, many thanks to all those who have proposed charities for the coming year. In fact, the number of suggestions put forward exactly matched the number of months to be filled. Here is the running order as agreed with the proposers, with the focus each month on 'giving Sunday' i.e. the 9.30 am service on the second Sunday of the month. Please do continue to give your generous support.

Sarah Squire

Charity coordinator

Foodbank Dates

Please bring donations for the foodbank to church on Sunday 11th January.

Or leave them the week before on Thursday 8th January at 19 Kings Road (Eleanor Scott) 9.00 am - 3.00 pm, or at 1 Millington Road (Rosey Gardiner) 8.00 am - 6.00 pm.

There is also a Tuesday morning collection point from 11.00 am to 12.00 noon at the Gough Way island with the postbox. In addition donations may be left up to the Thursday evening in the black plastic box on the driveway of number 14 Wootton Way, the home of Sarah Smalley and Martin Richards.

There is a collection point at the Co-op too.

Charities of the Month 2026

January It Takes a City: working to end homelessness in Cambridge

Sponsor: Barry Read

February Lyn's House: Cambridge Friendship Trust Christian

Community Sponsor: Revd Anna Jones

March The Arthur Rank Hospice Charity

Sponsor: Tina Wilson

April Gombe: Christians in Northern Nigeria

Sponsors: Andrew Watts, Perrin Hardy

May Christian Aid

Sponsor: Eleanor Toye Scott

June Rowan: arts centre for adults with learning disabilities

Sponsor: Dani Redhead

July Umoja: children and young people in Tanzania

Sponsor: Sue Wagner

August Caring Together: support for carers of all ages

Sponsor: Stuart Evans

September Maggie's: support for people with cancer

Sponsor: Sue Payne

October Gombe: Christians in Northern Nigeria

Sponsors: Andrew Watts, Perrin Hardy

November Combat Stress: mental health support for veterans

Sponsor: Miles Elliott

December Cambridge Money Advice Centre: support on debt issues

Sponsor: Shev Sen



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New Year on the Buses

All good news! Regular passengers on the 199 bus presented a gift token to our usual driver Nina and a signed card and box of chocolates to share with all Myall's drivers and other staff, in recognition of the excellent, reliable and very friendly service they have provided for an increasing number of passengers all last year. Secondly, the Stagecoach PR1 bus to Madingley P&R now stops at Storey's Way, providing a service between Bridge Street and Newnham by using it in conjunction with the U buses. Thirdly I hope to be in touch by next month together with local councillor Hugh Clough, the County Council person responsible for monitoring local public transport to discuss my ideas for improving the bus stops and bus services along Barton and Newnham Roads.

One tip from me until this happens:: the best time to travel by bus from Newnham into town is between 10.00 and 12.45 and 15.00 to 16.00. when there are on average four buses an hour. I would like to see this frequency extended to all the working day and at weekends.

Another tip: do use the Whippet customer service contact online e.g. to report justified complaints (especially cancellations), but also deserved compliments, such as for the U1 driver yesterday, who was so full of Christmas good cheer that all the passengers felt better getting off than they had getting on. Invaluable for public morale in hard times.

Finally, I would like some statistical backing for my cause by asking Newnham bus users to record a brief note of every journey they make on the U,18, 18A and 75 buses in the last two weeks of January from Sunday 18th to Saturday 31st January 2026. Please indicate your willingness to do this by contacting drcummings77@gmail.com. I'll send you a simple form to fill in each time you catch the bus.

Derek Cummings

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Advent Fair 2025



St Mark's first Arts & Crafts Advent Fair occurred on the afternoon of Saturday 29th November and was a roaring success. The church was transformed into a Christmas Market with fairy lights and festive displays by the 23 artists who participated in the event. Christmas music filled the air and many visitors commented approvingly on the congenial atmosphere and merry vibe, which they enjoyed while shopping and while relaxing in our indoor café (the converted choir-area). The first 90 minutes were very busy indeed, with visitors processing almost shoulder-to-shoulder around the various stalls; the second half of the event remained busy but at a more relaxed pace.



All sorts of wonderful creations were on offer — drawings and paintings, bags and purses, cards and prints, jewellery and clothing, carved stone and turned wood objects, Japanese calligraphy and stained glass, Christmas wreaths and wonderfully delicious cakes and cookies. Our charity partner, Rowan (<https://www.rowanhumberstone.org.uk>), had a stall featuring the products of their artists, who are the very people we aim to support with this event; they had an excellent afternoon, making £340 in sales and donations. St Mark's hosted four stalls: bagatelle; ornament decorating (for kids of all ages); plants; and hot beverages and seasonal snacks. Including the registration fee paid by the artists, St Mark's made £735.40, which will be shared equally with Rowan, bringing their earnings on the day to a respectable £707.40. Thank you to all who contributed their time, money and talents to this year's Advent Fair, making it a successful community event and charity fund-raiser! Next year's Advent Fair is on Saturday 28 November, 2026.

Ross Smythe

A Theatrical Christmas: A Recommendation

Many of us enjoyed this wonderful performance in St Mark's a few weeks before Christmas. Nick Warburton watched it at Histon a week earlier and wrote this recommendation. As someone who saw it at St Mark's and enjoyed every minute of it, I endorse every word he wrote and offer commiserations to those of you who missed it **Jane Plows**



If you want a taste of real Christmas – joyful and uplifting – you should make your way to St Mark's in Newnham for Bawds' *A Theatrical Christmas*. We saw it last night, on its first outing (at Histon Baptist Church) and loved every minute. It's a completely satisfying programme of

seasonal pieces, some delightfully new to me, others familiar and well-loved, all beautifully threaded together in Madeleine Forrester's clever script.



The cast were uniformly excellent and clearly enjoying themselves; it was an enjoyment they passed on to us. They all sang, and their singing was wonderful. They were, as I heard someone in the audience say, all so lovable. And you can catch them all in Newnham this coming Friday and Saturday.

Nick Warburton

Photographer : Ted Ridgway Watts

Bible Reading Fellowship Notes



This is a reminder that in early February I shall be renewing our church-rate subscription with the Bible Reading Fellowship, who produce a number of publications to "sustain people in their daily journey with the Bible". Subscription rates apply from May 2026 until April 2027.

- For busy people the most accessible of these is probably **New Daylight**. Each issue provides four months of daily Bible readings and comment, with a team of regular contributors drawn from a range of church backgrounds and covering a varied selection of Old and New Testament biblical themes, characters and seasonal readings. Each issue contains nine topics of fortnightly readings and is published three times a year in January, May and September. Available in regular and large-print editions, a single regular copy is **£5.99**; an annual subscription costs **£17.97** per set of 3 issues p.a. The large print edition costs **£7.25** for a single copy, **£21.75** per set of 3 issues p.a..
- By taking out the church-rate subscription from May 2026, you get a valuable saving of 3 issues for **£17.97** postage free for the regular edition, and **£21.75** for the large-print version, whereas an individual subscription costs **£25.50** and the large-print version **£30.15**.
- Another publication **Guidelines**, also @ **£5.99** for a single regular copy and **£17.97** per set of 3 issues p.a, is aimed primarily for Today's Ministry and Mission.

If you would like to see samples of **New Daylight** and **Guidelines** I am very happy to supply you with some past issues on application. There is indeed a sense of Fellowship in knowing that others at St Mark's and beyond are studying the same passages as yourself, and we often

compare impressions on the current topic of the week at our Bible Study meetings.

If you have any questions or would like to find out more, please do get in touch or contact me on Cambridge 366 988 or email <tinahelenwilson@gmail.com> . Go to <https://www.brfonline.org.uk> or <https://www.biblereadingnotes.org.uk> to find out more about BRF.

I shall be asking current subscribers if they are happy to continue with their subscriptions.

Tina Wilson

The Narthex Doors : a Salutory Experience

Architects will often tell you that designing the entrance to a substantial building is one of the most difficult challenges they face. After an open competition 25 years ago we chose a beautiful design for the Narthex which met our needs for an open welcoming space.

However, good design has to be followed by good construction and here we were less fortunate. We experienced frequent jamming of the doors and difficulties with the four locks.

After two years of consultation with the Diocese and our insurers we decided that the only answer was to replace the doors.

Fortunately we found Go Glass, a local family firm, well equipped to help us. They re-measured to within millimetres, copied our fine graphics by hand, fitted a central lock and completed a precision manufacture and installation. All for a cost of just over £6,000, half of which was met by an anonymous donor sympathetic to our plight.

We have solved a problem and also learned a valuable lesson. Glass doors are sensitive and, like our organ, need regular professional maintenance. Be assured that this has been arranged.

Alan Jones

St Mark's Parish New Year Parish Lunch

To beat the January blues, and mark the beginning of the New Year, you are heartily invited to join us for a parish lunch on Sunday 18th January, 12.30 pm in the Community Centre

£5 per person (cash on the day please!)

You are welcome to bring a bottle!

If anyone was willing to contribute a quiche, or a crumble, then please contact

Sarah Perry: sarahperrywarden@gmail.com

A sign-up sheet for attendance/helping will be in the Narthex in January.

Greetings from...

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- ① Pick up your postcard canvas for £6 each.
- ② Create an artwork made up of one, two or three parts.
- ③ Return your canvases by Friday 13th February 2026

Wish you were here!

Charity No. 1099555



On behalf of our student artists, staff and volunteers at Rowan, I would like to thank everybody at St Mark's Church for kindly supporting Rowan at your recent Advent Fair. In total, an impressive £707.40 was raised for Rowan, through the sale of our stall items and donations. It was wonderful to be a part of such a well organised, joyful event and we are truly grateful for your support.

As a local charity providing an arts centre and forest school for adults with learning disabilities, Rowan depends on such acts of kindness to carry out our work. Student fees only cover a fraction of our costs, and we therefore rely on donations to fund our work fully.

Rowan has been making a difference since 1984, providing a safe, creative, and enriching environment where the arts are used as a tool to bring people together and tackle social exclusion. We are passionate about what we do and thanks to the support of our local community we can make a real difference to the lives of people with learning disabilities in Cambridge.

Thank you once again for your kind generosity and wishing you all the best for Christmas and the New Year.

Rose Bloomfield

Fundraising and Events Manager

Pat Caesar

We have received the sad news that Pat Caesar died on the 1st December. Pat was a stalwart and long-term member of the Seek Committee and contributed articles to Seek for more than 30 years. As someone who was brought up in Newnham, she was a fount of information on all things local and was ready to share her many memories of her childhood here, including her years as a pupil at Newnham Croft. Her funeral will be held at St Catharine's College where she regularly attended evensong in the chapel. We send our condolences to her family.

Nancy Perham

Nancy Lane Perham died on the 25th November. A distinguished scientist and fellow of Girton College, Nancy lived in Newnham for many years, attending the Family Service when her children, Temple and Quentin, were young and latterly being a regular attendant at the Tuesday morning Communion Service. We send our condolences to her family.

The family of Nancy Lane Perham would like to inform you that her funeral will take place at St Mark's Church, on Thursday 8th January, at 2pm. All most welcome.

Call for Coffee Makers



The coffee served at the Sunday morning service is an excellent opportunity for us to meet each other.

However it does need people to make, serve and clear away the coffee. We are looking for more people to join

the coffee rota - it's only 3- 4 times a year. If you can help, do please contact Angie Cole at angie2cole@yahoo.co.uk or Judith Lewins at judithlewins@gmail.com.

Prayers for Seek January 2026

Gracious Father,

We thank you for the gift of a new year — giving us a sense of new beginnings, and a fresh start filled with hope and new possibilities. As we set our intentions, we place our trust in your goodness and faithfulness, knowing you are always at work in our lives. Guide us in the year ahead, shaping our hearts and aligning our steps with your purposes.

Amen

Lord Jesus,

As we step into 2026, tune our hearts to your goodness. Let this New Year be marked by your presence. Fill us with faith instead of fear, peace where worry weighs heavy, and joy to strengthen our hearts. so that we can live each day with thankfulness and generosity.

Teach us to walk humbly, love mercy and act justly; make our homes bright with kindness and our hands quick to bless. Write a new song of hope over us and help us share your love wherever you lead.

Amen.

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, whose years never fail and whose mercies are new each returning day: let the radiance of your Spirit renew our lives, warming our hearts and giving light to our minds; that we may pass the coming year in joyful obedience and firm faith; through him who is the beginning and the end, your Son, Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, now and for ever.

Amen.

Lord Jesus,

You, who stand at the gate of the year

Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.

As I go into the darkness, I put my hand into yours,

For that is better to me than any earthly light and safer than any known way.

Amen.

(based on a poem by Minnie Haskins (1875-1957))

Chosen and composed by Lizzy Jarvis

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Tuesday Home Group

7:30 pm, fortnightly – contact: Mike Thompson, 07957 735860

Thursday Home Group

7:30 pm, weekly – contact: Andrew Watts

aa.watts@hotmail.co.uk

Choir

The choir sings every Sunday morning during term time and one Sunday evensong per month. Contact Marcus Cox at

singing@stmarksnewnham.org

Rehearsals

every Friday evening during school term time (*Junior Choir: 5:15 pm – 6:00 pm, Adult Choir: 6:00 pm – 6:45 pm*).

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Services at St Mark's Church, Newnham in January

Communion (BCP) at 8.00 am every Sunday

Sunday Services

4th January at 9.30 am	Communion
11th January at 9.30 am	Morning Worship
6.00 pm	Choral Evensong
18th January at 9.30 am	Communion
25th January at 9.30 am	Communion

Regular Weekday Services

Monday - Friday at 9.00 am Morning Prayer

Tuesdays

Weekly Communion (BCP) at 11.00 am followed by refreshments

A caring and professional service at all times

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