

SPIRE & TOWER



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Editorial

Hello and welcome to Spire & Tower. It looks a little different this time: I've changed the software I use to lay it out, which has meant some extra work in the short term, but long-term should save time with more templates, guides and generally an ability to move things round without making a mess of everything. Please tell me what you think: if you spot something, don't be shy, tell me and I can either fix it if it's bad or else glow with pride if it's nice.

The big news this issue is that Robert is leaving us, moving on to another parish. I'm sure we can all offer him thanks for guiding us these past however many years. Beyond that, we've got an excellent bible study from Celia O'Neil, who tells us how Jeremiah contains her favourite bible verse. I'll admit I've struggled with Jeremiah, who is hardly one of the happier prophets, so if you're like me, why don't you read Celia's piece and ask her about it? Perhaps you could ask the Bible study group - from the (clearly true and accurate) reportage on page 6, you can

be sure they'll have something to say. Perhaps Jeremiah's tales of life in a weak, leaderless Jerusalem can tell us about how to survive an interregnum?

It's good to learn about our church members' lives outside the four walls of St Andrew's, so I'm sure you'll all be eager to read Duncan Volger's piece: he's in a care home now but is still an active member of the church, receives communion and loves to have visitors. Hazel Davis tells us more about how and why she decided to be a surrogate mother - most of you will have seen Hazel around church as her pregnancy has progressed over the last few months, so I for one was hugely interested to find out what inspired her to make such a selfless act.

Finally, advice for the season: Spire & Tower is best enjoyed with a mince pie and dry sherry. Merry Christmas!

Greg

View from the Vicarage

As most of you now know, I won't be writing many more of these articles as I've been asked by the Bishop of Kingston and the Archdeacon of Wandsworth to take on the role of Interim Team Vicar at the Richmond Team Ministry; my family and I will be leaving Surbiton in the New Year (date yet to be fixed, as I write.)

This means it will be my last Christmas here, which should make it extra special. But even in saying that I've already made an omission: it will also be my last Advent here.

Of course, these seasons are special everywhere, but they are particularly special at St Andrew's and St Mark's because of the way the tradition of holding services has grown over many decades.

It takes a bit of discovering, but for a certain few, the best service of the year is the Advent Carol service, at 6pm on Advent Sunday. There will be a recurring theme through the winter services of darkness moving into light, but there are different tones to this, and in the dark of St Andrew's, with the backdrop of candles and the intricate brickwork put up in 1871, starting off, often, with music that's five hundred years old, something about the Advent readings and music hits a mark that later services cannot capture. Of all our services through the year, Advent Carols is our closest approximation to 'cult movie' status. It'll probably never be the most popular but for those who like it, they really like it. Do come if you haven't been before.

By Christmas, we are moving into active joyful mode and the services reflect that, though the 'Blue Christmas'

service gives acknowledgement to the fact that for many, for various reasons, the joy of Christmas is jarring more than happy. However, the setting of the Christmas carol service at St Mark's somehow works brilliantly, just as the Advent carol service at St Andrew's works brilliantly. This year we have the world premiere of a poem written specially for the occasion.



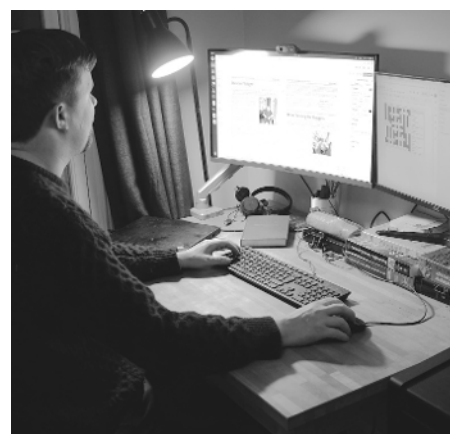
And then, the fun and joy and magic of Christingle on Christmas Eve blurs into the more solemn joy of Midnight Mass and Christmas morning - and then the way the Church hosts the Christmas lunch is some kind of articulation of openness and welcome that we strive to do for the rest of the year but don't always manage.

The season is the same, and the services are essentially the same, but what keeps it fresh is that we approach each year slightly differently. Christmas for a five year old child is magical in a different way from how it is when you are a ten year old child or a fifteen year old child. And then it's different again as you move to middle age and old age. Each year, we reconfigure our family life and our place in the world and our sense of what God wants us to celebrate on this earth.

So come to our services this Advent and Christmas. They will be the same, but different.

Spire & Tower is the parish magazine of St Andrew's & St Mark's Church Surbiton. It comes out four times a year. To submit an article, email the editor; for publication dates, see the table below. The next issue is in March, so submissions by 1st Feb please.

	Lent	Summer	Harvest	Advent
Articles	1st Feb	1st May	1st Aug	1st Nov
Published	1st Mar	1st Jun	1st Sep	1st Dec



Christmas at SASM



Service	Place	Date and Time	Description
Blue Christmas Service	St A	Wed 17th Dec, 7:30pm	<i>A time of prayer and quiet reflection for those whose celebration will be tinged with sadness</i>
Christmas Carol Service	St M	Sun 21 Dec, 6pm	<i>Traditional service with readings, carols and our choir in great voice again!</i>
Christingle with Children's choir	St A	Wed 24 Dec, 3:30pm	<i>Popular service for families where candle-lit decorated oranges are received.</i>
Christingle	St A	Wed 24 Dec, 5pm	<i>Popular service for families where candle-lit decorated oranges are received.</i>
Midnight Mass	St A & online	24 th , music 11pm, service 11:30pm	<i>Traditional Christmas Eve candlelit Choral Eucharist.</i>
BCP Holy communion	St M	Thu 25 Dec 8am	<i>Quiet reflective service.</i>
Christmas Day Eucharist	St M	Thu 25 Dec 10am	<i>Family Eucharist Service – a service for all on Christmas Morning.</i>
Christmas Season			
BCP Communion	St A	Sun 28 Dec, 8am	
Sung Eucharist	St A	Sun 28 Dec, 11 am	
No midweek services:			
Normal pattern of services resumes from Tue 5th Jan.			

Sunbeams Playgroup

Are you a parent of a young child? Read on: St Mark's has something for you.

Walk into St Mark's Church at about 10.30 on a Wednesday morning during term-time and you will see a buggy park along the North wall. Peek into the hall and you will see a throng of babies and toddlers at play. This is Sunbeams. It is one of the ways in which our church reaches out to the wider community. It is run by a group of volunteers who are mostly members of our congregation, but is open to all local parents and other carers who value a place to stay with their pre-school children whilst they play with others.

What happens at Sunbeams?

The children play with the toys, and before long they are also playing with each other. Before they arrive the hall has already been laid out with different activities in various corners. Typically these will include a book corner, with books stood to attention; a road layout and garage with the toy cars lined up; a baby corner with mat and baby toys; a fully equipped toy kitchen; a ball pool; a big plastic car and other ride-ons; a tent; dolls with a dolls house with a full set of furniture, as well as a doll-sized buggy; and a couple of small craft tables for the older children.

The children remain the responsibility of the parent, grandparent, nanny or other carer who has brought them, but the adults are nonetheless able to relax with coffee or tea and biscuits whilst the children are at play – and the children themselves can also enjoy juice and biscuits – for which there is always an eager queue. After an hour or so of play and refreshments, the children love helping at Tidy Up Time; and make a circle to sing songs. All too soon it is time for the last song, which is always "Goodbye Sunbeams" (until next week).

What do the users make of Sunbeams?

We asked some of the parents and carers what they thought and this is what they said:

"Sunbeams: it's always beautifully laid out. The toys are always suitable, safe toys with no broken ones."

"There is real coffee!"

"The children make friends with each other and this gives the carers a breathing space!"



"Because there is a limit on numbers, it is not too crowded."

"Sunbeams is really friendly and they look after people. They introduce people to each other and talk to each other."

What is the point of Sunbeams?

At a basic level Sunbeams aims to create a welcoming place where families are looked after and carers have a chance for a chat and a sit down. And where children have fun, make friends and learn to play together, which is a vital step towards preparing for their next stage in life. At the spiritual level Sunbeams puts into practice one of the mission aims of our parish – to serve God by serving the people of Surbiton. There is no preaching, and no attempt to recruit church members – although it is pleasing that some of the children go on to be baptised. It is simply a way of loving our neighbours in a pale reflection of the love of Christ.

How does one join Sunbeams?

Contact Janene Olivier at the Parish Office (020 8390 9129 Tuesday to Friday) who will arrange a taster session. There is usually a waiting list for places, but they do become available! There is a modest charge to cover costs.

Article: Katrina Lidbetter and Sarah Stokes

Fifteen minutes with the Tuesday Bible study group

People often ask what we do at Bible study. Jackie Robbs shares a transcript from one of our recent Tuesday sessions, to give a flavour of what goes on.



Jackie: We're going to start by looking at Psalm 24. Who would you say wrote it?

Jean: It says it's a Psalm of David.

Jackie: But do you think he's actually the author?

Ann and Jackie: (who have heard this question before): No! Probably not.

Jackie: Well done. Lots of Psalms are attributed to David, but he probably didn't compose them.

Jean: Oh.

Ann (beaming): It's nice that we remember some things you've taught us.

Trevor: Can I just ask, what does "Selah" mean?

Michael: What's that, Trevor?

Trevor: "Selah." You can see it where there are divisions in the Psalm.

Jennifer: Isn't it some form of musical notation?

Jackie: Yes, it might be. It may have been a place for a musical interlude, or a place for people to speak, but we don't really know.

Trevor gets out his phone and starts to look it up.

Mike (who attends Surbiton Hill Methodist): Do Anglicans often have Psalms in their services these days? We don't use them regularly, which is a shame.

Susan (another Methodist): I've come across "The Lord's my Shepherd" and that's about it.

Valerie: explains how Psalms are used in Anglican liturgy and the complications of the mediant pause. The Methodists are mystified but try not to show it.

Trevor: Can I read what it says on my phone?

Jackie: You know, it makes me very unsettled if you check up on everything I say.

Trevor: It's OK. It says there are various theories about musical notations in the Psalms, but "no one is exactly sure." So there we are. We don't really know. You were right.

Jackie: Thank you. Shall we read the Psalm now? I'd like us to divide into two groups, one to read the odd-numbered verses and the other to read the even-numbered verses. First group off you go.

Only a couple of people start reading.

Jackie: First group, are you ready?

Susan: I thought we were taking it in turns to read a verse.

Jackie: No, I'd like each group to read all together.

My Favourite Bible Verse

Each issue we ask a member of our congregation to tell us about their favourite Bible verse. This time, Celia O'Neil takes up the task.

Thus says the Lord: Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.

Jeremiah 6:16

I love the traditional and distinctive style of fingerposts. There is romance about them, and I am old enough to remember them used for main roads before motorway signage loomed large. When I read this verse from Jeremiah, I imagine a worn fingerpost at those crossroads in a deserted landscape. I am in this scene reading the fingerpost, looking and considering the choice before me.

Verse 16 feels like God is gently advising and presenting a quiet and hopeful breathing space. My worn fingerpost signs "the ancient paths" from which I take comfort as being paths well-trodden and tested. Along the way there are sure to be those who have nurtured my faith, those who will do so in the future and, with whom, I hope to cling to that 'good way.'

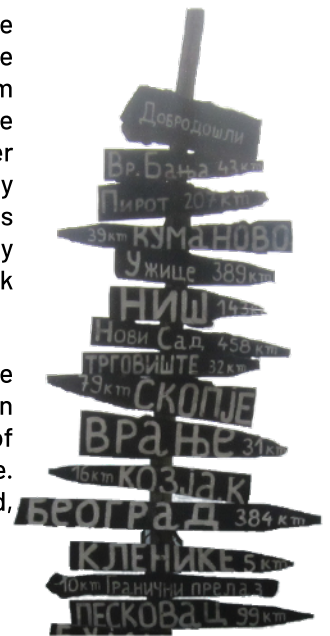
Additionally, I am asked to 'walk' in this way – not simply to hang around at the edge reluctant to take a step. This is the active, living Word of God that we have to proclaim and

I find this image of standing, looking, choosing and walking the 'ancient paths' helpful. My choice is completed with a promise – 'rest for your soul.' And God keeps his promises.

Jeremiah is not, perhaps, the first book one turns to in the Bible. So much of the doom laden and dire warnings the prophet is directed to deliver fall on deaf ears and are totally ignored. Verse 16 concludes with God's people decisively not listening, "we will not walk in it." Foiled again Jeremiah!

However, extracting the nuggets of God's wisdom within the dense and difficult bits of scripture is worth the time. They are there to be uncovered, held and acted upon.

Thanks Jeremiah. I have listened.



Susan: Well, that wasn't made very clear.

Mike: (loyally) I understood what we had to do.

Jackie: Let's try again. Group 1, off you go.

The groups read through the Psalm, discuss its purpose, structure, imagery and the parallel nature of Hebrew poetry. Most importantly, they cover the points which make it relevant to the letter of James, which is actually the text they're supposed to be studying today.

Trevor: Can I just say, I always learn so much when we go off on a tangent. There is so much knowledge around this table and I find it amazing.

People look pleased but slightly bemused.

Jackie: Right, time to go back to James Chapter 4.

Michael: (grinning) Er...can you just remind us, who was James again?

Jackie holds her head in her hands dramatically while the group dissolves in laughter.

The group meets roughly once a fortnight on Tuesday mornings, at the back of St Mark's. There is also a (slightly more serious) sister group which meets fortnightly at lunchtime on Fridays.

Holy Heroes - Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Each issue we look at someone's 'Holy Hero': a historic Christian who has inspired someone in a special way. This time Harry Banarjee tells us about the German theologian and martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Who's your holy hero? Whether they're John Calvin or Johnny Cash, we'd love to hear from you.

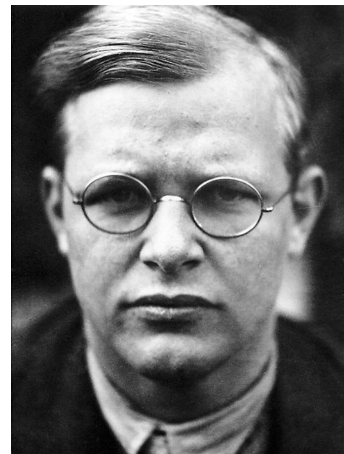
My holy hero is Dietrich Bonhoeffer - as he helped me return to the right path.

Despite only becoming a follower of Christ in the past two years, I've found it very easy to slide into old ways. Sitting comfortably in my sin; not praying; not reading my Bible. It's so much easier to live for the world; focus on earthly things. However, Bonhoeffer helped me recognise that this is ultimately destructive.

"Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our church. We are fighting today for costly grace."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's distinction between cheap and costly grace helped me understand how my actions in the here and now are a reflection of my appreciation for God. Sitting comfortably in a life of sin was what Bonhoeffer called cheap grace: it is the forgiveness of sin without requiring proper repentance, sacrifice or suffering. On the other hand, costly grace is the grace of God as a gift, requiring the response of radical obedience and discipleship. This is moving out of what he refers to as comfortable Christianity into a life of sacrifice and true commitment to Christ.

These theological principles made me understand that I was in that position - a comfortable Christian - taking advantage of God's grace. His grace is a gift, not a result of our actions. We do not deserve it.



"Grace without price; grace without cost! In such a church the world finds a cheap covering for its sins; no contrition is required, still less any real desire to be delivered from sin. Cheap grace therefore amounts to a denial of the living Word of God."

This fundamentally changed my mindset with how I approached following God and strengthening my relationship with Him. It has helped me turn away from sin; pick up my Bible; pray every day and ultimately become closer to God.

Thank you Bonhoeffer.

Who was Dietrich Bonhoeffer?

Bonhoeffer was one of the leading lights of German theology in the first half of the twentieth century. Throughout this time, the liberal mainstream Lutheran church fell prey to 'Kulturprotestantismus' - the idea that German Christianity was an outworking of German culture, and should be led by cultural norms - which left the church powerless to stand against the rising tide of fascism. Throughout this time, Bonhoeffer was a leader in the Confessing Church, which held to biblical truth against the culture of the day.

Bonhoeffer coined his most famous phrase "Cheap Grace" in *The Cost of Discipleship*, written in 1937 as Europe stood on the brink of war. During the war, he was known for his involvement in a plot to kill Hitler, but it was for smuggling Jews into Switzerland that he was arrested. He was hanged in 1945.

Theology and Gardening

Ruth Melia took a day to retreat into nature and consider theology in Kew Gardens. Here's what it taught her.

Last September I joined a retreat day of spiritual meditation at Kew Gardens run by Kew Theology and Gardening, an organisation which seeks to deepen the church's connection with nature.

Making the most of my maternity leave, I took my six month baby along with me for the day. For both of us, it was a first-time visit.

At the start of the day, we were given a booklet of meditations called 'the Stations of the Trees', based on the Stations of the Cross. The booklet guided us through 14 locations in the gardens, with reflections and prayers at each place, though I confess we only made it to 7.

It was a lovely sunny day in beautiful surroundings. The series of reflections helped me to think about the abundance, diversity and fragility of God's creation.

One station, positioned at some bare allotments, was focused on soil. The theme, and location, seemed

unremarkable at first, until the reflection pointed out the necessity of this extraordinary material as the foundation of all of life. The reflection quoted philosopher Wendell Berry:

[Soil] increases by experience, by the passage of seasons, growth rising out of it and returning to it, not by ambition or aggressiveness. It is enriched by all things that die and enter into it. It keeps the past, not as history or as memory, but as richness, new possibility."

Perhaps it was my new role as a mother, which I continue to find a strange and wonderful thing, which made this reflection hit home: the everyday miracle of new shoots growing out of soil, and the everyday miracle of a new person being created.



You can find out about more and book other events like this at the Kew Theology and Gardening website:

www.kewtheologyandgardening.org.uk



Christmas Meal - Volunteers Wanted

Each Christmas we put on a lunch in St Mark's for people who would otherwise be alone at Christmas.

Volunteering for the Christmas Day lunch is great fun and very rewarding. It makes a real difference to the lives of our guests.

For more information please contact Janice on sasmsdeacon3@gmail.com

Here are the ways to take part.

- 1) Volunteers are needed for preparation day on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day.
- 2) Drivers for Christmas Day to transport our guests to St Marks for the lunch, about 12 noon and home at 3.30pm.
- 3) Please think about donating a present for our guests. Label your gift male, female or neutral and please bring it wrapped.

Duncan Vogler

Every week we have people attend services via our web stream. Duncan Vogler is one of them: a long-term parishoner who now lives in a care home. Pastoral lay worker Toni Mitchell visits him and asks him about his life in the home.

As many of you may know, Duncan, a stalwart of this parish, now resides in Cloyda Care Home in New Malden.

Duncan is in his eighties now and told me that he was first taken to St Mark's 'when I was six' and attended Sunday School. He and his family lived opposite St Mark's from 1938 until his recent move due to declining health and mobility issues.

Following the bombing of St Mark's, Duncan moved to St Matthew's and was baptised there, eventually returning to St Mark's where he was confirmed. Duncan attended school at Shrewsbury House and Ewell Castle along with other parish members. On leaving school Duncan worked as a clerical assistant for Surrey Hills Executive on Ewell Road before moving on to Vickers Armstrong, and eventually spending 28 years in the civil service working in the library system. After his retirement Duncan cared for his mother and worked as a volunteer for various charities such as Oxfam, British Heart Foundation, Children's Society in Surbiton, and Princess Alice furniture shop in Kingston.

Meanwhile, Duncan continued to attend St Mark's, joining the choir as a boy and spending many years as a server in both St Andrew's and St Mark's following their amalgamation. When I asked Duncan about changes that he has seen in the church he told me he has had 'about 10 vicars.' He said that 'in the 60s church was mainly male dominated, no lady church wardens even, or in the choir, not even Lay Readers.' Duncan said that 'people who were against women priests were elderly women, my mother even.'

Duncan continued as a stalwart member of the parish, but the pandemic brought life changes in the form of deteriorating health and mobility. Duncan expressed great thanks and appreciation for the help and support provided by his sister and brother-in-law who looked after him during this time. Post-pandemic he said that his walking 'was not too bad at first' but deteriorated rapidly following a fall, resulting in him being confined to the flat. It was at this point that Duncan moved to Cloyda on a temporary basis.

I asked Duncan for his thoughts about the move from his home to Cloyda and he stated, 'I thought I'd miss it, but I didn't miss it all that much, maybe deep down.' Duncan quickly made friends in the care home and said, 'everyone cheered when I got to stay.' Asked what he liked about the



home, Duncan mentioned he had a nice room with his own bits and pieces, enjoyed the activities and exercises, games such as Scrabble and quizzes and outings to a neighbouring care home with his fellow residents, although this is becoming a bit more challenging due to his decreased mobility. Duncan said the staff are nice and he likes being with people, and that otherwise 'I'd be at home on my own not doing anything.'

Duncan misses church services and activities and also his friends in the congregation, so he is always eager for news. He particularly misses the Christmas Lunch, and while I was talking to him he reminisced about the time that Rev Robert brought him to a Wednesday Lunch which he used to attend regularly before the move. Duncan was a staunch member of Jackie's Friday Bible Study Group and his knowledge and understanding of the Bible, together with his sense of humour, is much missed.

Robert, Janice, and I take turns in bringing Holy Communion to Duncan, and my usual slot is the first Thursday following Morning Eucharist. Duncan participates in the service, and always includes in his prayers people from the church community and the parish, as well as his friends in Cloyda and his family. Duncan said that his favourite hymn is 'I vow to thee my country' and he likes reading the Bible from beginning to end.

Duncan said, 'I enjoyed being in the parish' and I am always impressed by his humility and his appreciation of any visits from church members. It is an indication of how well he has settled into his new home that some of his fellow residents were eagerly chipping in while we were chatting, and the manager has asked for a copy of the magazine 'so we can frame it for Duncan.'

Duncan sends his best wishes to all at St Andrew's and St Mark's, and I left him relaxed and smiling in his chair being serenaded by the care home's newly acquired songbirds and joking with his fellow residents.

Duncan welcomes anyone wishing to visit him at Cloyda; parking is available and the K1 bus stops just outside..

Duncan 's Address

Cloyda Care Home, 227 Malden Rd
New Malden KT3 6AG
0208 949 1839

Wine Tasting for Oxygen

SASM folk recently enjoyed some top notch vino thanks to Sommellier-in-chief Rev Robert and Charlie from our charity of the month, Oxygen.

On Saturday 1st November we held a wine tasting at St Mark's in aid of Oxygen, our charity of the month. Robert Stanier presented three pairs of wines from the old and new world, showing how different wine making processes influence the taste of the wine and we all had a chance to vote on our favourites. The overall 'wine of the night' was a Merlot-Cabernet from Moldova (talk to Robert for more information on this and all the wines from the evening).

Oxygen was the SASM Charity of the Month for October. They are a Christian youth work charity based in Kingston reaching out to young people of all faiths and none, supporting them through crisis, providing mentoring, youth clubs and a range of other activities including a community-focussed charity shop in New Malden where young (and old) people can volunteer. At the wine tasting, we heard from John Trend, Oxygen's Chief Executive, who shared the different ways that Oxygen reaches out to young people and provides meaningful support which shows them that they are unique and are loved by God. For more information on Oxygen and all the work that they do, speak to Charlie Bamford who is their Deputy Chief Executive and can usually be found at the 9.15 Sunday service at St Mark's.

Want to know more about
Oxygen? Find out at
www.oxygen-online.org



My Surrogacy Story

Most at St Andrew's will know about Hazel's pregnancy. Here she tells us more.

In a way, my surrogacy story started back in 2014 when my sister suffered complications following the birth of her first child. She was rushed back to hospital for emergency surgery that saved her life but left a lot of scar tissue on her uterus. Her second pregnancy was not easy, and after her second child was born the doctors told her it wouldn't be safe for her to carry any more children. Whilst she was very grateful for the two she had, my sister had always wanted a larger family. I knew this, so I started to think about whether I could carry a child for her. At the time my daughter Abi was only one, and my husband and I concluded that, although I could get my head around the idea of carrying my sister's baby, the timing was not right .

Surrogacy is not recommended until you are sure your family is complete, because things can go wrong, and at the time we weren't sure that we were done. As it turned out, my sister had a friend in the military wives choir who had her 2 older daughters, had enjoyed pregnancy and had developed the desire to be a surrogate to help somebody else complete their family. We are forever grateful to her for giving my sister her third child, and now my youngest niece is a determined little 6 year old. I never expected my thoughts of surrogacy to go any further after that.

On bonfire night 2023 we met up with our friends Dave and Ryan to watch the fireworks. Dave has been best friends with my husband Chris since primary school, is the reason Chris and I met, and is Abi's godfather. During the evening they told us that they had joined Surrogacy UK (SUK), a charity that supports people through the surrogacy process. They mentioned they were going to be busy attending social events in the hope that they would meet a surrogate who would offer to help them start a family.

This sparked something, so a couple of weeks later we chatted about their ideal scenario, about host vs traditional surrogacy (using donor vs the surrogate's own eggs), and how things might work. Chris and I decided we preferred host surrogacy and my GP confirmed there was no reason that I couldn't be a surrogate, so I joined SUK. Chris still had concerns about the medical risks, but he accepted that I wanted to do this and that I saw the potential to create a family as outweighing the challenges and risks.

Because we already knew each other, our 'Get To Know' period could be shortened. After that we could complete our agreement to outline our plans and preferences for every stage - including all sorts of scenarios a typical



couple might never consider unless the situation arose: which screening tests we would accept or decline, which vaccinations I would receive whilst pregnant, and under what circumstances we would consider termination. We then calculated my estimated expenses: commercial surrogacy is illegal in the UK but reasonable expenses are covered. Pregnancy vitamins, travel for midwife appointments, extra childcare, maternity clothes, pregnancy yoga ... it's quite a list and it does add up. I get maternity leave and pay, so for me loss of earnings is not an issue, but my husband is not entitled to any paid leave. Our friends know the overall budget and pay in installments, and afterwards I'll have to confirm my expenses with the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service.

Dave and Ryan had registered with a fertility clinic in London, so next I started the tests to check I was healthy enough to go ahead. I met the consultant who talked through the medication they would recommend. The clinic required that my husband and I had a session with their counsellor, and that the four of us had another session all together, to show that I was not being coerced in any way.

Then the waiting really began. The boys were on a waiting list to be matched to an egg donor. As November arrived, they took their final health test: samples were frozen from each of them for three months before retesting, so Chris and I booked a last minute family ski trip while we waited.

February 2025 and the results were good: sixteen donor eggs were ready to attempt fertilisation. Dave and Ryan had decided they would each like the chance to be biological fathers, so eight eggs were fertilised from each. Many updates followed over an intense few days of waiting ... until eight grew into embryos (usually around half fail to make it to day five) for freezing. We scheduled for embryo transfer in mid May - allowing a trip to Alton Towers over the Easter holidays. I started the drugs to shut down my own hormone production, followed by the drugs to replace those hormones. I had two more scans and a blood test to check I was reacting as expected, and the frozen embryo transfer was booked to go ahead.

Transfer day arrived, and the receptionist was slightly surprised when four of us turned up for my appointment - but they fitted us all into the room. The procedure didn't take very long, and we were sent away with a close-up photo of the embryo and an ultrasound scan picture of a tiny dot next to a white stripe of womb lining.

Test day was ten days later, and those were some long days of waiting. I did start to feel less normal so I was cautiously optimistic it had worked, but very reluctant to get the boys' hopes up. On day 10 we all woke ridiculously early, and thrilled to see a very clear line on the pregnancy test. We were officially four weeks pregnant!

Three weeks later it was amazing to see the looks on Dave and Ryan's faces as the sonographer found the embryo, the tiniest flickering spot that was the heart beating. She was incredibly reassuring that everything looked good, and with an egg from a healthy young donor we were told the odds of successfully carrying to term were very high.

From there I would be treated under the normal NHS path, so I registered with the Kingston hospital maternity team. The next milestone was the 12 week scan. We had some persuading to do to get all four adults into the scanning room, but other surrogates encouraged me to stand up for myself, and eventually Kingston NHS allowed it to happen..

It's all been pretty smooth since then. At the 20 week scan we were reassured all measurements were normal, and found I was carrying a boy. My initial exhaustion and nausea weren't too bad, but did drag on until about week 16. I'm now 27 weeks pregnant and feeling considerably larger, but enjoying pregnancy yoga. The boys have booked on a 'bumps and babies' course, and I'll go along to the sessions on birth, so our birth plans will all be agreed together.

Abi was initially reluctant for me to do this- mainly she didn't want me to feel sick and have to go to hospital, and partly she didn't want people assuming she was going to have a new baby sibling. So we've been very open to teachers and parents at school, and I shared my story with Robert and then the church. All the responses have been so supportive, it's been lovely for me, and Abi's really enjoyed seeing how the baby is growing through my pregnancy app, and has taken it all in her stride.

In about seven weeks time I'll be going on maternity leave - how did that happen?! I'll be able to keep relaxed and fit in the run up to birth, and then I've got time off to recover physically and emotionally. I'm planning to express milk for the first month or two to help with the hormones, but we'll see how that works out when we get there.

Whilst Dave and Ryan will be taking care of the baby straight away from birth, legally I am the mother and my husband is the father. So the final big step is the Parental Order. This can take anything from about 8-12 weeks to several months. We will confirm the laws have been followed, that the baby has a genetic connection to the Intended Parents, that I consent to it, and as everyone agrees that it is best for the child it should be a very straightforward date in court and a new birth certificate will be issued. In the longer term, the baby will know who I am, where they came from, how much they were wanted and how much they are loved.

Hazel Davis

Crossword Answers

<p>26:Edom 28:Ode 30:Ur 15:Pray 17:Obliged 18:Light 19:Consume 22:Turtle 23:Mate 24:Van</p>	<p>2:Eden 3:Hark 4:Ago 5:Galileo 6:Judea 7:Tavern 8:Noel 14:Nick</p>	<p>16:Coventry Carol 20:Oil 21:Satyr 23:Magi 24:Government 27:To 29:Med 31:Myrrh</p>	<p>1:Bethlehem 6:Joe 9:Dark 10:Coal 11:Id 12:Exalted 13:Angel</p>
Down		Across	



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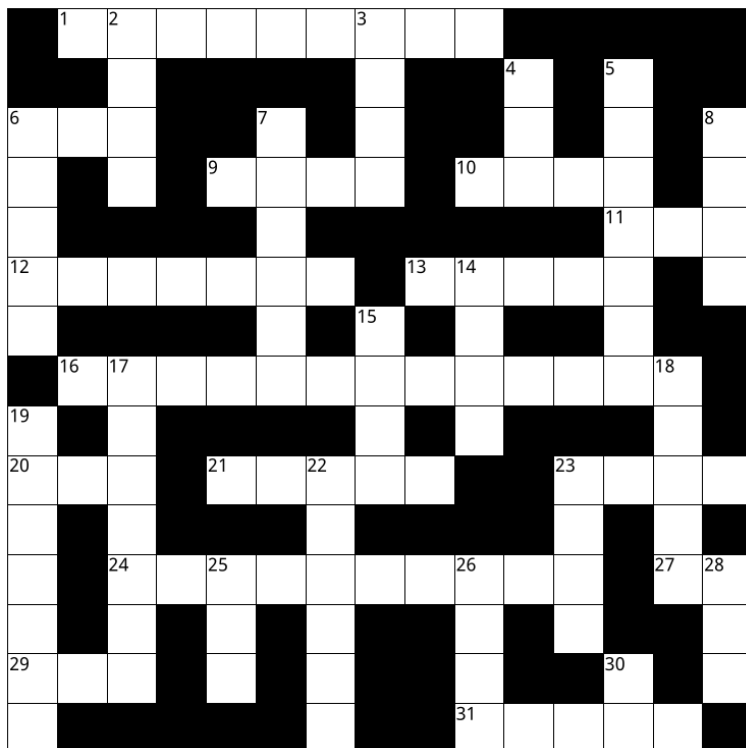




Congratulations to Lily, Dan, Theo, Kayvan, Yeganeh, Tamblin, Lucien and Eulilee, all of whom got confirmed recently. It's good to have you with us, so welcome to the faith!

Across

- 1. Where it all began (9)
- 6. Jesus' dad (sl.) (3)
- 9. E.g. the night before Christmas (4)
- 10. Bad gift (4)
- 11. E.g. Dec 13th (3)
- 12. State of humble in Magnificat (7)
- 13. Said 8D first (5)
- 16. You've been sent to Egypt? Lullay, too bad! (8,5)
- 20. Black version of first 23A gift (3)
- 21. Mr Tumnus, if he was Greek (5)
- 23. Unwittingly sparked 16A (4)
- 24. It's on His shoulders (10)
- 27. 28D Joy (2)
- 29. Nazareth's local sea (abbr.) (3)
- 31. Gift from 23A (5)



Down

- 2. Four rivers flow out of it (4)
- 3. 13A sing it, according to Wesley (4)
- 4. Long prophets knew (3)
- 5. Found Jupiter's moons on Christmas 1610 (5)
- 6. Province of 1A (5)
- 7. There's no room here (6)
- 8. The second Gallagher (4)
- 14. Father Christmas (sl.) (4)
- 15. Elizabeth's response to Mary's news (4)
- 17. You might feel this about hosting your relatives at Christmas (7)
- 18. Opposed to 9A (5)
- 19. Correct action to encountering Christmas cake (7)
- 22. Dove associated with Christmas (6)
- 23. Friend of king in tight fix (4)
- 25. Lake near Ararat (3)
- 26. Herod's home (4)
- 28. 27A Joy (3)
- 30. Abram's home (2)

