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Online Edition

# ST PETER'S CHURCH. BRACKLEY



**"LOVING GOD,  
LOVING EACH OTHER,  
LOVING BRACKLEY"**

May the God of hope  
fill you with all joy and peace





## **Don't be a Scrooge this Christmas**

*'Bah humbug! If I could work my will, every idiot who goes about with 'Merry Christmas' on his lips should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart!'*

So said the overworked vicar after his seventeenth rendition of Little Donkey.

I jest.

It was, of course, Ebenezer Scrooge in Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. He has understandably become the anti-hero of this festive season, the prototype for the Grinch who stole Christmas, and the paradigm for all December grumpiness. And it's all too easy to channel shades of Scrooge ourselves, with all the pressures and expectations of the month.

There are many reasons to feel disillusioned with Christmas. Perhaps for you it is ruined by busyness or loneliness, the supposed pagan roots of its past or the commercial tackiness of its present, too much family interaction or painfully little. Still, let me try to encourage you not to be a Scrooge this Christmas.

### **What about its pagan past?**

Historian Tom Holland has roundly debunked this myth. Christians did not rebrand the pagan festival of Saturnalia, or the worship of the bull-god Mithras. They completely replaced it – and good on 'em! When God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, the ground that had been profane became holy. And the whole point of Christmas is that darkness is replaced by light, "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5). So quite right no one says 'Merry Mithrasmas' any more, and what a mouthful anyway!

### **What about all the commercialism?**

It can be a bit much, can't it. But don't throw the Bethlehem baby out with the marketeering bathwater. R.C. Sproul writes, "Presenting our friends and families with gifts is not an ugly, ignoble vice. It incarnates the amorphous 'spirit of Christmas.' The tradition rests ultimately on the supreme gift God has given the world. The giving of gifts is a marvellous response to the receiving of such a gift." This year's cinematic, tear-

jerking ad from John Lewis, based on the unspoken love of a father and son, ends with the line, 'If you can't find the words, find the gift.' And when God couldn't just say it anymore, he gave the gift of his son to prove his love that first Christmas. Or better still: the Word *became* the gift. So let your gifts speak volumes this Christmas, just as His does.

### **What about my grief and pain?**

Grief and pain are very good reasons to be sad this Christmas. But not to be Scrooge. In fact, far from making us hate Christmas, they should make us love its true meaning even more. The whole point of Christmas is that God has come to meet us in our broken, hopeless and fearful world, to be with us in it, and to lift us out of it. Christmas is our only hope in the midst of all the pain. So you may not feel cheerful this Christmas, or even close. But you can still feel joyful. Perhaps more so than ever, since it is those walking in deep darkness who most clearly see a great light (Isaiah 9:2).

Do join us at one of our many services this month to find out more about this Light. And let's heed the warning of Jacob Marley: 'Don't be a Scrooge'.

Merry Christmas!

Christmas at  
St Peter's Brackley

**JOY**



**Carols by Candlelight** Sun 14<sup>th</sup> (7:30pm)  
Sing the classics, reflect on the season & enjoy festive refreshments

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**Nativity Service** Sun 21<sup>st</sup> (10am)  
Children can come dressed as their favourite nativity character

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**Christingles** Wed 24<sup>th</sup> (3pm, 4.15pm, 5.30pm)  
Book your free tickets through the St Peter's website

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**Midnight Communion** Wed 24<sup>th</sup> (11.30pm)  
See in Christmas Day with a chance to pause amid the chaos

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**Christmas Day all-age celebration** Thurs 25<sup>th</sup> (10am)  
A short, family-friendly Christmas celebration service

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All events are free. Booking only required for Christingle:  
[www.stpetersbrackley.org.uk/christmas](http://www.stpetersbrackley.org.uk/christmas)

# CAROLS *by* CANDLELIGHT

7.30pm on Sunday  
14<sup>th</sup> December

St Peter's Church  
Brackley

with mulled wine  
& mince pies



## St Peter's Nativity Service



Come dressed as  
your favourite  
Nativity  
character!



10am Sun 21 Dec

Everyone is welcome to  
take part - just turn up!

Part of our normal 10am service.  
Christmas party for the children while  
the service continues!

[stpetersbrackley.org.uk/christmas](http://stpetersbrackley.org.uk/christmas)



## Samaritan's Purse – Operation Christmas Child

A huge thank you to everyone for your love, generosity, and prayers in support of this year's Shoebox Appeal.



We had great fun at our "*Wrap and Fill*" coffee morning, where a wonderful team of around 30 people helped to fill **77 shoeboxes**!

Thanks to the generous donations from our church community, we have also been able to send **£385** to Samaritan's Purse to cover the £5 transportation and distribution cost each box requires.

Please continue to pray for the safe delivery of our shoeboxes as they make their way through checking, transportation, and distribution — and that they will be a blessing to every child who receives one.

We hope to hold another "*Wrap and Fill*" morning next year, so keep an eye out for bargains in the January sales! And if you're a knitter, we'll need plenty of hats ready for next November.

**Thank you again for your wonderful support.**

*Louise, Edward & Anna*



Book your free seat at  
[stpetersbrackley.org.uk/christmas](http://stpetersbrackley.org.uk/christmas)



# Christingle

Service

Christmas Eve, 3pm, 4.15pm, 5.30pm

# JOY

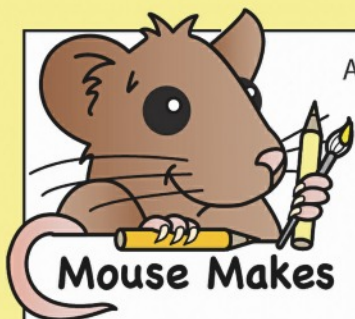
You're invited to our

## MIDNIGHT COMMUNION

Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> December  
11.30pm  
St Peter's Church

[stpetersbrackley.org.uk/christmas](http://stpetersbrackley.org.uk/christmas)





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

**read**

John 14:3

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

*What were you dressed in?*

Jesus was wrapped in

.....  
**read** Luke 2:7

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

*Where were you born?*

Jesus was born  
in a stable in

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

A baby needs  
somewhere  
to sleep like  
a crib or a cot.

*What did you  
sleep in?*

Jesus slept in a

.....  
**read** Luke 2:7

A baby needs  
a name.

*What name were  
you called?*

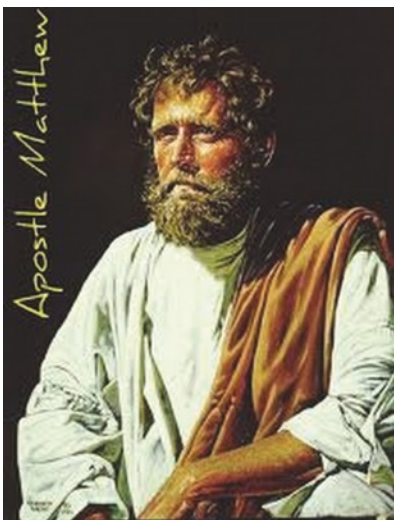
Jesus was given  
a special name  
that had a  
special meaning.

**read**

Matthew 1:21-23

# HAPPY CHRISTMAS!

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



## An Introduction to the Gospel of Matthew

This month we turn to the New Testament and look at Matthew, the first of the gospels. Although linked to Matthew the apostle, it is generally believed that the author used oral tradition, written fragments, eye-witness accounts, as well as common material in the other synoptic gospels (Mark and Luke).

Matthew, in writing for Jews, sets out to prove that Jesus is the true Messiah. He

connects Jesus' birth, life death and resurrection with the Old Testament Scriptures. In fact, he quotes the Old Testament more than any other New Testament author. This is reflected in the opening genealogy which traces Jesus back to Abraham; in his use of the terms *kingdom of heaven* and *Father in heaven*, reflecting a Jewish reluctance to use God's name; and in the way he portrays Jesus as the *Son of David*.

The whole gospel is structured around five blocks of teaching (chapters 5-7; 10; 13; 18; 24-25). This fivefold division reflects the structure of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament).

Matthew provides a comprehensive context by which we see all God's creation and salvation completed in Jesus, and all parts of our lives (work, family, friends and future) completed in Him. At the end of his gospel, Matthew records Jesus' commission to His disciples share this good news, promising to be with them:

*'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'* (28:18-20)

## What Does Christmas Mean To You?

When you prepare for Christmas  
What matters spring to mind?  
The coming of the Saviour  
Or the gifts that you can't find?

Do you think of baby Jesus  
As you deck the halls with holly?  
Or are your thoughts preoccupied  
With piling high your shopping trolley.



Will you be moved this Christmas  
By the sound of carol singing  
Or are you more in tune with  
The sound of shop tills ringing?

On that family occasion  
When you choose your Christmas tree  
Do you think of how that tiny babe  
Came to die for you and me?

Christmas to you could mean much more  
If you're prepared to see  
The reasons why each Christmastime  
Just mean so much to me

So as you celebrate this Christmas  
Why not resolve to start anew?  
And change your whole perspective  
Of what Christmas means to you.



*By Colin Hammacott*

## Jane Austen – still loved 250 years later



It was 250 years ago, on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1775, that novelist Jane Austen (*Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Persuasion*) was born. Over 30 million copies of her books have since been sold – 7000 in her lifetime.

She was the second daughter and seventh child of the Revd George Austen, rector of the village of Steventon in Hampshire. Two of her brothers became clergymen, two were Admirals in the Royal Navy and the other inherited substantial estates in Kent and Hampshire from a distant cousin. Neither Jane nor her sister Cassandra, with whom she was very close, ever married.

Jane had a sincere Christian faith which deepened as she got older and is reflected in her novels. She had sympathy with hands-on evangelicalism and a desire to abolish the slave trade, which she refers to particularly in *Mansfield Park*.

She lived at Steventon for 25 years and then moved with her parents and sister to Bath, enjoying holidays in the West Country. Her father died in 1805, and they moved to Southampton and then Chawton in Hampshire, less than 20 miles from Steventon, where they had a cottage on one of her brother Edward's estates – now a Jane Austen museum. This cottage was where she devoted herself to writing, revising her first three novels and composing another three.

But it was here too that she fell ill and died in 1817 – probably from Addison's Disease. She had been published only anonymously in her lifetime, and her style was not immediately appreciated, though its comments on the world of the landed gentry, to which she belonged, quickly became popular – as did her wit, irony and her realistic plots.

She is now more popular than ever, with followers known as Janeites and a flourishing Jane Austen Society with worldwide membership, plus numerous film and TV adaptations of her work.

There are some gaps in her private life, mainly because her sister Cassandra destroyed most of her letters. At the age of 20 she seems to have fallen temporarily for Thomas Lefroy, a neighbour who later became Lord Chief Justice of Ireland, but the relationship never developed. The epitaph by her brother James on her tomb in Winchester Cathedral praises the "extraordinary endowments of her mind".



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