

FEBRUARY 2026

From the Editors

A warm welcome to this first edition of 2026. We hope you had an enjoyable Christmas and New Year.

2026 brings new challenges to our church, the main one being the application for Heritage Lottery Funding to fund the new extension for which we now have the necessary permissions to go ahead. As this work progresses we will need the support of parishioners so if you think you can help in any way please speak to any of the churchwardens or the PCC Secretary who will be happy to advise you. Chris our Vicar will be retiring this year after more than 21 years please see the article on page 2.

Later this month (Saturday 21st) we welcome Occento Choir for their performance of the Messiah. Why not make this a date in your diary?

We wish you a happy and prosperous 2026 with health, wealth, happiness and freedom for all.

The season of Lent begins this month with Ash Wednesday falling on the 18th. Lent is a time for spiritual preparation, a time to come understand the wonder of Christ's Ministry and to anticipate his glorious resurrection after his terrible death on the cross.

"If apples were pears
And peaches were plums
And the rose had a
different name.
If tigers were bears
And fingers were thumbs
I'd love you just the same."
- Valentine's Day Songs
and Poems -



Chris our Vicar is retiring.

As you no doubt know Chris intends to retire from his ministry here in Penwortham. On Sunday, 1st February he announced that his last service will be on Pentecost Sunday 24th May. After that he will take 2 weeks leave and officially retire on 7th June. Chris came to us in January 2001 and since that time he has overseen many changes in our church, with the re-ordering between 2009 and 2011 being the biggest. Chris and Jaqui will move to pastures new although they will still live in the parish. We will miss his smiles, affability and wisdom and many will be grateful for his help in times of need. Please pray for Chris and Jacqui during this time of change and wish them well.

Churchyard

The work on the retaining wall is picking up pace now although it is much dependent on the weather. Hopefully, progress will speed up as Spring comes to us.

Car Parking at Church,

While the work continues regrettably there is no car parking available at church. Parishioners are requested to park on Hollinhurst Ave and walk through the ginnel to Church Avenue. Please do not park in the emergency turn around area near the Lych Gate as access to this will be needed for emergency vehicles.

Electoral Roll

The Church Electoral Roll is now open for new members and will close on 1st April. Existing members do not need to apply again as their inclusion is valid for 6 years. The next complete revision is not due until 2031.

THE CHURCH ELECTORAL ROLL

Having your say in the life of St Mary's – saying St Mary's is YOUR Church

WHAT IS THE CHURCH ELECTORAL ROLL?

- It is a list of people who want to have a say in how St Mary's Church is run
- It is the people on the Electoral Roll who vote for members of the Parochial Church Council (PCC) and Deanery Synod. The PCC is the responsible body for the smooth running of St Mary's.
- It is NOT the electoral roll for General and/or Local Council Elections

SHOULD I JOIN THE CHURCH ELECTORAL ROLL?

IF you would call St Mary's your church

AND YOU EITHER

live in St Mary's Parish (ask if unsure)

OR

live outside St Mary's Parish (ask if unsure) and have been regularly worshipping here for 6 months or more

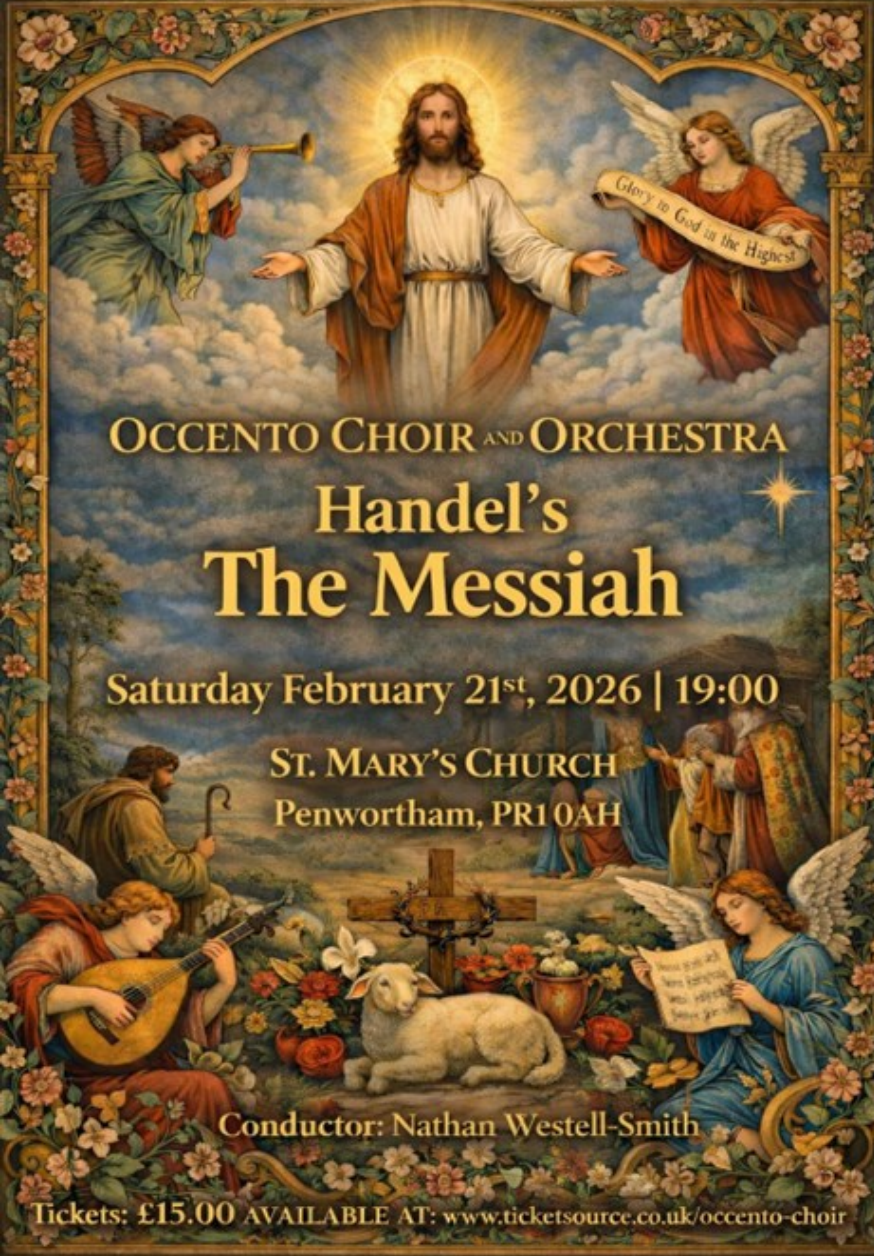
THEN YES you should join the Electoral Roll so long as you meet the eligibility requirements (see Electoral Roll application form).

WHAT DO I GET & HAVE TO DO WHEN I JOIN THE ELECTORAL ROLL?

- You can vote and speak at the Annual Parish Church Meeting (APCM)
- You can nominate & elect people to be on the PCC & Deanery Synod
- You can be a PCC or Deanery Synod member or a Sidesperson

THE ELECTORAL ROLL

Every 6 years a brand new roll has to be compiled. This was last done in 2025 so the next one will be in 2031. At that point everyone will need to reapply if they wish to remain on the roll. Only original documents (not electronic or copied) can be accepted.



OCCENTO CHOIR AND ORCHESTRA

**Handel's
The Messiah**

Saturday February 21st, 2026 | 19:00

ST. MARY'S CHURCH
Penwortham, PR10AH

Conductor: Nathan Westell-Smith

Tickets: £15.00 AVAILABLE AT: www.ticketsource.co.uk/occento-choir

Please help us

St Mary's Church has recently been given permission to renovate and extend the existing extension at the church

We have money to help pay for this work but that will not cover the whole cost of building and fitting the replacement extension

As part of the application process, we need to show that the whole community have an interest in us doing this work to help us to make the church a sustainable building, that will preserve and publicise important heritage in Penwortham and provide a resource for the community

As a result, we are making an application to try to get funds from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to cover the difference.





PENWORTHAM FOODBANK

PENWORTHAM COMMUNITY CENTRE
KINGSFOLD DRIVE PR1 9EQ

EVERY FRIDAY**
BETWEEN 0930 AND NOON

DONATIONS OF NON-PERISHABLE FOODS ARE URGENTLY REQUIRED

We thank all who have donated food in the past but we need further supplies: particularly pasta, pasta sauce, tins of soup, tins of baked beans and canned fruit

BRING YOUR DONATIONS TO CHURCH, OR TO THE FOODBANK ON A FRIDAY MORNING

OR

ARRANGE A BANK TRANSFER/STANDING ORDER* TO:

Account name: Churches Together in Penwortham
Sort Code: 30-96-85 Account No: 00415955 (Lloyds Bank)

OR

MAKE A DONATION (cheque or cash)*

*We are registered for Gift Aid so if you are able to make a financial donation and are a UK taxpayer then please let us have your contact details so we can arrange for a Gift Aid form to be sent to you.

**opening times vary over the Christmas period

Bishops from around the world join together to make pioneering visit to Kenya

Bishops from Dioceses around the world with links to The Church of England in Lancashire (Blackburn Diocese) will converge on Kenya this week for a gathering which is being supported by Christian Aid and is thought to be the first of its kind.



Rt Rev Philip North, Bishop of Blackburn, will be meeting with Bishop Joseph Aba, from Liwolo Diocese in South Sudan; Bishop Dintoe Letloenyane, from Free State Diocese in South Africa and Bishop Leo Paul of Multan Diocese in Pakistan. Blackburn Diocese is also linked with Braunschweig Diocese in Germany but they are currently in a vacancy period between Bishops. The gathering will be groundbreaking because, while it seeks to further strengthen relationships between Blackburn Diocese and its link Dioceses, it will also have the additional purpose of fostering stronger long-term collaboration between the partner Dioceses as well. The Bishops will be making the journey to Nairobi from profoundly different realities including one Diocese (Liwolo) where the people are living in exile due to ongoing war in their home country and another (Multan) where Christians are often persecuted.

They will pray and seek to build strong personal relationships over the week they will be together – January 28 to February 3 - and will also take part in a variety of activities. There will also be time to relax, including a visit to Nairobi Wildlife Park. The entire trip will be chronicled on social media via Bishop Philip's and Diocese of Blackburn's social media channels including [Bishop Philip on Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#); [Blackburn Diocese on Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#). The core of the visit will be two days (Friday and Saturday) coordinated by the international charity [Christian Aid](#). They will also be chronicling the visit on their own social channels. On Friday morning the bishops will have a roundtable with staff from the Christian Aid Africa Head Office in Nairobi.

Three new Priests are ordained to serve in Lancashire Church of England parishes

The ordinations of three new Priests to serve in parishes across Lancashire took place at the weekend.

The congregation for the Ordination Service, at St Bartholomew's in Colne, watched as Rev Tony Howarth, Rev Kaarina Leong and Rev Cathy Malins were newly-ordained to the Priesthood.



Tony will serve in the benefice of Colne; Kaarina in the parish of Lancaster Christ Church and Cathy in the parish of Lower Darwen St James in plurality with Over Darwen St James.

The three new Priests were ordained by the Bishop of Lancaster, Rt Rev Dr Jill Duff. The preacher at the service was Rev Tim Evans, Honorary Priest at Lancaster Priory, who led the ordinands' retreat beforehand at Whalley Abbey.

Speaking before the service, Bishop Jill said: "Priests carry a wide range of responsibilities in the Church of God as messengers, stewards, teachers of the faith, ministers of the sacraments and shepherds of the flock. It has been a delight to follow the journeys of Kaarina, Cathy and Tony as they have prepared for this moment and I am grateful to all those who have supported them on their way including families, friends and their training incumbents Carol, Rebecca and Alex."

Other visiting clergy included the Rt Rev Leah Vasey-Saunders, Bishop of Doncaster. Until recently, Bishop Leah was Vicar of Lancaster Priory where Kaarina's vocation was nurtured, so she attended to support alongside her husband Mark, and led the intercessions. Rt Rev Tony Porter who is an Honorary Assistant Bishop in the Diocese also attended the service.

Leaders of the Ukrainian church appeal for peace

As the fourth anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine approaches, Ukrainian church leaders have appealed for just measures to be put in place so that the invasion will end.

The country's Greek Catholic Primate, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk, said: "Let the modern creators of history protect human life from modern-day Herods - and let us pray that those who make fateful decisions will be inspired by the Holy Spirit not to start wars, but to stop them."

The Primate of the Ukrainian independent Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Epiphany (Dumenko), also compared Russia's rulers to King Herod, who had used "ostentatious, external religiosity" to conceal a "rejection of God's truth".

He went on to say that divine retribution was "inevitable" for those who continued to abduct Ukrainian children and rape Ukrainian women, and for Patriarch Kirill, who had "blessed war, crimes, and murders" from the pulpit.

People are coming to faith amidst the 'darkness' of crises around the world

So says several Church of England bishops. They believe that increasing numbers of people have been turning to the Christian faith.

The Bishop of Rochester, Jonathan Gibbs said: "Something is going on. Or rather, God Himself seems to be up to something – way beyond what we as Christians have been doing to share the message of the gospel with the people around us. "Humanly speaking, I believe this is happening because people have begun to realise that the things in which they had placed their hopes – things like ever-increasing prosperity or the ability of science and technology to solve all our problems – have started to crumble in the face of economic crises, global pandemics and climate change."

The Bishop of Gloucester, Rachel Treweek said: "As I have listened to the voices of children, young people and adults across this diocese; the voices in Westminster, and indeed in prisons; I believe there is a yearning for certainty amid the turbulence, anxiety and uncertainty, and the endless messaging of crises." The Bishop of Chichester, Martin Warner, speaks of joyful celebrations of baptisms and confirmations in his Diocese and new congregation members at Chichester Cathedral.

"A new generation attending Chichester Cathedral have shifted the atmosphere," he said. "Buggies now take their place alongside the Zimmer frames, to the delight of everyone."

Church's concern for Venezuela

The Episcopal Church in America is concerned about the people of Venezuela. Following the Trump administration's recent night-time swoop on the capital Caracas, and the capture of the country's President, the Episcopal Church says it fears for the people because of the inevitable instability that will follow the dramatic raid.

President Nicolas Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, are in New York facing charges on weapons and drug-trafficking.

The Episcopal Church's General Convention has a long-standing policy that: 'condemns in any nation the first use of armed force in the form of a preventive or pre-emptive strike that is aimed at disrupting a non-imminent, uncertain military threat.'

The Church goes on: "Even as we recognise that intervention in sovereign states can sometimes be necessary to prevent atrocities, we discourage the abuse of this norm to rationalise military actions in sovereign states for political ends. "We urge Congress to call for an investigation and accountability for this most recent unauthorised operation, as well as the related military actions carried out in recent months."

In the hours after the raid, President Trump announced that the US would run Venezuela, and that US oil firms would take over its oil industry.

The C of E agrees to spend £12.4 million on social and racial justice programmes

Back last summer, when the C of E announced its three-year national spending plans, the Triennium Funding Working Group (TFWG) included an allocation of £12 million for the areas of social and racial justice in the 2026-2028 triennium.

The precise allocation of that £12 million was a matter for the Archbishops' Council to determine. It has now agreed that £7 million will be spent on racial justice programmes over a three-year period, from 2026-2028. An additional £200,000 will also be carried forward from 2023-2025 and spent on racial justice.

A further £5 million will be spent in support of disability programmes.

This money will aim to help the C of E become more diverse and inclusive, dismantling barriers from worship, participation and leadership in the Church.

The droughts, heat and hunger threatening the Middle East and Afghanistan

World Vision has warned that millions of people in the Middle East and Afghanistan are suffering such severe drought, heat and hunger, that the aid agency fears we are reaching a 'tipping point'. In its recent report, *Children on the Brink*, World Vision reviews the current situation:

Iraq's catastrophic drought has displaced more than one million people in the region; Lebanon has its most severe drought on record, with more than 40 per cent of the people reliant on water trucking.

Afghanistan has an estimated 17.5 million people in food crisis, of which two million are in food emergency. In Syria, one million people are rated at 'food insecure'. Meanwhile, the West Bank is struggling with "severe restrictions on land and water access, damage to infrastructure, and hunger and malnutrition.

Considering all this, World Vision warns: "The Middle East and Afghanistan are approaching a critical tipping point as drought conditions intensify rapidly across the region. Rising temperatures, prolonged dry periods, and chronic water-management challenges are driving alarming levels of food and water insecurity. "Close to 50 million people in the Middle East and Afghanistan are experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity that threaten their wellbeing and survival." Alongside internal and cross-border displacement, the risk of "deepening tensions between communities" is rising, the report continues. World Vision's response in the region includes restoring watersheds, using earth and stone structures to increase water retention, recharge groundwater, and improve year-round availability. It is also promoting what it describes as 'climate-smart technologies', including drip irrigation, also called trickle irrigation; drought-tolerant seeds and livestock; and training in agroecological and conservation agriculture practices. However, the reports warns: "The scale and pace of drought demand unified action from national authorities, international donors, and local communities." Meanwhile, the recent World Meteorological Organisation's *State of the Climate in the Arab Region* report has found that a number of countries in the region had temperatures of above 50 C (122 F) in 2024. The agency's Secretary-General, Celeste Saulo, says these high temperatures are pushing society to the limits. "It is simply too hot to handle. Human health, ecosystems and economies can't cope with extended spells of more than 50 C."

Valentine's Day mystery

There are two confusing things about this day of romance and anonymous love-cards strewn with lace, cupids and ribbon: firstly, there seems to have been two different Valentines in the 4th century - one a priest martyred on the Flaminian Way, under the emperor Claudius, the other a bishop of Terni martyred at Rome. And neither seems to have had any clear connection with lovers or courting couples.

So why has Valentine become the patron saint of romantic love? By Chaucer's time the link was assumed to be because on these saints' day - 14th February - the birds are supposed to pair. Or perhaps the custom of seeking a partner on St Valentine's Day is a surviving scrap of the old Roman Lupercalia festival, which took place in the middle of February. One of the Roman gods honoured during this Festival was Pan, the god of nature. Another was Juno, the goddess of women and marriage. During the Lupercalia it was a popular custom for young men to draw the name of a young unmarried woman from a name-box. The two would then be partners or 'sweethearts' during the time of the celebrations. Even modern Valentine decorations bear an ancient symbol of love - Roman cupids with their bows and love-arrows.

There are no churches in England dedicated to Valentine, but since 1835 his relics have been claimed by the Carmelite church in Dublin.

Marriage requires falling in love
many times – always with the
same person.- *Anon*

Oh, if it be to choose and call thee
mine,
Love, thou art every day my
Valentine!

Thomas Hood

Editor: Canon Paul Hardingham continues his series on the books of the Bible.

What's the Big Idea? - An Introduction to the Old Testament: Isaiah

Isaiah is often regarded as the greatest of the prophets. His name means 'The Lord saves' and he began his 50-year ministry in 740 BC when King Uzziah died (6:1). Many scholars challenge the claim that Isaiah wrote the entire book, however there are striking verbal parallels between chapters 1–39 and 40–66.

Isaiah spoke during the stormy period marking the expansion of the Assyrian empire and the decline of Israel. The Assyrians destroyed the northern kingdom in 721. Judah was left to decide whether they would make alliances with other kingdoms or rely on God to protect them. Isaiah warns Judah that her sin would bring captivity in Babylon, which eventually took place in 586.

Isaiah sees the Messiah coming from the line of David. He speaks of a new temple being established (ch2); a child born with a new kingdom (ch9) and judging differently to other kings (ch11) as well as the nature of His suffering (ch53). The 'suffering servant' (chapters 42–53) also applies to Israel as a nation, who are called to be a 'light for the Gentiles' (42:6). Not surprisingly Jesus applies Isaiah's words to His own life and ministry. eg Is 61:1 quoted in Luke 4:18. Throughout his book Isaiah presents the full dimensions of God's judgment and salvation as 'the Holy One of Israel' (6:1), as well as the 'Sovereign Lord' far above all nations (40:15–24).

Isaiah looks forward to the promise of a new city of Zion (chs 60–66), in which the people offer praise to the Holy One of Israel. 'Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.' (65:17).

**No man ever said, at the end of his days,
'I have read my Bible too much, I have
thought of God too much, I have prayed
too much, I have been too careful with
my soul.' - J C Ryle**

Editor: Canon Paul Hardingham continues his seven-part series. This will conclude with the July issue.

The Seven Deadly Sins: Greed

'How much money is enough? Just a little bit more.' (John D Rockefeller).

In this article of on the Seven Deadly Sins, we are looking at greed. It is the overwhelming desire for *more and more* in our lives. In our consumer culture it can be hard to tell the difference between needs and wants - e.g. buying a new laptop or shoes for different occasions? We need to ask the question: *How much is enough?*

Jesus was approached by a man who wanted Him to settle a dispute about family inheritance. He said, *'Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.'* (Luke 12:15). Jesus goes on to tell the story of a rich farmer who builds bigger and bigger barns, but whose life is unexpectedly cut short by death. He concludes: *'This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich towards God.'* (21).

How do we overcome greed and become *'rich towards God'*? Paul writes: *'I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.'* (Philippians 4:13). Overcoming greed involves learning to be content in whatever situation we find ourselves, in need or plenty. Paul is not saying that there is anything wrong with having food, money or possessions, but these cannot be the primary source of our contentment. The secret of contentment is found in a transforming relationship with Jesus: *'I can do all this through Him who gives me strength.'* (13). He is the one who enables us to overcome greed and know riches.

***Contentment makes poor men rich;
discontent makes rich men
poor.'*** (Benjamin Franklin).

God in the Arts

Editor: Have you ever thought how an actual church building might provide a series of visual aids to spiritual meditation? This month the Revd Michael Burgess considers the font.

‘He gave us eyes to see them’ - The Church Font

Last month we stood at the doorway of a church in West Yorkshire. Open the door of that church or any church and the first thing to greet our eyes is the font. It marks the beginning of Christian life in the church. Many fonts have fine carvings of the seven sacraments that nourish the Christian. Others are octagonal in shape: a reminder of Noah and his seven family members saved in the ark from the Flood. This month’s font is a symbol of the ship sailing the seas of life. It is in St George’s Church, Anstey, in Hertfordshire. Around the font are carved mermen - mythical, pagan creatures that belong to a pre-Christian age which the newly baptised is called on to renounce. When it was carved in the 11th-12th centuries, baptism occurred within eight days of birth. Babies would be immersed three times into the waters of the font: dying to the old life symbolised by the mermen, and rising to new life, to be clothed in a white robe and given a lighted candle as a guide through life. They would then grow up in the church, moving from that west end through the upturned boat of the nave to the altar at the east end. That movement is a sign of the pilgrimage we are all called to make.

Like a journey on the seas of this world, we may sail through tranquil waters and peaceful days. There may be times when the skies are cloudy and the waters stormy. Martin Luther, when he was faced by struggles like that in his life, would say the words ‘I am baptised’ to strengthen and reassure himself. ‘I am baptised’ we can say as we travel in faith, knowing that there is always a light to guide and a goal that is sure and eternal.



The famous mermen font at St George's Church, Anstey, by Michael Garlick, via Wikimedia Commons'

God in the Sciences

This series is written by Dr Ruth M. Bancewicz, who is Church Engagement Director at The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion in Cambridge. Ruth writes on the positive relationship between Science and Christian faith.

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

Every person who ever lived was once a sperm and an egg. Those two cells fused together, and in nine months they turned into a living, breathing, human being. Each of us emerged from this same embryonic development process, which is highly complex and organised, but variable enough to turn out a unique individual every time.

If you like order – such as neat piles of stationery, or tidy colour-coded files – you will enjoy this story. One of the most important stages of an embryo's development is when each section of the body, from head to rump, takes on its identity. Each part is told what shape to take, and which limbs or internal organs to grow: legs or arms, lungs or kidneys, and so on.

The most beautiful part of this body-patterning process is that it brings the dimensions of time and space together in such a neat way. The DNA instructions for the procedure, known as genes, are organised in the order in which they are needed during development *which is also* the order in which they appear on the body. No other sets of genes are known to be arranged in such a tidy pattern.

So, as the embryo develops, the tissues near the head end activate the first sets of genes. Those active genes then make all the proteins needed for that part of the body to grow and develop in the right way. The tissues just below the head then switch on the second set of genes, and so on. A wave of activation passes down the embryo, specifying each section of the trunk in turn.

The Wisconsin-based developmental biologist Jeff Hardin often quotes Psalm 139 to express the wonder of embryonic development. The Psalmist did not understand how this process happened, but he knew that it was a marvellous thing. *“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb...your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.”*

Bible Bite

A short story from the Bible

It can be read in the Bible in
1 Samuel chapter 1

In the time before there were kings in Israel, there lived a rich man, Elkanah, and his two wives, Hannah and Peninnah.

Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.



Each year they travelled to Shiloh to worship God.



After the worship, they feasted.



Elkanah always gave Hannah a special portion of food to show he loved her.



But Hannah was too sad to eat. She left the meal and went to pray.



She prayed silently.

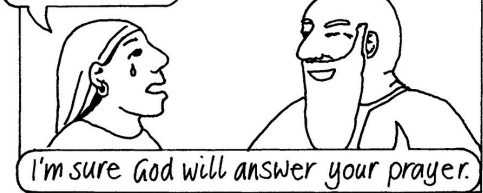


Please give me a son. If You do, he will serve You all his life.

Eli the priest saw Hannah's silent weeping and praying and thought she was drunk.



I'm not drunk! I was just pouring out how I feel to God.



I'm sure God will answer your prayer.

Back home, Hannah had a son, and she named him Samuel.



She stayed at home with him when the rest of the family went to Shiloh.

When Samuel was old enough, Hannah and Elkanah took him to Shiloh to live there and serve God.



Miscellaneous

All in the month of February

It was:

300 years ago, on 20th Feb 1726 that William Prescott, an American colonel in American Revolutionary War was born. Famous for giving the order: "Don't fire until you see the whites of their eyes."

200 years ago, on 4th Feb 1826 that James Fenimore Cooper's historical romance novel *The Last of the Mohicans* was published.

175 years ago, on 1st Feb 1851 that novelist Mary Shelley died, aged 53. Best known for her Gothic novel *Frankenstein*.

125 years ago, on 2nd Feb 1901 that the funeral of Queen Victoria took place.

80 years ago, on 11th Feb 1946, that the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament was published. It was the first major English-language update of the Bible since the King James version was published in 1611.

Also 80 years ago, on 19th Feb 1946 that mathematician and cryptanalyst Alan Turing presented a detailed paper for the national Physical Laboratory that gave the first reasonably complete design of a stored-programme computer.

70 years ago, on 11th Feb 1956 that two members of the Cambridge spy ring, British diplomats Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean, announced that they had defected to the Soviet Union. They had both vanished in mysterious circumstances in 1951.

50 years ago, on 11th Feb 1976 that John Curry won Britain's first-ever Olympic gold medal in figure skating.

Also 50 years ago, on 23rd Feb 1976 that artist the L S Lowry died. Known for his bleak industrial landscapes of north-west England, populated with matchstick men.

40 years ago, on 12th Feb 1986 that the Treaty of Canterbury was signed by Britain and France. It was the agreement to construct the Channel Tunnel linking the two countries. The tunnel opened in 1994.

30 years ago, on 1st Feb 1996 that US President Bill Clinton met Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams at the White House, to discuss the Northern Ireland Peace Process.

25 years ago, on 12th Feb 2001 that the Human Genome Project announced the publication of the first complete working draft of the human genome.

20 years ago, on 18th Feb 2006 that the Rolling Stones played the world's largest free rock concert on Copacabana beach, Rio de Janeiro. An estimated 2 million people attended.

Miscellaneous

4th anniversary of the Russia-Ukraine war

As 24th February approaches, the statistics are grim for the fourth anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Massive displacement: 6.9 million refugees have fled Ukraine, with a further 3.7 million internally displaced.

Significant casualties: Russia has hit one million casualties in all, including 250,000 soldiers killed. Ukraine has had about 53,000 casualties, including about 15,000 deaths.

Immense destruction of Ukraine's infrastructure, medical facilities and educational facilities.

Impact: Russia now occupies about 20% of Ukraine, including Crimea. Worldwide, a weakened global economy, threatened food security, and documented war crimes, including chemical weapons used by Russia.

Expense: Billions of dollars have been given in aid to Ukraine. (About \$175bn from the US, and \$197bn from EU since 2022.)

The future is unclear, but here are some memorable quotes of two leading Ukrainians:

At the start of the war, when offered evacuation from Kyiv by the U.S. government, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy famously stated, "I need ammunition, not a ride".

The following day, on 25th February he emphasised Ukraine's determination, stating: "We will be defending our country, because our weapon is truth, and our truth is that this is our land, our country, our children, and we will defend all of this".

The head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk focuses on themes of resilience, freedom, and hope. "Ukraine is wounded, but it is not defeated! Ukraine is exhausted, but it is standing and will remain standing! Believe me, no one thinks of giving up."

A recurring theme in Zelenskyy's speeches is that "Life will win over death, and the light will win over darkness".

When you were born, you cried and the world rejoiced. Live your life so when you die, the world cries and you rejoice. - Native American saying

Editor: by Tim Lenton

Mary Shelley and Frankenstein

It was 175 years ago, on 1st February 1851, that the novelist Mary Shelley died. She is best known for her Gothic novel *Frankenstein*.

Her parents were the influential philosophers William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, a strong advocate of women's rights who died 11 days after Mary's birth from complications. The future Mary Shelley was herself fascinated by books and philosophy but spent two long, enjoyable spells "for her health" with the Baxters, a dissenting family who lived near Dundee.

She started on the novel *Frankenstein* – not the name of the eight-foot, love-lorn 'Christian' monster but of the scientist who created him – at the age of 18 after a conversation about ghosts with her husband, the atheist Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, and others. After her book was published anonymously, many suspected that her husband had written it or was co-author, but this was not the case: he may have done some light editing.

Mary, a baptised Anglican who came to despair and doubt, wrote several other books, but her life was tragic on many levels. Her husband had affairs, and they mixed in circles where that was encouraged. A four-year period in Italy with Byron and others, initially welcomed by Mary, became especially hard for her to endure. According to him, she had described Naples as "a paradise inhabited by devils".

Three of her four children died at a very young age; only the fourth, Percy Florence, reached adulthood. And her husband died, aged only 29, in a mysterious sailing accident in 1822 in The Gulf of Spezia near Genoa.

Her last book, however, was a travel narrative about rambles in Germany and Italy which she had undertaken with her son Percy in the early 1840s. She died aged 53, perhaps of a brain tumour or a stroke. She was buried at St Peter's Church in Bournemouth.

Editor: by Tim Lenton.

The funeral of Queen Victoria

Exactly 125 years ago, on 2nd February 1901, the funeral of Queen Victoria took place.

She had died at the age of 81 on 22 January, having ruled for nearly 64 years, and her death took her family, courtiers and subjects by surprise in difficult times. The Boer war was still in progress, and the previous year the Prince of Wales had been shot at in Belgium, by a boy who was protesting against the war.

Her third adult child – Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh – had just died, another was near death, and she herself had been confined to a wheelchair, almost blind and often confused. She died at the remote Osborne House on the Isle of Wight, and when it happened there was no-one alive who could remember how to bury a monarch.

Victoria had asked for a full military state funeral, and there were secret instructions concerning mementoes of her personal servant, John Brown. The official service in St George's Chapel was chaotic because of timing errors, but it was followed by an emotional ceremony for the family on 4th February, in the mausoleum the queen had built for her husband at Frogmore, adjoining Windsor Castle, where the Queen was laid to rest beside her much-loved Prince Albert.

The total cost was £35,500 (£4.5 million). Victoria had outlived all the members of her Privy Council alive in 1837; all the members who had sat in the House of Commons at that time; and all nine of her bridesmaids.

What has been described as the godly domesticity of the Victorian era appealed to a mainly Protestant public, centring more on morals than on radical evangelicalism and effective prayer. One historian noted the transformation in the general British attitude from “aggressive, brutal, rowdy, outspoken, riotous, cruel and bloodthirsty” to “inhibited, polite, orderly, tender-minded, prudish and hypocritical”.

Editor: by Tim Lenton. You could make this story local by asking if any of your readers are fans of Lowry.

Remembering the work of L S Lowry

Fifty years ago, on 23rd February 1976, the artist L S Lowry died of pneumonia. He was known primarily for his bleak industrial landscapes of north-west England, populated with matchstick men, but he also painted original and striking seascapes and impressive portraits.

Laurence Stephen Lowry was born on 1st November 1887 in Stretford. His father worked for an estate agent and his mother was an organist, playing at the local church. Laurence went to Sunday school, but as life later turned difficult, his faith became shadowy. After leaving school he became a rent collector for the Pall Mall Property Company and stayed there until his retirement in 1952. This led to some dismissing him as a 'Sunday painter'.

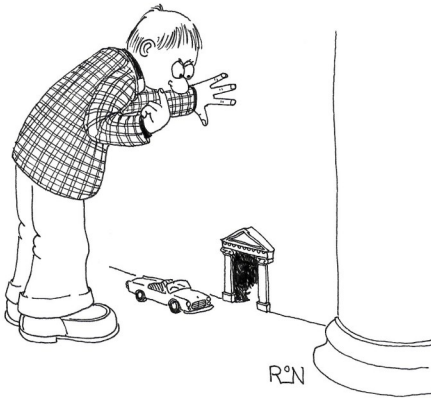
Lowry's life was restricted by his family debts and his mother, for whom he took responsibility after his father died. He tried hard to please her, but she showed no appreciation for the quality of his art, looking instead for a middle-class respectable life. He became a solitary figure and never married.

Lowry remains popular as an artist, with many imitators, but he never formally taught or gathered a group of followers around him. He holds the record for rejecting British honours—five, including a knighthood (1968). A collection of his work is on display in The Lowry, an impressive purpose-built art gallery on Salford Quays.

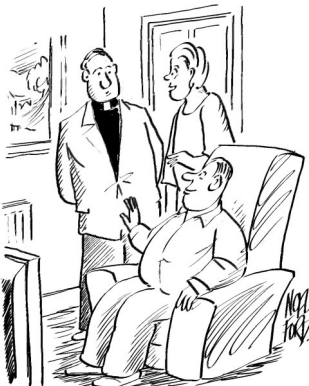
During his life he made about 1,000 paintings and over 8,000 drawings. His works often sell for millions of pounds. Buried in Manchester next to his parents, he left an estate valued at £298,459, plus artwork, to Carol Ann Lowry (no relation), whose family he befriended when she was 13, after she asked for help with her own development as an artist.



One of my churchwardens is a stickler for 'Health and Safety'...



...and yet the Church Mice still put it about that they were poor



Henry is making a real effort for Lent – he's giving up the remote control and walking to the TV

Disturb us, Lord

Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves,
When our dreams have come true
Because we have dreamed too little,
When we arrived safely
Because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when
With the abundance of things we possess
We have lost our thirst
For the waters of life;
Having fallen in love with life,
We have ceased to dream of eternity
And in our efforts to build a new earth,
We have allowed our vision
Of the new Heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly,
To venture on wider seas
Where storms will show your mastery;
Where losing sight of land,
We shall find the stars.
We ask You to push back
The horizons of our hopes;
And to push into the future
In strength, courage, hope, and love.

Attributed to Sir Francis Drake, 16th Century





It hurts

A little girl told her mother one day before lunch that her stomach was hurting. Her mother replied: "That's because it's empty, you have to put something into it!"

That evening the minister and his wife came for dinner. The minister looked a bit rough and explained that his head was hurting him. The little girl gave him a sweet smile and said encouragingly: "That's because it's empty, you have to put something into it!"

Post-Valentine

A man confided to his friend that he and his wife had had a serious argument the night before. "It finally ended," he said, "when she came crawling to me on her hands and knees."

"What did she say?" asked the friend, amazed.

The husband replied, "She said, 'Come out from under that bed, you coward!'"

After Eden

Adam was out walking with his sons Cain and Abel. As they passed by the ruins of the Garden of Eden, one of the boys asked, "Father, what's that place?"

Adam replied, "Boys, that's where your mother ate us out of house and home."

God made us

A little girl sitting on her grandfather's lap reached up to touch his wrinkled cheek. "Grandpa, did God make you?"

"Yes, sweetheart," he answered, "God made me a long time ago."

"Oh," she paused. "Grandpa, did God make me too?" Her grandfather assured her that He had. Feeling his wrinkled cheek again, she observed, "God's getting better at it, isn't He?"

Hymns for Professionals

Dentist - Crown Him with many crowns

Contractors - The Church's one foundation

Obstetricians - Come labour on

Golfers - There is a green hill far away

Politicians - Standing on the promises

Librarians - Let all mortal flesh keep silent



The Rules of Marriage

Here are the real-life answers from a group of children:

Question: How do you decide who to marry?

You got to find somebody who likes the same stuff. Like, if you like sports, she should like it that you like sports, and she should keep the chips and dip coming. - Alan, age 10

No person really decides before they grow up who they're going to marry. God decides it all way before, and you get to find out later who you're stuck with. - Kirsten, age 10

Question: What is the right age to get married?

23 is the best age because you know the person FOREVER by then. - Camille, age 10

No age is good to get married at. You got to be a fool to get married. - Freddie, age 6 (very wise for his age)

Question: How can a stranger tell if two people are married?

You might have to guess, based on whether they seem to be yelling at the same kids.

- Derrick, age 8

Question: What do you think your Mum and Dad have in common?

Both don't want any more kids. -Lori, age 8

Question: What do most people do on a date?

Dates are for having fun, and people should use them to get to know each other. Even boys have something to say if you listen long enough. - Lynnette, age 8

On the first date, they just tell each other lies and that usually gets them interested enough to go for a second date. - Martin, age 10

Question: What would you do on a first date that was turning sour?

I'd run home and play dead. The next day I would call all the newspapers and make sure they wrote about me in all the dead columns. - Craig, age 9

Question: When is it okay to kiss someone?

When they're rich. - Pam, age 7

The law says you have to be eighteen, so I wouldn't want to mess with that. - Curt, age 7

The rule goes like this: If you kiss someone, then you should marry them and have kids with them. It's the right thing to do. - Howard, age 8

Picture Parable

The Big Bash!



JESUS OFTEN TOLD STORIES WITH HIDDEN MEANINGS



ONE STORY WAS ABOUT A RICH MAN WHO DECIDED TO HAVE A PARTY

HE SENT OUT LOTS OF INVITATIONS

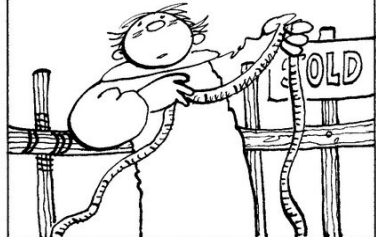


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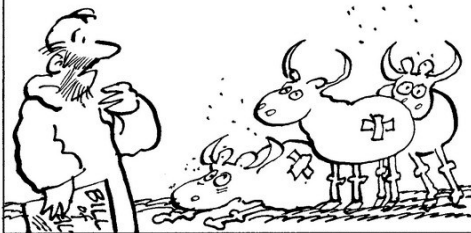


BUT PEOPLE STARTED MAKING EXCUSES

ONE MAN SAID HE HAD BOUGHT A FIELD, BUT NEEDED TO MEASURE IT



ANOTHER MAN SAID HE NEEDED TO TEST DRIVE THE OXEN HE HAS JUST PAID FOR



ANOTHER MAN SAID HE HAD JUST GOT MARRIED - AND HIS WIFE WOULDN'T LET HIM OUT!

SO THE RICH MAN INVITED ALL THE POOR AND NEEDY INSTEAD.



YES - I CAN COME TO YOUR PARTY

THE PARABLE MEANS WE SHOULDN'T MAKE EXCUSES FOR NOT FOLLOWING JESUS.