

Sharing the invitation

Revd Sarah Sanderson, Pioneer Associate Vicar at St James, Yeovil, shares some of the things planned for Christmas and Advent.



Celebrating together with our communities at Christmas

How will you be sharing the joy of Christmas with your community?

I've got both a church role and a pioneering one. In church, we'll have our carol and Christmas Eve services, plus a Christingle at the local garden centre which is joyful, and a lovely way to share the story of Jesus. We're running a 'camel hunt' through Advent. Families will find camels with words that build the Christmas message. It's fun, creative, and gets people talking about Jesus.

In my pioneering role on new housing estate we'll go into school to make Christingles and share the story in assembly. Our toddler group will have a Christmas sing-along nativity, and our youth group will celebrate with a party too.

Why is important to share the Christmas story in different places?

Some people feel daunted about coming into a church. It can feel less

daunting to go to something that's clearly Christmassy, but not quite as formal as church. It's a great opportunity to open up the invitation. It is sharing with people that there's so much more to the Christian faith than just the Christmas season itself. We can invite people to understand they are welcome not only within church but to God himself.

How will you explore the joy of Christmas with young people?

A lot of young people haven't really heard the Christmas story in the way we might assume. So it's a great opportunity to share it afresh. With the toddlers, I do it through songs they already know, just changing the words slightly so they can learn the Christmas story that way. The Christmas story and the Christian faith are becoming less well known. We've got a new generation who don't know the Bible stories, they don't know who Jesus is. That gives us an amazing opportunity - a clean slate - where we can come in and say, "Hey, there's this person, Jesus and this is who he is." Which is a really exciting place to start from.

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Living and telling the story of Jesus

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From the Church of England Diocese of Bath and Wells ☩ December 2025

Breaking news - no room at the inn!

The angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see - I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people ...' Luke 2.10-11

All our churches will be sharing the good news of great joy, with their communities at Christmas - the news of Jesus' birth as Emmanuel (God With Us). But how would it look if it that story were breaking news today?

In Haywood Village, Weston Super Mare they will be exploring that idea. Instead of a traditional nativity play, the church's youth group will take centre stage as television reporters, anchors and eyewitnesses to the first Christmas. The young people will "go live" from Bethlehem, interviewing Mary and Joseph, shepherds, angels, and bystanders, even the 'innkeeper' at the local pub, The Landing Light. For example, they may cut from the news programme to a bystander who says, "I was just walking home when I saw a group of shepherds rushing to an old stable. Everyone's talking about the baby born there. They say He's special maybe even the one we've been waiting for."



The local pub, the Landing Light, will be used as the Inn for Mary and Joseph

The youth group were inspired to write and develop the idea after they had a go at recreating the Fiona Mayne, Pioneer Minister and leader of Haywood Village Church explains, "When the young people imagine themselves in the story, they connect with it in a real way. And when they start ask questions such as, 'How did you feel when you heard the angels?', they can imagine the joy of the first Christmas. Suddenly, it's not just a story, it begins to come alive." Haywood Village Church doesn't yet have a building so all this will take place in the familiar surroundings of the community room at the local school. Fiona says, "I hope that this angle on the Christmas story will help people connect with it and see that it still matters and will get people involved in the telling of the story."

News in brief

Gold!

St Michael's Church, Flax Bourton, has been awarded Bath and Wells first Gold Eco Church Award by A Rocha UK. Assessors praised the church's creativity and genuine passion for caring for creation. Revd James Harris, Rector, said, "This award celebrates how our community is living out the Gospel so that all may flourish." Eco Church Lead, Adrienne Hughes, added, "We've discovered just how much joy there is in caring for Creation. We hope our story inspires others."



Demonstrator Grant

Taunton Minster has been awarded £18,000 as part of a Demonstrator Grant to help it move towards becoming a net zero carbon church. The funding is part of the Church of England's national programme to help churches cut their energy use and move away from fossil fuels.

Great start to the school year

It's been an inspiring start to the academic year for Bath and Wells' 182 church schools. Since September, 3,000 joined Bishop Michael for online Collective Worship, 15 new leaders joined the Induction and Commissioning service, and 7 joined the first Aspiring Leaders event in Taunton. There were forums for Foundation Governors, clerks and the Church Secondary School network launched. Meanwhile, St Benedict's Junior School, Glastonbury welcomed our new Bishop of Taunton designate, Fiona Gibson.



The project will focus on identifying a suitable retrofit heating and energy system for the main church building. The Minster now has the opportunity to share what is learned with other churches so they can be encouraged and supported on their own path to net zero.

Find out more on these and other stories at bathandwells.org.uk/news

Tidings of great joy

By Michael Beasley, Bishop of Bath and Wells

We fear that we live in a world of increasing polarisation. Conflicts between and within nations play their part. The amplification of division and hostility by social media algorithms doesn't help. Culture wars exacerbate matters further. Sometimes it feels like common ground is disappearing from underneath our feet like a sandbar being overwhelmed by the tide. In such a climate, it's good to return to the message that heralded the arrival of Jesus. 'I bring you tidings of great joy which shall be for all people' says that angel who announces the saviour's birth (Luke 2:10). Jesus's story quickly includes all types and sorts of humanity. From local shepherds to exotic visitors from afar. I wonder what the conversation was like as they all crammed into the stable to see the newborn child?

Jesus's story quickly shows that not only is he for all people but that he needs all people. His family must have needed assistance when they fled as refugees to Egypt. Jesus must have needed help when his parents left him behind on a family outing to Jerusalem aged twelve. Jesus was constantly calling on and engaging with others as he went about his

teaching and ministry.

What might counter the polarisation of our day? Amongst our greatest resource is to seek out the emotion that accompanied the news of the saviour's birth – joy. When we encounter joy – from that cup winning goal to the marriage of much loved friends – such moments are never the time for division and enmity. We're all far too busy shouting and hugging each other! The invitation of Christmas is to experience such joy afresh. Often, we see joy most obviously in children's experience of the season. Might we seek it for ourselves too? For joy breaks down divisions, overcomes barriers, reminds us that we are one. 'I bring you tidings of great joy which shall be for all people' says the angel. A very merry and joyful Christmas to you all.

Bishop Michael

