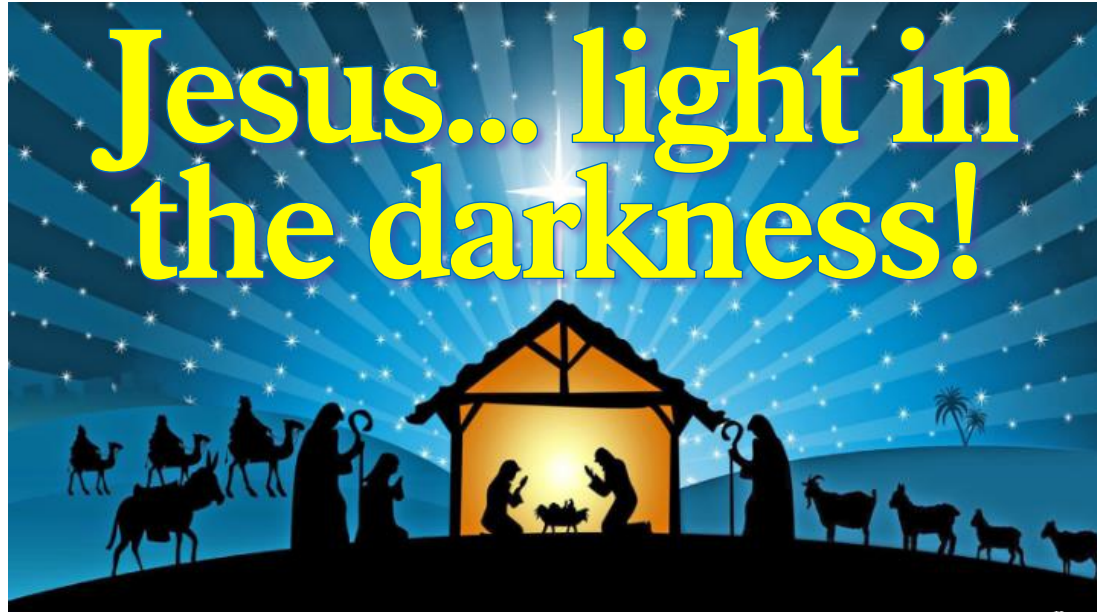


Open Space

SAINT STEPHENS SOUNDWELL

DECEMBER 2022



As a child, I never thought much about the dark. Well, that's not strictly true. I thought a lot about how scary it was, how much of it there was, I wondered whether the darkness hid monsters in it, or whether the dark was a monster in itself.

But I never thought much about what darkness was, how it behaved, what happened to it when my parents came to switch the lights back on.

There is something fascinating about darkness, in part because it creates pockets of mystery. In true darkness I have no idea what is around me, my surroundings, my company, even my own person become unknown to me for a moment.

Perhaps that's why we find it so scary.

But for all the terror of monsters, or things that might sneak up on us, when I think about it, darkness is not very powerful. No matter how deep the darkness, it is never able to extinguish a light.

There was never any struggle, when my light went back on because then, the darkness lost its hold on me.

Even a single flickering flame doesn't falter because of the darkness around it.

In fact, the only power darkness has, is in the space granted it by an absence of light.

When the light comes, the darkness retreats. We can see things as they actually are. When the light comes, the darkness is defeated.

This is a time of year when everything seems against us: the days are too short for our to-do lists, it feels as if it's been raining for months.

We look around us and we see the ravages of climate change, the fear we feel surrounding the war in Ukraine, and the sense of divisiveness that recent politics has wrought in our society. This year the winter seems darker than ever.

I think that it's no coincidence that Christmas has become such a focal point in the midst of winter.

Christmas represents the birth of our hope as Christians: the light shining in the darkness.

It's a message we often desperately need to hear.

The darkness can feel overwhelming, can exacerbate our hurts and fears until we no longer feel able to tell if we are running from monsters or frightened of shadows.

This time of year, is hard. Christmas is hard when you feel dissociated from the joy and celebration.

But because Christmas is not all about feeling cheerful, or pretending we're not hurt or afraid, I think that's okay.

Continued on page 2>

Open Space

DECEMBER 2022



Mission Partners with St Stephens:

Beloved

Bristol City Centre Soup Run

Bristol Schools Connection

Bristol/Uganda Link

Christian Aid

Community of the Sisters of the Church

Emmaus

Fair Trade

One25 Project

The Bristol Noise

St Stephens

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@SoundwellChurch

CHARITY NUMBER
1131503



Readings & Collects

FOR DECEMBER 2022

FOR THOSE OF US who are not able to attend services or who wish to use the Sunday readings and Collect Prayer to worship at home, here they are:

SUNDAY 04 DECEMBER 2nd Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 11:1–10; Psalm 72:1–7, 18, 19
Romans 15:4–13; Matthew 3:1–12;
ALMIGHTY GOD, purify our hearts and minds, that when your Son Jesus Christ comes again as judge and saviour we may be ready to receive him, who is our Lord and our God. Amen.

SUNDAY 11 DECEMBER 3rd Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 35:1–10; Psalm 146:4–10
James 5:7–10; Matthew 11:2–11;
GOD for whom we watch AND wait, you sent John the Baptist to prepare the way of your Son: give us courage to speak the truth, to hunger for justice, and to suffer for the cause of right, with Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY 18 DECEMBER 4th Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 7:10–16; Psalm 80:1–8, 18–20
Romans 1:1–7; Matthew 1:18–25;
ETERNAL GOD, as Mary waited for the birth of your Son, so we wait for his coming in glory; bring us through the birth pangs of this present age to see, with her, our great salvation in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SUNDAY 25 DECEMBER Christmas Day

Isaiah 52:7–10; Psalm 98
Hebrews 1:1–4 [5–12] John 1:1–14
LORD JESUS CHRIST, your birth at Bethlehem draws us to kneel in wonder at heaven touching earth: accept our heartfelt praise as we worship you, our Saviour and our eternal God. Amen

Jesus... light in the darkness! *(Continued from page 1)*

Christmas is about hope, about recognising that even the deepest darkness is no longer impenetrable because the light has come.

Jesus the Light of the world is with us and the darkness will be quenched. We can say, even when we don't feel it, that hope has come to us.

Christ comes to meet us, not 'in the form of God', but as one of us; he comes, not as a king in a palace, but as a baby in a manger... poor, fragile, human. Human life now woven into God's life.

For us, preparing to meet Christ afresh this Christmas, he comes to us in the depth of winter, a light that shines amidst the darkness. A beacon of hope for our salvation. A light to lighten the darkness in which we live.



The special thing about hope is that it points beyond the 'now'. Hope does not claim that everything's fine now, that we have nothing to worry about. Hope points us to the future, a better future than the present we experience. Something which is coming to change our present pain. And yet hope changes our relationship with the struggles we are facing – present tense – completely.

A person with hope can endure almost infinitely more than a person without it. Something is changed when we discover that we have hope, something in us is transformed.



The promise of Christmas is very much like that: a reminder that the

world was changed forever by the birth of this little child.

All things will be made new, salvation has been set in motion, but it's not complete yet.

The promise of Christmas is still working itself out in the hearts of each of us. The light that shines in the darkness has come, the darkness is being banished, but the work is not yet over. Begun but not finished. In process, in motion.

We celebrate Christmas every year, not just to remember something that happened but to re-establish it in our hearts and minds, this thing which is still happening.

Darkness has no power to extinguish even the faintest of lights, but we can fan a single flame into a roaring fire. We can spread this light by embracing it, by becoming lights ourselves: the lights of the world.

Christ is the light that shines in the darkness, the true light that has come to enlighten all people.

We can approach it, embrace it, set ourselves alight with it, and shine hope into the lives of anyone who is seeking it. That is what Christmas calls us to: to embody the hope we have in Christ, that others might find it for themselves.



And when we light candles this Christmas or switch on fairy lights, this is the light we should remember... THE LIGHT which came as a tiny baby is the light of the world, the light which came to give us hope. He, Jesus, is the shining beacon of our salvation in whose light the darkness around us loses its grip. In Him, all these things which hurt and haunt us are being made new.

So I wish you a Happy Christmas, and may it be blessed with light and hope. **Lisa xx**

Dawn & Thomas are Confirmed!

CONGRATULATIONS are in order from us all of us at St Stephens, to Dawn and Thomas on the occasion of their confirmation.

IT WAS also great to see so many from St Stephens in attendance at the Service of Confirmation to support Dawn and Thomas as they joined with 21 other candidates from various other churches across our Deanery, on the evening of Monday 14th November.

We celebrated with much joy and enthusiasm and lots of smiles at the warm and cosy Holy Trinity Church in Bradley Stoke.

Bishop Viv presided and each of those confirmed processed out with a lit candle, following these words from +Viv:

“GOD has delivered you from the dominion of darkness and has given us a place with the saints in light.



You have received the light of Christ, walk in this light all the days of your life.”

And we all responded:
“Shine as a light in the world to the glory of God the Father.”



So please continue to pray for Dawn and Thomas and may these words be true, not just for both of them, but also for each of us. Amen.

Prayer Ministry in Church

SADLY, Covid pressed the pause button on gathering together with others to pray for particular needs during our services but we hope to begin this again in the New Year.

BUT what is at the heart of prayer ministry? *What is it all about?*

Prayer ministry is an opportunity to encounter the power, truth and love of God as someone prays with you, discerning and passing on what they sense God has for you. This could be healing, forgiveness, blessing, encouragement, freedom or any number of other things.

What you pray with the ‘prayer ministers’ will always be held in confidence, and is therefore kept just between those praying at that time and God.

There will be no ‘checking up’ on you afterwards, unless you specifically request it.

The purpose of the prayer ministry team is to actively encourage and promote prayer within the life of the church. By being open and responsive to the working of the Holy Spirit, we pray that God's love, guidance and healing power would be released for the benefit of His people and to Jesus' glory.

If you would like to be part of the prayer ministry team, then please do speak with me, Lisa, at any time. If you'd like to be involved as we start afresh in 2023, please do have that chat before Christmas.

Thank you & bless you as you ponder if this is right for you.

LISA x

CHRISTMAS FAYRE

St Stephen's Church, Soundwell

**Sat 3rd
December
2.00 - 4.00 pm**

Bric-a-Brac Refreshments Books
Raffles Cakes Games

Mulled Wine Jesus ... Light in the Darkness



Yo ho ho!
Soon will be that time again!

COME ALONG—
and bring a friend for some fun,
food, drinks, games, a bargain and
an enjoyable time.

Warm Space initiative

FROM stories in the news, we will all be very aware that many people are having difficulty making ends meet.

MANY are having to make the unimaginable choice between eating and heating.

These are hard times, and as the cold weather approaches, many will be struggling.

There appears to be a growing movement for those who can, to offer a 'warm space'.

These are places to hang out for a while, receive a friendly welcome and have a hot drink or two.

At a meeting of our PCC on the 8th November, we all agreed that we at St Stephens could offer such a space for our own community.

So, we are proposing opening up the Church Room each Tuesday morning, starting on 10th January 2023 from 9am until noon, for the first few months of the new year.

To do this we will need to build a small team of people who will be around for the morning to set up, do the refreshments and generally make people welcome.

Hopefully there will be enough of us to be able to sort out some form of rota so that any commitment is not too onerous.

Would you be able or like to be part of this initiative and help to make a difference in our community?

If so, please do telephone Sandy on 0117 967 2621 for a chat about how you might be involved.

Your help would be very much appreciated. Thank you.

Sandy Cooper

THE WORK OF THE COMMUNITY OF THE SISTERS OF THE CHURCH:

Giving at Christmas...

“TO help people in times of need, you give them something to eat...”

IN THE early 1990's four Sisters from our Community moved to Ashley Road and they have had a presence there ever since.

As part of their lives of prayer and active service, Sisters began giving out small food parcels to about 12 people who came for food each week.

However, this soon grew and for many years now they expect to see around 250–300 people a week in all types of need.

Callers come not only for food but also companionship.

Poverty in the UK is a disturbing reality seen every day, and examples abound all around us, but especially now, given the current economic times of hardship and the cost of living.

In the Gospel of John 6:1–14 Jesus took a boy's offering of 'five small barley loaves and two small fish' and fed the five thousand.

Together with their wonderful volunteers, the Sisters have become the channels of countless people's kind and generous donations which is why they have named their ministry 'The Five Loaves and Two Fishes Project'.

Here at St Stephens we support their efforts at important times of the year, such as at Easter, Harvest and Christmas with Gift Services.

So on Sunday 4th December at 10am we have a **Christmas Gift Service** as part of our commitment of help. *(See details on page 5).*

Special gift envelopes are available for monetary donations and are usually found at the rear of church for you to use.



These financial gifts go towards assisting the Sisters of the Church in Bristol give food and Christmas cheer to some of the poorest families in our city.

GIVING ALL YEAR ROUND:

Also – you might like to donate freely at other times of the year and to do so there are several ways:

- For example, there is a collection point in church to the side of the main entrance in which you can place items they require.
- Alternatively you can make one off or regular online donations:
- By BACS, payable to: Sisters of the Church, Sort code 08-92-99, Account number 65075960
- Via Charities Aid Foundation, charity number is 200240, please specify that the donation is for the Sister's 'Bristol House'
- By cheque: payable to 'Sisters of the Church'.

Send to: Sisters of the Church, 82 Ashley Road, Bristol BS6 5NT

Thank you – and a happy and blessed Christmas to you all!

Christmas Cards

WE HAVE Christmas Cards on sale this year, so that you don't have to go hunting the shops for the right cards to give your family and friends – we have them right here for you!

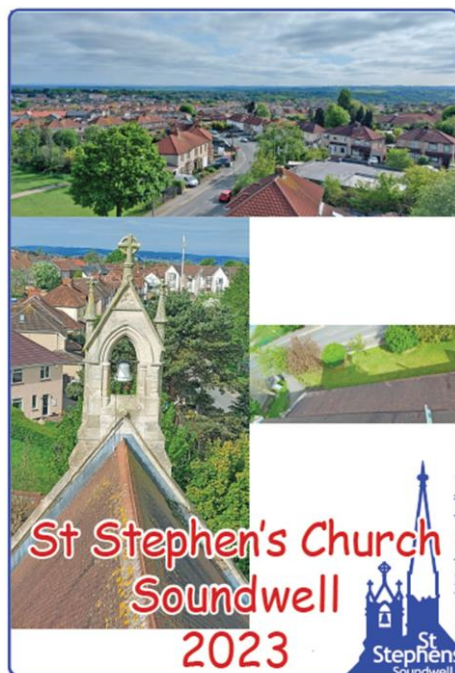
The price is £5 for a pack of 10 cards complete with envelopes.



Calendars

WE will also have 2023 Calendars on sale! Yay!

The cost of these will be £8 each, with 12 pages and new photos for a new year!



Christmas Cards to the Parish

THESE, along with flyers which will advertise our Christmas Fayre, have mostly been delivered to homes in our Parish and we thank those who have helped with this project, but if there are any left please could you help to finish the project! *Every blessing.* [Lisa](#)

Christmas Events & Services

- Saturday 3rd December 2–4pm: **CHRISTMAS FAYRE** in the Church & Church Hall
- Sunday 18th December 6.30pm: **CAROLS BY CANDLELIGHT** in Church
- Christmas Eve (Saturday 24th) 2.30pm & 4pm: **CHRISTINGLE SERVICE** Christmas Family Fun in Church
- 11pm: **MIDNIGHT COMMUNION** in Church
- Christmas Day (Sunday 25th) 10am: **FAMILY COMMUNION** in Church
- Wednesday 28th December 10am: **St Stephen's Day Service** in Church

Join us for some COFFEE/CHAT & COMPANY

Every first Wednesday of the month at 11 AM in the Turnpike on Soundwell Road.

A time to be, be known, and be together!

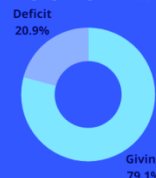
ALSO:
Join us for some **CAROLS** at the Turnpike!
SUNDAY 11 DECEMBER
AT 7PM

Our church FINANCE UPDATE

Our Church Financial Health



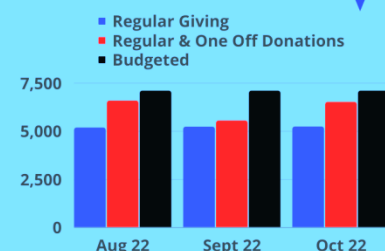
GIVING FOR OCTOBER



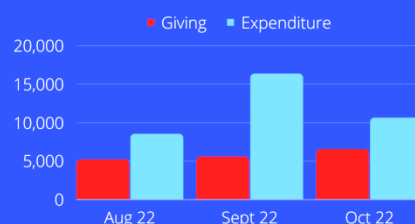
WHAT OUR GIVING NEEDS TO BE £7095

GIVING RECEIVED £5226

Giving Last 3 Months



Giving v Church Expenses Last 3 Months



CHRISTMAS Gift Service

SUNDAY 4th DECEMBER 10am

WE will collect financial gifts to help the Sisters of the Church in Bristol feed and give a little Christmas cheer to some of the poorest families in our city. This will enable them to give £15 of Argos Vouchers to each child they know is in need, and toiletry sets, gloves, warm scarves, hats and socks to the adults.

Please do give generously this Christmas if you can.

Thank you!

DECEMBER CYCLE OF PRAYER BEGINNING SUNDAY OF EACH WEEK

04 Baptism Preparation	Geoff and Joyce Harris Ivor Harris, Ruby Harrison Carolyn Hawkins, Nicole Hayward	The Wickets Tyndale Road Wesley Close
11 Marriage Preparation	James Head, Stella Hoare Mike and Jayne Hudd, Cherilyn Hughes Jean and Barry Hulbert	Wesley Hill Whitfield Close Willis Road
18 Bereavement visitors	Neil, Carey, Marin & Eliza Humphrey Sue and Martyn Humphrey Roger Hurkett	Wiltshire Place Witcombe Close Woodchester
25 Home groups	Roccus, Rozina, Adan & Jereome Inayat Jan Johns, June Jones, Linda Krause Anadita Kumar	Woodland Avenue Woodland Way Yew Tree Drive

SUNDAY Community Worship Service at 10am

Sunday 8am BCP Holy Communion on 1st and 3rd Sundays.

WEDNESDAY Service of Holy Communion at 10am.

DIAL-A-SERMON: Listen to this week's Sermon on your phone: 0117 456 2090, (Cost is the same as a local call) or **CLICK-A-SERMON:** visit our website and use the audio link to listen on-line: <http://saintstephensoundwell.org>

DECEMBER DIARY

01 Thursday(s)	10-11.45am 2-4pm	See & Know weekly in Church Hall Ladies Group in Church Hall then fortnightly
02 Friday	7-9pm	Outburst Youth Church in Church Hall (Monthly first Friday of the month)
03 Saturday	2-4pm	CHRISTMAS FAYRE
04 Sunday	10am	CHRISTMAS GIFT SERVICE
06 Tuesday(s)	1.30-3.30pm	Knit & Natter weekly in the Church Room
07 Wednesday	11am	Coffee/Chat/Company Turnpike Pub
09 Friday	2pm	Pensioner's Group Carols in Church
11 Sunday	7pm	CAROLS at the Turnpike
15 Thursday	7.30pm	Ladies Group Christmas Carol Service in Church
18 Sunday	6.30pm	CAROLS by Candlelight in Church
24 Saturday	2.30 & 4pm	CHRISTINGLE Service in Church
25 Sunday	10am	CHRISTMAS Family Communion in Church
28 Wednesday	10am	St Stephens Day Service in Church

Giving Christmas Cards – or not!

THIS year more than any other it might prove expensive to buy and send many Cards.

For your church family – can we suggest you write out just ONE card to us all – our 'Church family' and then either attach it to the ribbons hanging at the side of the organ, or leave your card there and it will be done for you. Our cards will then be displayed in church for all to see!

As an idea, any savings you make on buying fewer cards, could be donated to church funds or a charity of your choice.



Dial-a-SERMON

Listen to this week's Sermon on your phone:

0117 456 2090

(Cost is the same as a local call)

OR

Click-a-SERMON



Visit our website and use the audio link to listen on-line

<http://saintstephensoundwell.org>

FROM THE REGISTERS

SINCE OCTOBER 2022

Baptisms:

● NOVEMBER 20: **Phoenix Allen.**
Please hold Phoenix's parents, Lisa and Ashley, his Godparents and all his family and friends in your prayers.

Funerals:

● OCTOBER 24: **Brian Henry Howell** (80). The celebration of Brian's life was held at Westerleigh Crematorium.

Please hold Brian's wife, Carol, their children Warren, Glyn, Emma & Ritchie and all her family and friends in your prayers.

● OCTOBER 31: **Hazel June Stone** (93). The celebration of Hazel's life was held at St Stephen's Church, Soundwell, followed by the burial at Mangotsfield Cemetery.

Please hold Hazel's children Sally-Ann and Paul and all her family and friends in your prayers.

● NOVEMBER 01: **Fiona Jane Kendall** (56). The celebration of Fiona's life was held at Westerleigh Crematorium.

Please hold Fiona's husband, Gary, their children Ryan, Emma & Liam, and all her family & friends in your prayers.

● NOVEMBER 02: **June Perrett** (86). The celebration of June's life was held at Westerleigh Crematorium.

Please hold June's children Sally & Mandy, their families, June's wider family & many friends in your prayers.

● NOVEMBER 18: **Bob Parr** (89). The celebration of Bob's life was held at Westerleigh Crematorium.

Please hold Bob's children Denise, Jon and Robert, their families and Bob's wider family and many friends in your prayers.

SAINT STEPHENS SOUNDWELL



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Telephone 0117 957 4297



● **Revd Sandy Cooper**
Associate Minister, 1 Deerpark
Soundwell, Bristol BS15 1XH
Telephone 0117 967 2621



● **Revd Regan Meares**
Curate
Telephone 07769 704270



● **Peter Robbins**
Lay Minister, 13 Wood Road
Kingswood, Bristol BS15 8DT
Telephone 0117 967 9576



● **Gill Mayo**
Church Warden
Telephone
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