

A blue-toned illustration of a nativity scene. In the foreground, the silhouettes of Mary, Joseph, and the infant Jesus in a manger are visible. To the right, three shepherds with staffs stand in a field with sheep. Above the manger, a bright, glowing light descends from the sky, surrounded by a shower of white stars. Two angels are depicted flying in the upper left, one holding a trumpet. The background is a deep blue sky filled with numerous white stars of varying sizes.

*Trinity Times
Christmas 2024*

Holy Trinity Church, Maisons-Laffitte
Donation 3 Euros

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Lesson Readers	Elizabeth Bean
Little Fishes	office@html.com Coffee morning every Tuesday at 9.30 am for pre-school children.
Organist	Joan Bauman

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Chaplain's Corner



Dear friends,

Christmas is often seen as a time of joy, celebration and togetherness. But for many, the season can bring challenges. Whether it's grieving the loss of a loved one, managing mental health struggles, facing financial difficulties or dealing with personal hardships, Christmas can sometimes feel heavy instead of merry. This year at Holy Trinity, we're offering a special "Blue Christmas" service on December 23rd for anyone finding this season particularly hard.

The idea behind Blue Christmas is to acknowledge the reality that, for some, the holidays are a time of sadness or stress rather than celebration. In a world that encourages constant cheer, those grappling with grief, loneliness or depression can feel out of place—or even pressured to set aside their pain to match the season's mood.

This reflective service, also known as a "Longest Night" service, is designed to offer comfort and connection for those who may feel disconnected from the traditional Christmas story. It's a moment to pause and recognise the struggles we face, bringing them before God in a space that is safe and compassionate.

The service will include moments to light candles in memory of loved ones, quiet time for prayer and messages of hope for those facing tough circumstances. The tone will be gentle, with hymns and carols sung in a way that honours the complexities of this time of year. Themes of peace, comfort and God's presence will guide us, reminding us that even in our darkest times, we are not alone.

This service is for anyone who finds the holiday season overwhelming or isolating. It's for those mourning, those battling illness, families facing financial worries, people feeling anxious or down, or anyone struggling to connect with the festive spirit. It's simply a space to be honest about how you feel, without expectations or judgment.

While Christmas is often thought of as a season of giving, it's also a time when emotional needs can run high. A Blue Christmas service provides a reminder that we're not alone in those feelings and that it's okay not to feel okay. God meets us in our struggles, offering understanding and care. This service invites us to bring our pain, grief and weariness to Him, trusting that He is with us through it all.

We warmly invite you to join us for the Blue Christmas service on December 23rd at 7:00 pm. If this season feels particularly hard for you — whether due to loss, loneliness or simply a sense of being out of sync with the holiday cheer— we hope this gathering will be a place where you can find comfort, peace and even a glimmer of hope.

This isn't about ignoring the joy of Christmas, but about making space for those who experience its challenges. Come as you are, bring your struggles, and let's rest together in God's presence, trusting that He can hold both the light and the dark of this season.

Rev'd. Charlotte Sullivan

The Blue Christmas service is on December 23rd at 7 pm.



Your dynamic ministry team — here to serve!

Vivian tells us about two new advent initiatives.

Christmas craziness

As I write on this unusually early, snowy day, it's not difficult to get into the Christmas spirit. I've even let the first signs of Christmassy decoration into the house in spite of it still being November! So now several poinsettias brighten an otherwise fairly drab (shh!) living room wall and the room begins to say "seasonal cheer" once again.

At the same time, having the month-until-Christmas clock start counting down sets my heart racing just a bit *too* much. Along with anticipation of celebrating Jesus' birth comes an avalanche of social and family expectations. Cards to send, gifts to choose, food to make, events to attend, travel to plan, money that must be spent... and all this on top of the end-of-year deadlines for school and work. It's kind of crazy, isn't it?

Rather than experiencing an extra measure of peace on earth, I find myself dreading that crazed feeling created by a seemingly inescapable and frantically spinning vortex.

Does it have to be this way? We'd like to think not, and so are trying an experiment at Holy Trinity this year for Advent with two new initiatives – and we honestly don't know if they will help or make things worse (you'll have to let us know!).

The first is the return of vicarage suppers as **Christmas Survival Suppers**. They'll be once a week on a Wednesday evening starting on 27 November. Each evening will start with an apéritif, then we'll have a low-key bring-and-share buffet meal, followed by a brief moment to talk together about different themes of craziness that this season can bring and how we cope with them: Crazy Families, Crazy Busy, Crazy Money and Crazy Story.

Whether you can join us for one or for all, we hope that you'll find them to be a small, weekly oasis in which God whispers sanity to you amidst the hustle of the season.

The second is an encouragement to carve out a few moments daily to remember where we want our spiritual focus to be. We'll be going through a Christmas devotional called "**The Greatest Gift: Unwrapping the Full Love Story of Christmas**" by Ann Voskamp. There'll be the personal part, where we read the daily devotional on our own, stilling our hearts before God. And then to encourage each other (and help us to stick with it!), there'll be a dedicated WhatsApp group solely for sharing our spiritual thoughts inspired by the daily reading.

I'm really looking forward to seeing how God will use these two opportunities and pray that it will tip the balance for all of our spirits, away from stress and towards anticipation and renewed wonder at God made tiny, fragile human in the birth of Jesus.

V. S.



Katrin shares with us a message of hope.

Immanuel

In the final words of the Old Testament canon, God promises, “See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents, or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction” (Malachi 4:5-6). And with that—silence. No more prophets. Some four hundred years come and go without so much as a word from God. At least, no recorded word.

During those centuries of silence, Israel is conquered and subjugated by a whole succession of foreign powers. Alexander the Great. The Ptolemies. The Seleucids. And after a brief taste of freedom following the Maccabean Revolt, the Roman army showed up. With precious few exceptions, each new wave of conquest brought cultural oppression, brutality, persecution, paganism, slavery, and ever more taxes.

To keep hope alive under such circumstances was itself an act of resistance. Resistance to despair, resistance to accepting what many must have perceived as a long, painful defeat. God’s chosen people may very well have wondered whether He had skipped over the return of Elijah and gone straight to the destruction part of Malachi’s prophecy. How ironic, then—or perhaps *poetic* is a better word—that it was precisely at that moment, when darkness seemed poised to snuff out the last remnant of hope, that Jesus, the Light of the World, was born.

Centuries earlier, the prophet Isaiah had proclaimed, “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14). The Gospel writer Matthew saw in Christ’s birth the fulfilment of those prophetic words, reminding his readers that Immanuel means *God with us*. Sometime around 4 BC, the God who had repeatedly expressed His desire to live among His people revealed a wholly unexpected way of doing so—by permanently wedding His essence to ours in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, not as an earthly king crowned with gold and living in splendor, but as a humble craftsman who had to learn to walk and to talk, who got dirty and tired and hot and cold—who came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for all.

The Incarnation was God moving into the neighborhood, pitching His tent right alongside ours. But God’s plan went far beyond being *with us*; God wanted to be *in us*, to show us that the true nourishment that sustains our lives is *Himself*. And He went to great lengths to make that message abundantly clear. In the town of Bethlehem, whose name means *house of bread*, the newly born Son of God was laid in a literal feeding trough. Years later, He explicitly claimed to be the bread of life (John 6:35) and the living bread that came down from heaven: “This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (John 6:51). The Last Supper was Jesus’ ultimate invitation to consume Him, to take Him into ourselves, to feed on Him and live forever through the life-sustaining power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts.

Why would God go so far? Why would the Creator of the universe wish to be with us and in us? Because He loves His creation—and humanity above all—with a love that is beyond our power of comprehension. That is all. This is the God who declares in Isaiah 43:25 “I—yes, I alone—will blot out your sins for my own sake and will never think of them again.” Did you catch that? *My own sake*. When God reconciles the world to Himself, He does it for His own sake. So that His own joy will be complete. Because He made us, because He loves us, and because He doesn’t want us to remain as outcasts from Eden.

When we think back on the “silent years” before the coming of Christ, the parallel with the strife of our own era is hard to miss. The world feels very dark right now. With the winter solstice approaching, the days are at their shortest. The news shrieks of hatred and violence. Evil continues to rip and tear at the fabric of God’s good creation. We, like the Jewish people of those long centuries, may be tempted to cry out, “O God! Do You hear us? Do You see us? *Do You not care that we are perishing?*”

But God’s answer is, as ever, a resounding *YES*. Psalm 139 declares that our Lord sees in the dark, that in fact, *darkness is as light to Him*. We may stumble and fall when the lamps go out, but God does not. In fact, He often uses the darkness to draw our attention to His Light. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and His saving, sanctifying purposes are unchanging as well. “Even to your old age and gray hairs I am He, I am He who will sustain you,” declares the Lord. “I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you” (Isaiah 46:4). Again and again, God shows us His *khesed*—His faithful love—in that He does not turn His face from us but instead walks determinately and unflinchingly straight into the heart of our darkness, filling it with His unquenchable, irresistible Light.

Our God is no impassive divine Clockmaker, content to stand back and observe the ticking of the universe He made. No, He is Immanuel — God *with* us, God *in* us, God *for* us.

Amen.



Image credits: Adoration of the Christ Child. c. 1619–1621
Artist Gerard Honthorst (Uffizi, Florence).

K.D.

Judy describes her experience as a volunteer at the Olympics.

Happiness and Humility

It was a privilege to work as a volunteer at the Olympic and Paralympic Games and only superlatives spring to mind as I reminisce on those colourful days that will be filed in my memory drawer forever. Now that the party is over and the euphoria has faded, two simple words, happiness and humility, best reflect the overall and overwhelming impressions that still pervade.

For my first job at the Olympic Games I worked at the Champions Park in Trocadero where 15,000+ people queued up for hours in the blazing sun every day for three weeks in the hope of gaining free entry to the open-air arena. Medallists from around the globe paraded along a very long, raised podium to the sound of compelling techno music while posing for photos and throwing t-shirts or such like to a hungry audience in rapture of their presence. Smiles and laughter were my daily constants. Not once was a complaint or a criticism uttered from this crowd inebriated by Olympic fervour and consumed with bursting enthusiasm. My days were spent talking to happy people, each and every one with a story to tell. I was often an usherette finding seats in the tribunes where I also became an on-the-spot photographer, aware of the huge responsibility entrusted to me to immortalize the moment, as people posed with the majestic Eiffel Tower as their backcloth. Some days my job was to point people in the right direction with my floppy rubber finger, certainly the must-have accessory and source of much amusement to all and sundry. Gratitude overflowed and I was touched by this communion of spontaneous thanks. Hearty handshaking became the norm, dancing in the aisles was an expected pose. It is funny to think of all those photos I am part of, now stored somewhere in the cloud! If I close my eyes I can still hear Victor Le Masne's official Olympic anthem "The Parade" and envisage the crowds still swaying to the tune with pride and joy. Collective happiness on such a scale is addictive, it energises the brain, stimulates the feel-good factor and is totally inclusive.

My second job, in the muted, diplomatic department of Protocol at the Arena Nanterre for the paralympic swimming events, could not have been more different. Here I was part of a very small team looking after not only royal and political dignitaries but also paralympic delegations and families from across the globe. In such a role I was often in the front line to be of immediate help by explaining the many protocol procedures in place, accompanying people to their seats in the reserved section, where I was expected to stay in attendance, and helping disabled people with everyday tasks that we ourselves take for granted. So often, I was humbled by their mental strength and painfully aware of my own ineptitudes in the face of their courage and determination.

As the days went past, I like to think I developed some meaningful relationships with these new-found friends whom I realised I was impatient to welcome when they arrived daily in the protocol lounge. Spontaneous smiles, high fives and universal sign greetings were my source of inspiration, my connection to this brave, relatively new world of high profile paralympic sport. Equally eye-opening were the numerous opportunities to meet and greet glossy magazine royals and well-known politicians but name-dropping seems irrelevant, as the true legacy of this particular job will always be the unique experience I was so fortunate to live thanks to all those athletes that made my days special and memorable. Sometimes, I would arrive for work early, when the Arena was totally empty of any human activity, and climb up to the very top of the tribunes where I would sit on a step in the dark and enjoy the deafening silence. The peace that reigned, as I watched the dimmed lights glisten on the bewitching, twinkling pool in preparation for the incredible exploits about to take place, was ethereal, and there I felt privy to life's bigger picture, to God's work in progress. I was humbled.

J.P.



Carrot cake with orange

Anna shares this delicious, cheap and easy to make recipe:
25 minutes preparation, 45 minutes cooking time.

Ingredients (for 8 – 10 people):

275 g self-raising flour
2 level teaspoons baking powder
250 g brown sugar
2 teaspoons cinnamon
2 teaspoons ground ginger
20 cl sunflower oil
280 g grated carrots
3 eggs
zest of 1 orange
10 cl freshly squeezed orange juice.



Method:

Grease a 25 cm diameter cake tin and put it in the fridge.

Pre-heat oven to 180 °C.

Grate carrots and put to one side.

In a big mixing bowl, mix all the dry ingredients.

Add the oil and mix well.

Add grated carrots and mix again.

Add the eggs (whole), one by one, mixing each time.

Add the orange juice and zest and mix again.

Pour the mixture into the cake tin, smooth the surface and bake for about 45 minutes.

Test with a knife – the blade should come out clean — when the cake is ready.

Leave it to cool, then turn out onto a cake tray.

Variation:

You can cover this cake with white icing, made with:

- either a mixture of 200 g white cream cheese (eg Saint-Moret), 2 teaspoons of lemon juice and 2 soup spoons of icing sugar,
- or a mixture of 200 g icing sugar and 1 egg white.

Tip:

Wait until the cake is cool before spreading the icing!

A.D.

Chocolate Chip Cookies

Jane's recipe from "Home Recipes with Be-Ro" - everyone's mum's favourite cookery book!

Ingredients:

75 g margarine

75 g brown sugar

1 egg

a few drops vanilla essence

150 g self-raising flour

pinch of salt

100 g plain chocolate chopped / 100 g chocolate chips / 50 g of each.

Method:

Cream the margarine and sugar.

Beat in the egg and vanilla essence.

Stir in the flour, salt and chocolate.

Place in small spoonfuls on greased baking trays.

Bake in a moderate oven (180 °C) for about 10 minutes.

J.U.



Decadent chocolate cake

Constance's recipe comes from "Simply Jamie" by Jamie Oliver and serves 16 people.

Flourless, rich, moreish and oh-so delicious, this chocolate-packed cake recipe is one we all need!

Ingredients:

300g quality dark chocolate (70%)
100g unsalted butter
8 large free-range eggs
200g golden caster sugar
2 tablespoons cocoa powder



Top Tip:

Turn this lovely cake into a proper pud by serving it up with your favourite seasonal fruit: cherries, berries, segments of orange, whatever you fancy.

Method:

Preheat the oven to 180°C.

Snap the chocolate into a large heatproof bowl, add the butter and melt over a pan of gently simmering water, stirring regularly and making sure the water doesn't touch the base of the bowl, then leave to cool slightly.

Separate the eggs, putting the yolks into the bowl of a free-standing mixer with the caster sugar, or into a large bowl if using an electric hand whisk. Whisk for 2 minutes, or until pale and fluffy, then stir in the melted chocolate.

Whisk the egg whites and a pinch of sea salt in a separate bowl until stiff, using a free-standing mixer or electric hand whisk. Working in batches, gently fold them into the chocolate mixture, then sift and fold in the cocoa.

Either pour the cake batter directly into a greased 25cm x 30cm roasting tray, or spread evenly across a 30cm x 40cm greaseproof-paper-lined baking tray.

Bake for 15 minutes exactly – until just springy to the touch and gooey in the middle. Remove from the oven.

C.D.

Dates for your Diary

Sunday services:
9.15 am and 11.00 am

<https://htcml.com/>

Christmas Survival Suppers

Friendship, food - and conversations
about thriving in the busyness of the season



Crazy families (27/11), Crazy busy (4/12),
Crazy money (11/12), Crazy story (18/12)

WEDNESDAY NIGHTS 7-10PM IN THE VICARAGE

Holy Trinity Church - Maisons-Laffitte - htcml.com - info@htcml.com

HOLY TRINITY CHURCH MAISONS-LAFFITTE

Christmas Services

Carol Service

Saturday 14th December, 5.30pm

Nativity

Sunday 15th December, 11am

Watch our young people retell the Christmas story.
If you'd like your child to take part, email info@htcml.com

Blue Christmas

Monday 23rd December, 7pm

Engage with Christmas even if you're not feeling the joy.

God in the Manger (Crib Service)

Tuesday 24th December, 5pm

An immersion into the Christmas story, for all ages.

Carols by candlelight

Tuesday 24th December, 10.30pm

Christmas Day Service

Wednesday 25th December, 10.30am

htcml.com - info@htcml.com

HOLY TRINITY CHURCH MAISONS-LAFFITTE

info@htcml.com

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Confirmation CLASSES

STARTING 12TH JANUARY 2025



A four session online course for teenagers and adults

Explore & deepen your faith

Understand the commitment of Confirmation

Opportunity to be confirmed on Saturday 15th February 2025

Thank you Sylvaine and all the volunteers who helped at

The Christmas Fête 2024



The Trinity Times committee—Carolyn, Katrin, Nancy and Sarah—would like to thank Jane Drew for the beautiful cover design of this issue and Emma Parr for this gorgeous winter artwork,

*and we would like to take this opportunity to wish our readers
a very Happy Christmas and **a Peaceful New Year.***



The policy of this magazine is to publish articles of interest provided they are neither illegal nor immoral. The content of the magazine does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editorial committee.