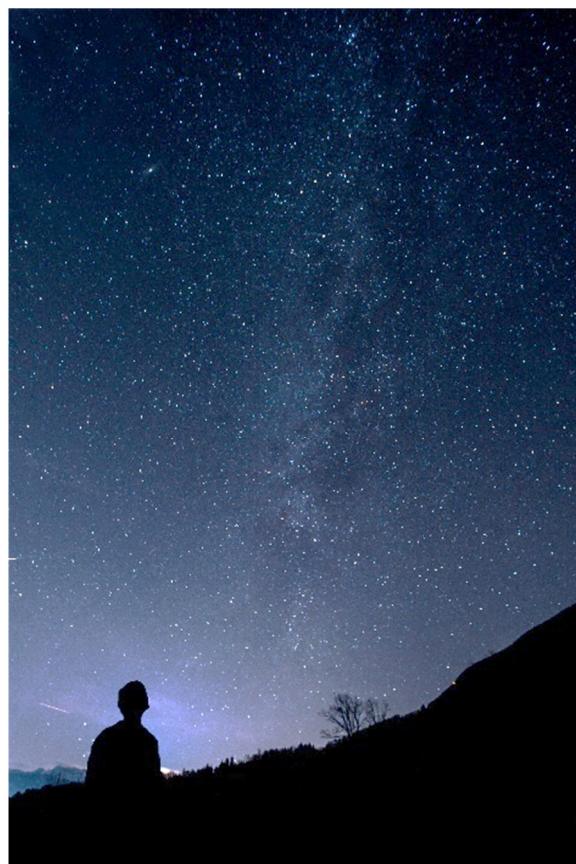


The parish magazine of
Hertford St Andrew

www.hertfordstandrews.co.uk

FEBRUARY 2026



DARK SKIES AND STARGAZING

Here with you Here for you

HERTFORD ST ANDREW

Registered charity 1132540

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Judy Sharman, David Spring and Rod Willis.

Whilst every reasonable care has been taken in presenting the information in this magazine,
no responsibility can be taken for any inaccuracies. The opinions expressed in this magazine
are not necessarily those of the Priests, Churchwardens or editor.

SONDER

I learnt a new word recently; 'Sonder'.

It's the sudden realisation that each and every person is living a life just as complex and real as yours, with their own battles and worries and hopes and history.

Coined by John Koenig in the wonderfully titled 'The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows', it captures the feeling of waking up to the fact that other people are not background character in your story, but the main character in their own.

To sonder is to genuinely empathise with others. Empathy fuels connection. It's a 'feeling with' rather than a 'feeling for'. It creates a sacred space that doesn't try to fix or judge, but simply says 'you're not alone'.

Religious communities often have a 'Rule for Life' to which each member is required to sign up. It's a spiritual framework that provides principles and practices which centre around a common goal of service to God and others. The Anglican Community of the Transfiguration have one particular rule which I love.



WELCOME!

Welcome everyone to St Andrew's, and in particular visitors and newcomers. Details of services are given on the next and last couple of pages of this magazine. If you wish to know more about anything mentioned, please see the website or get in touch with any named contact person or speak with one of the churchwardens. For contact details, see the previous page.

The church is open during daylight hours, and there is a prayer space by the main door where there is an opportunity to post prayers on the prayer board and light a candle.

'Let us take care to live in God's Today, so that we may in some small way help others to prepare for God's Tomorrow'.

I love that. It's a call to be fully awake and present to the person in front of us, to sonder, to practice empathy. And as we do this, 'in some small way', we gift that person something of the strength, understanding and comfort that they might need for 'God's Tomorrow'.

Prayer for 2026; sonder more!

Alan

Save the date for our 2026 away day!

All are welcome

When: 10th May 2026

Where: All Nations Christian College, Easneye, Ware

Theme: Belonging

- *Join us for workshops, activities, discussion and music for all ages*
- *Get to know new people including those from our sister church St Mary's Hertfordbury*
- *Enjoy an amazing place with time to relax, walk, run, play, re-energise, think and pray*

More information to follow.



THE CLOSING DATE FOR THE **MARCH** MAGAZINE IS **SUNDAY 22ND FEBRUARY**. Please send copy by email to hertfordsta@aol.co.uk

SERVICES AND OTHER EVENTS

Church Services

You will find a full list of church services at the end of this magazine and on the church website, with some additional information about certain services on this and the following pages.

Junior Church

Children are welcome to attend Junior Church which runs during the 10.30am Parish Communion service on most Sundays during school term time, except during an All-Age service (see below), when the children stay in church for the whole service.

ALL-AGE SERVICE

SUNDAY 8TH FEBRUARY at 10.30am
SUNDAY 15TH MARCH at 10.30am being
MOTHERING SUNDAY

A shorter, child-friendly, interactive service with songs, prayers and surprises.

St Andrew's services on Zoom

Zoom codes for online access and access via a landline are available from the church office: standrew.hertford@btinternet.com or by calling 01992 504373.

Join us on Zoom for:

Service of the Word

every Sunday at 10.30am with praise, prayer and teaching. There is a communion service once a month. Please check the services on the last page of this magazine and the website for dates.

On Zoom on Sundays at 7pm



Compline is based on the Felgild Compline from the Northumbria Community and Night Prayer from the New Zealand Prayer Book.



**OUR MONTHLY PRAYER MEETING
IN PERSON & ON ZOOM
NOW LATER IN THE MONTH
on Saturday 14th February
& Saturday 21st March
at 8.30am**

Join us on Zoom or pop down to St Andrew's and join us in the Lady Chapel as we pray for ourselves, our churches and our world during these worrying times.

SOUL SUNDAY

The first Sunday of the month sees a different kind of service at St Andrew's called 'Soul Sunday'. Held in the St Andrew's Centre behind the church, this is an opportunity to join us for an informal hour of gentle discussion, songs and prayers, along with tea and biscuits and a heap of good fun.

Please join us in the St Andrew's Centre
6.45pm for refreshments
Service begins at 7pm
Sunday 1st February
Sunday 1st March

Know the Story; Share the Story; Live the Story

SERVICES AND OTHER EVENTS

Mindfulness & Meditation

at St Andrew's Church, Hertford

Mindfulness can help with wellbeing & stress.
Explore alongside the riches of Christian meditation in a free 40-minute session.
Beginners especially welcome!

Wednesdays (usually twice a month) 7.30pm

Feb: 4th (in church and on Zoom), 25th (on Zoom)

March: 4th (in church and on Zoom)

Apr 1st (Holy Week, in church and on Zoom)

Apr 15th (on Zoom)

For details, including the Zoom link, please see our website:

www.hertfordstandrews.co.uk



FREE Mindfulness

WHEN

Fortnightly on Mondays at 10.30am:

**2 Feb, 16 Feb
2 Mar, 16 Mar
30 Mar 13 Apr
27 Apr 10 May
25 May 8 June
22 June 6 July
20 July**

WHERE

Sele Community Hub
Fleming Crescent, Sele Farm SG14 2DJ



www.hertfordstandrews.co.uk
standrew.hertford@btinternet.com

Mindfulness can help with **wellbeing, stress** and **anxiety**. Come along and join the **FREE 30-min sessions**, followed by refreshments.

Everyone is welcome

just turn up!

Civic Service

Sunday 1st March at the 10.30am Parish Communion Service

We are delighted to be joined by the Mayor of Hertford, Councillor Steven Watson, and Members of Hertford Town Council at our 10.30am Parish Communion service on this date.



HERTFORD TOWN COUNCIL

Ash Wednesday:

Wednesday 18th February at 10.30am & 8pm

Join us for a traditional service marking the beginning of Lent. Ash Wednesday focuses the Christian's heart on repentance and prayer as we enter the period known as Lent.

PRAYER MINISTRY

Prayer Ministry provides an opportunity to pray with a member of our prayer ministry team about any concerns you have; for wholeness and fullness of life for ourselves and others, and/or to give thanks to God for answered prayer. This takes place during the 10.30am Sunday service, usually in or by the chapel or at the back of the church at the time of communion. No appointment is needed.

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CHURCH FAMILY

FROM THE REGISTERS

BAPTISMS:

We welcome into the Lord's family:

4th January **Edgar and Reuben Vincent.** The ceremony included tradition from the Assyrian Church. Their parents, Christopher and Hannah, were married at St Andrew's.

MEMORIAL SERVICE:

4th December **For the life of Barry Lee**

OH BROTHER!



Noah Robert Hunt made a surprise entry into the world on 30th November 2025 at the Lister Hospital. He was born two weeks earlier than expected and made an appearance at St Andrew's 10.30am service just one week later with mum and dad, Rebecca and Rosco, and brother Ezra. He weighed at birth a petite 6lbs 7oz but is now over 10lbs after only 6 weeks. Big brother Ezra initially thought he was a toy, but now is fairly unfazed by him. The Hunt family is settling into their new routine very well, if lacking sleep. Grandparents Jo & Rod Willis are enjoying the new addition to the family.



JASPER'S SPECIAL DAY



26th October 2025 was a special day for Jasper Kay. He was baptised at St Andrew's Church by Rev Alan Stewart in front of his parents Bryony and Peter who were joined by many family members and friends who had travelled from all over the country. They included both sets of Jasper's grandparents, with Peter's parents and family travelling from Newcastle and Bryony's from Great Saling, Essex. Jasper's godparents are Conor Hoey and Zoe Voice.



New Year's Day Walk

Forty people of all ages, and a few dogs, turned out for the New Year's Day Walk attended by people connected with St Andrew's Church, St Mary's Church

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CHURCH FAMILY

Hertingfordbury and All Saints' Church. It was a very cold day but we enjoyed blue skies as everyone collected at the Golden Griffin pub before setting off along Welwyn Road and into Panshanger Park. Enjoying a gentle stroll around the woods and fields of the park, the walkers stopped briefly for a photo by the Queen's Green Canopy sculpture which marks a new wood planted with the help of local people in honour of our late Queen. Much conversation was had and introductions made during the walk and they continued when many of the walkers, on arriving back, repaired to the Golden Griffin for a well-earned drink in the warm.



MODEL RAILWAY LAYOUTS AND MORE WANTED



At St Andrew's Coffee Morning in May (Saturday 2nd May, 10.30am – 12.30pm) we are planning to have a railway theme. We are looking to have a number of operating model railway layouts together with static models, various items of railway interest and displays. If you can provide an operating layout or other railway-related items of interest or would like to help please contact Forbes Mutch (07946 265077) or Richard Taylor (07703 197707).



Thursday 19th March 2026
7.30pm at the Drill Hall Ware

Charles and Debbie Ledsam are organising a trip to the Drill Hall to see JOSEPH AND THE AMAZING TECHNICOLOUR DREAMCOAT. This is being presented by Ware Musical Theatre. Amongst those in it are St Andrew's own Phil Cable (playing Simeon) and Sue Mulligan. Tickets are £24 each with a slight discount (£1) for ten people or more.

Do please support it. Please contact Charles or Debbie Ledsam if interested in joining our group. (01992 584426). If you wish to attend another evening (it's on from Tuesday 17th March to Saturday 21st March) do feel free to contact Sue Mulligan direct or apply for tickets via the website: www.waremusicaltheatre.org.uk

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CHURCH MATTERS

FOR THOSE WISHING TO GET DATES IN THE DIARY FOR 2026:

(PLEASE NOTE: *details are subject to change*)

Ash Wednesday 18th February 10.30am and 8pm services

Civic Service 1st March at 10.30am

Mothering Sunday 15th March 10.30am *All-Age service with choir and organ*

Holy Week and Easter

Monday 30th March Compline, 8pm *in church and online*

Tuesday 31st March Taizé, 8pm

Wednesday 1st April Meditation, 8pm

Maundy Thursday Eucharist, 8pm with watch 'til 10pm

Good Friday The Three Hours, 12-3pm

Easter Day 5.30am at St Mary's; 8am, 10.30am *All-Age service with choir and organ*

Church Away Day Sunday 10th May

Ascension Day 14th May 8pm service

Harvest Festival Sunday 11th October *All-Age service with choir and organ*

Bereavement Service 1st November, 2pm

Remembrance Sunday 8th November 9.15am service (NOT All Age)

Advent & Christmas

Advent Evening Service Sunday 29th November, 6.30pm

Beer and Carols Saturday 12th December

A Mindful Christmas Monday 14th December, 7.30pm

Lessons & Carols Service Monday 21st December, 7.30pm

Christmas Eve Crib services 11am and 4pm; Midnight Mass, 11.15pm

Christmas Day 8am, 10.30am



The logo for Flowered Up features a stylized flower icon on the left, followed by the text "Flowered Up" in a large, bold, sans-serif font. Below this, the tagline "Your local Hertford florist" is written in a smaller, bold, sans-serif font, flanked by two sets of five stars each. At the bottom, the address "The Verge, House, 43A St Andrews Street, Hertford, Hertfordshire, SG16 1HZ" is printed, along with the email "hello@floweredup.co.uk", the website "www.floweredup.co.uk", the social media handle "@floweredup_", and the phone number "01992 845098". The entire logo is framed by a decorative border of stars.

The Verge, House, 43A St Andrews Street, Hertford, Hertfordshire, SG16 1HZ
hello@floweredup.co.uk | www.floweredup.co.uk | @floweredup_ | 01992 845098

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EVENTS

COFFEE MORNING

JOIN US FOR OUR EVER-POPULAR MONTHLY COFFEE MORNING

Saturday 7th February: 10.30am to 12.30pm

In February we are offering wellbeing activities at our coffee morning and raising funds for MIND and St Andrew's Church. There will be a range of activities for people of all ages to try and - as always - good coffee and a delicious selection of homemade cakes and bakes to tempt you. You can expect a warm welcome and live music, too.



You are invited to the FUTUREhope Hertford and Ware Quiz at 7pm on Saturday 28th February. Ideally we are looking for teams of 8, but if there are fewer of you, we can help put teams together.

Proceeds go towards the work of FUTUREhope, helping vulnerable young people in Hertford and Ware cope with all that life is throwing at them.

Please come along for a fun and worthwhile evening - tickets are £15pp and can be reserved by emailing Dave Hollis at dave@fhhw.org.uk. Light nibbles will be provided but feel free to bring your own drinks and snacks.



Welwyn Garden City Male Voice Choir in Concert
Saturday 21st March at 7.30pm
in St Mary's Church Hertfordbury
They're back again by popular demand!

Our friends at the WGC Male Voice Choir will be entertaining us once again with their usual mix of traditional and popular music and always accompanied by talented young guest soloists

Tickets are £10. Please contact Kay Juniper on 07776 340932.

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A LOOK BACK AT THE FESTIVE SEASON

BUMPER CHRISTMAS ATTENDANCES GENEROUS CONGREGATIONS



Christmas saw many more people entering the doors of St Andrew's to attend the various events and services held over the festive season.

Chrissy Barclay, with help, had decorated the church gloriously. A beautiful Christmas tree lit the church too, thanks to a generous donor and the team led by Jo and Rod Willis who installed and decorated it.

For 'Beer & Carols' about 460 adults and children were welcomed through the doors over the course of the afternoon, up from 370 in 2024. They enjoyed the music of our wonderful house band 'Flare' which led the carol singing, while a huge group of children enjoyed crafts in the Children's Corner with Lindsey Betteridge, Sue Mulligan and Rosemary Willis. Mulled wine, beer and soft drinks were in high demand. A bucket

collection for **The Hertford Pantry** raised a good amount to which was added a donation from St Andrew's.

St Andrew's School held their Christmas Carol Service in St Andrew's Church with nearly 140 children in attendance and tremendous support from their families.

A beautiful candlelit service of Lessons and Carols was held on the Monday before Christmas with over 200 attending, refreshed afterwards by mulled wine and mince pies – thanks to the Social Committee. A collection for **Herts Young Homeless** raised a significant amount.

Christmas Eve saw two Crib and Christingle Services at which 700 adults and children (up from 465 in 2024) attended with the children receiving Christingles. The collections at these services always go to **The Children's Society** and they will receive a large donation towards their wonderful work in the UK.

Finally, the Christmas Day Services – Midnight Mass, 8am Christmas Day and the All Age on Christmas Day. We felt it appropriate that we should again remember the Holy Land on this day and so our collection went to **Christian Aid's Middle East Appeal**, which will receive a large donation.

It was a joy to see so many people worshipping the Christ Child in so many ways and to witness people's generosity towards those in need.

Shirley Taylor

Know the Story; Share the Story; Live the Story

LENT

On the puzzle page reference is made to Lent beginning this year on 18th February (Ash Wednesday) and is a time when Christians remember when Jesus went into the desert to fast and pray for forty days and forty nights and was tempted by the devil, before beginning his work for God.

Ash Wednesday follows Shrove Tuesday, traditionally known as pancake day. In French-speaking nations Shrove Tuesday is called Mardi Gras, which roughly means Tuesday of Fat!

On Ash Wednesday there are services at St Andrew's at 10.30am and 8pm marking the beginning of Lent, focusing the Christian's heart on repentance and prayer as we enter Lent. Worshippers may have their foreheads marked with ash in the sign of a cross as a powerful, visible symbol of mortality ("dust to dust") and repentance.

While Lent is said to last for 40 days, it is actually 46 as the Sundays are not counted. If you decide to give up something for Lent, as many people do, you might say you have a day off on Sundays! But as the puzzle page says, you might wish to decide to do something positive for Lent, something meaningful.

The church often uses colours for seasons. The colour for Lent is purple, which means both sorrow because we do wrong, and royalty. Some churches decorate their church with grey banners and cloths for the whole season of Lent as a reminder of the grey ashes of Ash Wednesday.

On Maundy Thursday (the Thursday before Easter), observed in the Christian Church as a commemoration of the Last Supper, the King gives money to the poor at a special service. The Royal Maundy is an ancient ceremony which has its origin in the commandment Christ gave after washing the feet of his disciples on the day before Good Friday. The commandment, or mandatum, 'that ye love one another' (John XIII 34) is still recalled regularly by Christian churches throughout the world and the ceremony of monarchs washing the feet of the poor, accompanied by gifts of food and clothing, can be traced back to the fourth century.

It seems to have been the custom as early as the 13th century for members of the royal family to take part in Maundy ceremonies, to distribute money and gifts, and to recall Christ's simple act of humility by washing the feet of the poor. Henry IV began the practice of relating the number of recipients of gifts to the monarch's age, and as it became the custom of the monarch to perform the ceremony, the event became known as the Royal Maundy. In the 18th century the act of washing the feet of the poor was discontinued and in the 19th century money allowances were distributed in place of the various gifts of food and clothing. Today's recipients of Royal Maundy, as many elderly men and as many elderly women as there are years in the sovereign's age, are chosen because of the Christian service they have given to the Church and community.

Know the Story; Share the Story; Live the Story

Think about... LENT

Lent is the time to prepare your heart and mind for Easter. It lasts for 40 days (not including Sundays) and begins on **Ash Wednesday**, which is on 18 February this year. At the Ash Wednesday service, Christians are marked on the forehead with a cross of ashes as a sign of saying sorry to God for anything they have done that's wrong.

The day before Ash Wednesday is called **Shrove Tuesday**, when it used to be the last chance to use up the food that would not be eaten during Lent (this is also known as pancake day!).

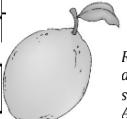
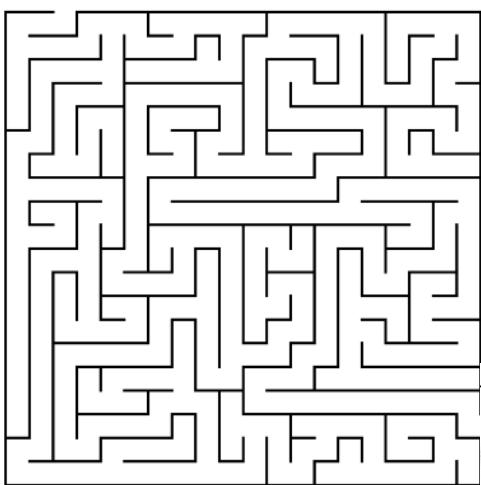


During Lent, Christians remember when Jesus went into the desert to fast and pray before beginning his work for God. Traditionally, Lent is a time of giving things up, as a way of remembering how Jesus fasted in the desert. People may give up meat, chocolate, cakes, their favourite drink in Lent... OR people can decide to make an effort to DO something during Lent – perhaps read the Bible more, or do a different, meaningful, thing each day... maybe visit someone who may be lonely or fundraise for a local charity.

Pancake Day Maze



The girl would like some lemon to put on her pancake. Can you help her find her way through the maze?



Word Searches

How many words can you find in this puzzle using the word bank below? Words go left to right, top to bottom or diagonally ...

L	Y	F	C	A	L	P	V	H	S	Q
H	F	O	R	K	P	E	A	J	C	A
E	A	R	O	F	E	H	N	L	R	M
A	S	E	S	B	N	K	C	T	M	C
S	T	H	S	L	A	S	H	E	S	S
T	R	E	P	E	N	T	A	N	C	E
E	X	A	J	S	C	R	M	E	A	T
R	J	D	N	S	E	F	I	R	S	T

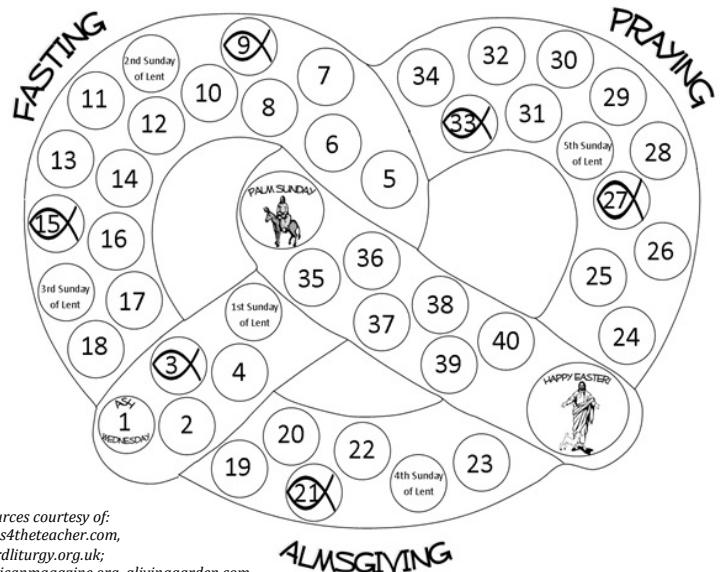
ASHES EASTER FOREHEAD PALMS BLESS
FAST LENT PENANCE CROSS FIRST MEAT
REPENTANCE

S	L	E	G	N	A	L	O	N	E
T	S	D	E	T	P	M	E	T	W
E	Y	E	A	X	F	A	O	L	I
P	T	T	N	E	H	L	I	D	P
A	H	S	R	R	R	V	Y	E	I
R	R	U	E	O	E	B	R	V	H
A	O	A	N	D	F	D	O	L	S
P	W	H	O	G	H	O	L	Y	R
O	Y	X	T	O	R	L	G	I	O
W	T	E	S	T	S	Y	A	D	W

WILDERNESS
TEMPTED
DEVIL
FORTY
STONE
BREAD
ALONE
GLORY
WORSHIP
PARAPET
ANGELS
EXHAUSTED

THE PRETZEL IS A REALLY GOOD SYMBOL FOR THE SEASON OF LENT. IT LOOKS LIKE THE SHAPE OF ARMS CROSSED IN PRAYER AND IT IS MADE OF SIMPLE INGREDIENTS TO REMIND US THAT LENT IS A TIME OF FASTING. YOU CAN USE THIS CALENDAR TO HELP COUNT THE DAYS OF LENT UP TO EASTER SUNDAY...

LENTEN CALENDAR: THE SALT OF THE EARTH



Resources courtesy of:
apples4theteacher.com,
salfordliturgy.org.uk;
Americanmagazine.org, alivinggarden.com

CHILDREN AT ST ANDREW'S

ALL CHILDREN ARE WELCOME

Children are never too young to come to church. You and your children are very welcome at St Andrew's. We realise that bringing children, especially babies and toddlers, to church can be challenging to say the least, so we have set aside part of the church (the Children's Corner) at the front of church (to the right of the altar) which is equipped with toys, books, craft materials and a space to call their own. Here, even if they are occupied with a toy or book, children absorb the atmosphere of worship.

Junior Church

During the 10.30am Parish Communion on Sundays in term time (except when there is an All Age service) there are activities for children in the St Andrew's Centre. The children will begin the service with the

congregation and then, after the first hymn, they leave to join Junior Church.

All-Age Services

These are monthly, shorter, child-friendly, interactive communion services with songs and prayers which are held once a month: usually but not always on the second Sunday of the month. Children stay in church for the whole of the service.

Hertford Children's Choir is a choir led by Rachel and Sam Chaplin for anyone aged 8-13 who loves singing and wants to develop their musicianship. Rehearsals are on Fridays 5.30-6.45pm at St Andrew's Church Hertford and there are termly performances. See the church website for more information.



chapter79.

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DARK SKIES EVENT: 7th February

In the December edition of this magazine, Jenny Mutch (St Andrew's Eco-church Group) wrote about protecting our night, saying that reducing light pollution matters more than you might think.

Light pollution is often an overlooked way we accelerate climate change by wasting energy and impacting our ecosystem health by disrupting wildlife's (and indeed our own) natural sleep patterns.

Jenny explained how different species respond to light in different ways and said that more than two-thirds of life on Earth is nocturnal. When we sleep, the night shift begins; insects pollinate plants, bats forage and navigate, birds migrate, and amphibians and aquatic species emerge.

Once a year there a community event where you can learn about light pollution but also to switch lights off and appreciate the night sky without local sky glow or glare.

On **7th February** Dark Skies returns to Hertford Castle for another immersive evening celebrating the beauty of the night sky.

Visitors are invited to experience the stars with reduced artificial lighting and minimal light pollution.

Expert groups including LAPD Lighting Design, The University of Hertfordshire: Bayfordbury Observatory, and the Hertford Astronomy Group will be there for an inspiring evening of stargazing, educational talks and hands-on activities. Highlights include a mobile planetarium and interactive learning about the impact of artificial light on people and the natural environment.



The event will have limited lighting, and therefore a proportionate cap on visitor numbers is necessary.

Ticket Prices: General Admission: £2
General Admission plus Planetarium: £4

In addition, between 3.30pm and 5.30pm, BEAM theatre will host a special screening of *Night Burns Like Cigarettes*, followed by a post-screening talk from Simon Thorp, lighting designer at LAPD, that reflects on the film and considers if darkness could really play a greater part in our future world.

Narrated by Lily Cole and shot under the glow of urban night lighting, *Night Burns Like Cigarettes* is a poetic exploration of our disappearing darkness. The film examines how we consume the night as carelessly as cigarettes, reflecting on over-lit cities, fear of the dark and what is lost when night is pushed aside. Featuring a dreamlike London landscape, a Banksy mural in the Barbican tunnel, and an evocative dance performance by British-Zimbabwean singer Kwaye, the film is a love letter to the night.

Go to the BEAM website for ticket information.

For more information on DarkSky UK, please visit their website.

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STARGAZING

FROM A SERMON GIVEN BY REV ALAN STEWART

Back in the day, when I used to pick my kids up from school, I would inevitably ask the same question that 99% of parents ask: 'How was your day?'. Occasionally I'd mix it up a bit with the catchier 'So, school; how was it?'. And like 99% of other parents, I'd receive exactly the same one-word answer: 'Okay'.

It took me a while to realise that if I wanted more, I'd have to pursue a slightly different line of enquiry. So, I'd ask 'who did you play with today?' or, 'what did you have for lunch?'. Again, one-word answers. The problem of course was that I was asking closed questions which shut down conversations rather than open them up. Late in the day, I learnt to ask more open questions like 'what was your favourite part of today?'

That's actually a powerful question. It teaches us, whatever our age, to reflect and take notice of the good things that are in every day. And that's a game-changer. If we take that question one step further to 'why?', then we go deeper into appreciation and self-understanding; we learn that curiosity and gratitude are some of the best spiritual disciplines.

Another great question of course is 'what was your least favourite part of today?', and its supplementary; 'what did you learn from that?'. This is actually an ancient spiritual practice called the Examen, a great way to end every day; my favourite and least favourite parts of today. And it's a great practice as we set out on another year.



A New Year is a good time to reflect, hopefully with gratitude, on what the past year brought and taught, the ways it deepened us through both its highs and its lows. For some of us there have been lots to treasure, many uplifting memories made, many reasons to be grateful. For others, our only reason to be grateful perhaps is simply that it's over.

For the Church the start of January is the season of Epiphany, which literally means 'revelation' or 'realisation'. And that's so apt for a New Year into which we step blindly, asking that as it unfolds, so our eyes will be opened to the Presence of God in each and every moment; trusting that whatever happens, our God is with us. Epiphany is the story of mysterious stargazers who, having studied the alignment of planets (the 'star' of the story), set off on a long and perilous journey to pay homage to a faraway newborn king. This journey was a huge act of faith, endurance and courage; a stepping into the unknown, a trusting that the stars had indeed aligned and spoken. And of course, they headed for the 'right' place for a king, the palace, which, as we know, turned out to be the wrong place, a dangerous place in fact.

As we navigate life, we make decisions that don't always lead us to the 'right' place. Some people think that God has a 'right' and perfect plan for each of our lives, and our mission, should we choose to accept it, is to work out that right and perfect plan. Experience tells me however that that isn't how God or life

CONTINUED OVERLEAF

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STARGAZING

FROM A SERMON GIVEN BY REV ALAN STEWART

works. It's a lot more open-ended and nuanced and messy. I believe that God knows all that can be known, the general flow of the future, but not necessarily the details. That's open. So, there might be a thousand, thousand ways forward. If we take a 'wrong' step, then God works with that. In all things, we're told, he works for good. Like the magi, after their 'wrong' detour, he sends us new information via others, helps us re-route, and then after, sends us home another way. God's dream, I believe, is that we fulfil as much of our potential as we possibly can and that we leave this world a better place than we found it. Just how we do that doesn't require a map. It's actually more about stargazing. With an open mind and open heart, we fix our eyes on Christ, the Morning Star. As best we can, we make him our compass. Life is a series of questions 'do I go this way or that way?'.

And some of those answers are straightforward and some definitely aren't. In many cases, God probably does have a preference; 'this way is better, trust me'. And he has his ways of communicating that, so we try to be as open as we can. Most often, he speaks through prayer as we open ourselves to his wisdom and persuasion. Often, that comes through our conscience, our gut, the changing of our minds. Sometimes he speaks through wise counsel, sometimes through scripture.

When I came back from Sabbatical last year, for a while I felt disorientated and went through quite a stressful period of self-doubt. I found it hard to settle to pray. But I know that's exactly the time when I need that sustaining rhythm. One morning somehow, instinctively I knew that something in the Bible readings for that day had something personally to

say to me. And there it was, leaping from a verse in Psalm 143; 'lead me on a level path'. Those words, written millennia ago, in another world, another context, I knew were for me in that moment. And they became my prayer as I began to reorientate and find my balance again.

As we step into a New Year, with all its promise and uncertainty, remember that we do not step alone. So, may God lead us on a level path, gifting us with courage, with curiosity and with gratitude. And may we know this, our God is not only with us, but ahead of us, waiting.

Blessing

May your eyes be opened to the wonder of the daily miracles around you and your sense of mystery be deepened.

May you be aware of the light that shines in the darkness and that the darkness can never put out.

May you be blessed with companions on the journey, friends who will listen to you and encourage you with their presence.

May you learn to live with what is unsolved in your heart, daring to face the questions and holding them until, one day, they perhaps find their answers.

May you find the still quiet place inside yourself where you can know and experience the peace that passes understanding.

May love flow in you and through you to those who need your care. And may you continue to dream dreams and to reach out into the future with a deeper understanding of God's way for you.

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LATIN LINK & ANGEL TREE CENTRE

Jenny Aitken brings us an update from Julie Noble in Oruro, Bolivia on life in the country and her work at the Angel Tree Centre.

Julie Noble is part of the Latin Link American mission. Latin Link is a charity registered in England and an international community with a calling to love and serve God and our neighbour. Most members of Latin Link work in Latin American countries while some work with Latin Americans in other parts of the world. Angel Tree Centre works with prisoners' children and families.



There has not been news of Julie for some time as she had extended leave earlier in 2025 and then a serious family matter brought her back to England for another protracted time. However, Julie is now back in Oruro and writes....

'I work mostly with young offenders and only visit the women's prison from time to time when I am told off by the ladies for not going there often enough.

Two weeks ago when I visited the prison, kiosks where the women sell food, have recently been moved to a place where the police have a clearer view of what is going on.

A group of people who entered the prison with me set themselves up purchasing hair from the prisoners. There was a stream of prisoners interested in selling plaits of various lengths.

I talked to the lady attending the toilet block. There is now a charge for using the outside toilet block and she is responsible for keeping it clean. Her son is currently in my victim empathy group at the young offender centre. She was arrested and subsequently imprisoned when she went to visit him as she had an outstanding warrant. People here

don't seem to realise that these details are kept on computers now.

I was able to catch up with mothers of ex-Angel Tree and current Angel Tree children, some discipleship participants and a couple of sisters on remand. The older one had twins to add to the four children she already had and who now are in children's homes in Oruro.



There are over twenty small children and babies in the prison at the moment. Three of them are due to be separated from their mums at the end of the year as they cannot stay in the prison once they are seven. Two of the mums seem to have good options for placing their children with family outside but the third

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has no idea what will happen to her child. One of the mums was told by the prison psychologist to give her daughter cuddly toys to take with her when she leaves and I was able to help providing those.

We asked the Prison Governor how we could pray for her. She said to pray for more opportunities for rehabilitation for the women and their successful

reintegration into society without reoffending.

As for the political situation in Bolivia – on 19th October 2025 Rodrigo Paz Pereira (Christian Democrat Party) was elected President and took power on 8th November. There has been no decision on the fixed boliviano-dollar exchange rate yet but the unofficial rate has fallen sharply since the new government came into office. The government's removal of the fuel subsidy a week before Christmas reduced demand but caused further price rises. There have been protests, marches, blockades and hunger strikes as petrol and diesel have nearly doubled in price. My travel plans over Christmas were severely curtailed by the petrol situation but happily I was able to spend time with friends over the festive season.'

Jenny Aitken

Facts about Bolivia

Population: 10 million

Area: 1,098,580 km.sq.

Climate: Tropical Jungle ('Oriente') to Cold Highlands ('Altiplano')

Capital: Sucre

Seat of Government: La Paz

Currency: Boliviano

People: 39% Quechua, 30% Mixed Race, 25% Aymara, 5% European Descent

Official Languages: Spanish, and all the languages of the indigenous nations and peoples

Religion: 94% Christian (12% Evangelical), 6% Other Faiths/None

The very first Valentine card - a legend

The Roman Emperor Claudius II needed soldiers. He suspected that marriage made men want to stay at home instead of fighting wars, so he outlawed marriage.

A kind-hearted young priest named Valentine felt sorry for all the couples who wanted to marry, but couldn't. So, secretly, he married as many couples as he could - until the Emperor found out and condemned him to death. While he was in prison awaiting execution, Valentine showed love and compassion to everyone around him, including his jailer. The jailer had a young daughter who was blind, but through Valentine's prayers, she was healed. Just before his death in Rome on 14 February, he wrote her a farewell message signed 'From your Valentine.'

So the very first Valentine card was not between lovers, but between a priest about to die, and a little girl, healed through his prayers.

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Services at St Andrew's

February 2026



To attend a Zoom service please email the Parish Office at:- standrew.hertford@btinternet.com

	Date	Time	Service	Celebrant	Preacher
SUNDAY <i>Epiphany 4</i>	1	8.00 am	Holy Communion (BCP)	Rev Alan Stewart	
		10.30 am	Parish Communion	Rev Alan Stewart	
		10.30 am	Morning Service on Zoom	Kath Oates	Rev Alan Stewart
		7.00 pm	Soul Sunday worship in St Andrew's Centre	Rev Alan Stewart	
Monday	2	8.00 am	Morning Prayer (Common Worship)		
Wednesday	4	10.30 am	Holy Communion (Traditional)	Rev Alan Stewart	
Thursday	5	8.00 am	Morning Prayer (BCP)		
SUNDAY <i>2nd Before Lent</i>	8	8.00 am	Holy Communion (BCP)	Rev Scott Martin	
		10.30 am	All Age Service	Rev Alan Stewart	
		10.30 am	Morning Service on Zoom	Nick Hoyle	HeartEdge Sermon
		7.00 pm	Compline on Zoom		
Monday	9	8.00 am	Morning Prayer (Common Worship)		
Wednesday	11	10.30 am	Holy Communion (Traditional)	Rev Bill Church	
Thursday	12	8.00 am	Morning Prayer (BCP)		
		10.30 am	Calton Court Communion Service	Rev Bill Church	
SUNDAY <i>Next before Lent</i>	15	8.00 am	Holy Communion (BCP)	Rev Bill Church	
		10.30 am	Parish Communion	Rev Alan Stewart	Forbes Mutch
		10.30 am	Morning Service on Zoom	Kath Oates	Forbes Mutch
		7.00 pm	Compline on Zoom	Rev Alan Stewart	
Monday	16	8.00 am	Morning Prayer (Common Worship)		
Wednesday	18	10.30 am	Holy Communion (Traditional)	Rev Scott Martin	
<i>Ash Wednesday</i>		8.00 pm	Holy Communion + Imposition of Ashes	Rev Alan Stewart	Rev Scott Martin
Thursday	19	8.00 am	Morning Prayer (BCP)		
SUNDAY <i>Lent 1</i>	22	8.00 am	Holy Communion (BCP)	Rev Alan Stewart	
		10.30 am	Parish Communion	Rev Scott Martin	Rev Alan Stewart
		10.30 am	Morning Service on Zoom	Nick Hoyle	Rev Alan Stewart
		6.30 pm	Evening Prayer St Mary's Hertingfordbury	Rev Bill Church	
		7.00 pm	Compline on Zoom	Rev Alan Stewart	
Monday	23	8.00 am	Morning Prayer (Common Worship)		
Wednesday	25	10.30 am	Holy Communion (Traditional)	Rev Alan Stewart	
Thursday	26	8.00 am	Morning Prayer (BCP)		
		10.30 am	Calton Court Communion Service	Rev Bill Church	