

21st December 2025 – 10th January CHRISTMAS & EPIPHANY – NEWSLETTER

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government will be upon His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9:6)

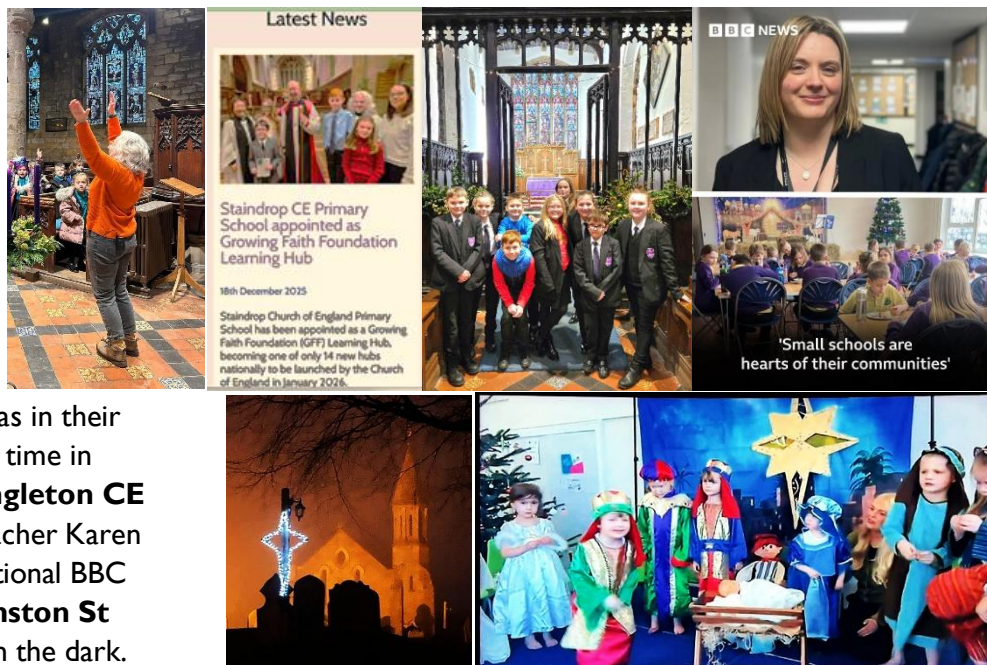
Dear friends,

‘It’s Christmas time the angels sang!’ This is my Christmas and Epiphany Newsletter to all of you: parishioners and your families; congregations; schools; Youth Saints; leaders and ministers; friends near and afar. **A heartfelt and big thank you to everyone on our teams in Gainford, Ingleton, Staindrop, Winston, and GATHER:** officers and members of each PCC; GATHER’s Leads; Open the Book, Youth Saints, Schools. As we end this calendar year and enter 2026, we journey with the wise men who kept their sights on the star – that heaven-sent light that took them to Jesus, the Light of the World. They were rewarded with their epiphany, recognising God revealed in his birth in human life. As they bowed down in worship, they rejoiced. Then they also heard and trusted God’s call to return to their distant lands by another way. **How would you be changed again this Christmas and come upon a new epiphany** as you look upon Jesus at Christmas and journey with him into the new year? I’ve given you Isaiah 9:6 above. But read Isaiah 9.5. It is more descriptive of the state of the world today, so the Christmas message is God’s invitation for us to look to him for the world’s salvation and for lasting peace regardless of human circumstances.

God has blessed us this

year: The Bishops’ Advisers Panel has recommended **Sarah Fells** to proceed as a full Ordinand-in-Training! **Staindrop CE Primary School’s** award as a Growing Faith Foundation Learning Hub is announced by the Diocese; **Staindrop**

Academy celebrated Christmas in their church at a service for the first time in decades; and **Gainford and Ingleton CE Primary** Schools with headteacher Karen Whitaker were featured on national BBC News! And have you seen **Winston St Andrew’s Star?** Such a light in the dark.



And here is a **YouTube link of our Christmas Greetings** in a short video with the music of Ingleton Primary School children’s singing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5TghBZqZ4Hk>

Our churches have a page on the Church of England’s A CHURCH NEAR YOU website. I found this promotional video rather

compelling: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VGoEvgAIK20> Thanks to Peter Dransfield for these.



Services on the 4th Sunday of ADVENT

9.15am	Staindrop St Mary	Service of the Word	Worship Group with Peter Craig
9.30am	Winston St Andrew	Holy Communion	Rev’d Canon Eileen Harrop; Sarah Fells preaching
10.45am	Gainford St Mary	Holy Communion	Rev’d Canon Eileen Harrop; Sarah Fells preaching
6pm	Churches Together	Carol Service in Gainford St Mary Fr Thomas & Revd Canon Eileen leading	

Services for Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, 28th December, and 4th January - next page.

Brian and I, and on behalf of our ministers and leaders of our 4 parishes and GATHER, wish you God’s blessings of Christmas love, joy, and peace.

Rev’d Canon Eileen Harrop



GAINFORD PARISHIONERS: Have you noticed our **CHURCHES TOGETHER CHRISTMAS CARD** in the centrefold of the **FOCUS** magazine? The picture is the beautiful specially commissioned Christmas painting by Christine Ruhstorfer of St Osmund's Church and if you pull the card out from the magazine, it stands like a card!

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS also come from our recent Curate **REV'D MOJI JAIYESIMI**, who sends her warmest wishes from St Mary's Church in Cockerton, Darlington, where she is now their Associate Priest; and from our recent Ordinand **REV'D CLAIRE MEAD** now Curate in a group of churches in Hartlepool.

Services on 24th December, Christmas Eve

11am	Ingleton St John	Christmas Communion	Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop; Peter Craig preaching
4pm	Gainford St Mary	Crib Service	Sarah Fells and Family Team
7pm	Winston St Andrew	Carols by Candlelight	Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop
11.30pm	Staindrop St Mary	Midnight Christmas Communion	Rev'd Ian Gomersall
11.30pm	Gainford St Mary	1 st Communion of Christmas	Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop; Peter Craig preaching

Services on 25th December, Christmas Day

9.30am	Winston St Andrew	Christmas Communion	Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop
10am	Staindrop St Mary	Christmas Service of the Word	Worship Group with Sarah Fells
10.45am	Gainford St Mary	Christmas Communion	Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop

Services on 28th December, 1st Sunday of Christmas

9.15am	Staindrop St Mary	Holy Communion	Rev'd David Spokes
9.30am	Winston St Andrew	Holy Communion	Rev'd Ian Gomersall
10.45am	Gainford St Mary	Holy Communion	Rev'd David Spokes
11am	Ingleton St John	St John's Patronal Communion	Rev'd Ian Gomersall

Services on 4th January 2026, 2nd Sunday of Christmas

9.15am	Staindrop St Mary	Service of the Word	Worship Group with Peter Craig preaching
9.30am	Winston St Andrew	Service of the Word	Lay Leaders
10.45am	Gainford St Mary	Holy Communion	Lay Leaders with Peter Craig preaching

The Feast of The Epiphany will be celebrated on Sunday 11th January 2026

NOTICES:

Please pray for:

† **RYAN & ABBEY BURKE** who were married on 18th December and whose marriage was blessed at Gainford St Mary's Church on 19th December 2025.

† **The family of the late June Tallentire of Gainford**, whose funeral service will be at Gainford St Mary's on Monday 22nd December 11am and therefore for burial in the cemetery.

The Vicarage telephone landline is down. Please use my mobile number 07976676098 if you need to get in touch by phone. Thanks.

Rev'd Canon Eileen Harrop

COLLECT for the 4th of ADVENT

God our redeemer,
who prepared the Blessed Virgin Mary
to be the mother of your Son:
grant that, as she looked for his coming as our
saviour,
so we may be ready to greet him
when he comes again as our judge;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen

COLLECT for CHRISTMAS DAY

Almighty God,
you have given us your only-begotten Son
to take our nature upon him
and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin:
grant that we, who have been born again
and made your children by adoption and grace,
may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen

COLLECT for the 1st of Christmas

Almighty God,
who wonderfully created us in your own image
and yet more wonderfully restored us
through your Son Jesus Christ:
grant that, as he came to share in our humanity,
so we may share the life of his divinity;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen

COLLECT for 2nd of Christmas

Almighty God,
in the birth of your Son
you have poured on us the new light of your
incarnate Word,
and shown us the fullness of your love:
help us to walk in his light and dwell in his love
that we may know the fullness of his joy;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen

POST-COMMUNION PRAYER

Heavenly Father,
who chose the Blessed Virgin Mary
to be the mother of the promised saviour:
fill us your servants with your grace,
that in all things we may embrace your holy
will
and with her rejoice in your salvation;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

POST-COMMUNION PRAYER

God our Father,
whose Word has come among us
in the Holy Child of Bethlehem:
may the light of faith illumine our hearts
and shine in our words and deeds;
through him who is Christ the Lord. Amen

POST-COMMUNION PRAYER

Heavenly Father,
whose blessed Son shared at Nazareth the
life of an earthly home:
help your Church to live as one family,
united in love and obedience,
and bring us all at last to our home in
heaven;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

POST-COMMUNION PRAYER

All praise to you,
almighty God and heavenly king,
who sent your Son into the world
to take our nature upon him
and to be born of a pure virgin:
grant that, as we are born again in him,
so he may continually dwell in us
and reign on earth as he reigns in heaven,
now and for ever. Amen

First Reading (21st December): Isaiah 7:10-16

¹⁰ Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying, ¹¹ Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. ¹² But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test. ¹³ Then Isaiah said: 'Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. ¹⁵ He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶ For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.

The Gospel (21st December): Matthew 1:18-25

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' ²² All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

²³ 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel', which means, 'God is with us.' ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

First Reading (24th December – 1st Eucharist of Christmas): Isaiah 52:7-10

⁷ How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of the messenger who announces
peace,
who brings good news,
who announces salvation,
who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'
⁸ Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices,
together they sing for joy;
for in plain sight they see

the return of the Lord to Zion.
⁹ Break forth together into singing,
you ruins of Jerusalem;
for the Lord has comforted his people,
he has redeemed Jerusalem.
¹⁰ The Lord has bared his holy arm
before the eyes of all the nations;
and all the ends of the earth shall see
the salvation of our God.

The Gospel (24th December – 1st Eucharist of Christmas): John 1:1-14

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

First Reading (25th December – Christmas Day): Isaiah 9:2-7

² The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.

³ You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,

as people exult when dividing plunder.
4 For the yoke of their burden,
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
5 For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.
6 For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;

and he is named
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
7 His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onwards and for evermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

The Gospel (25th December Christmas Day): Luke 2:1-14

1 In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 All went to their own towns to be registered. 4 Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5 He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

8 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

14 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'

First Reading (28th December – 1st Sunday of Christmas): Isaiah 63:7-9

7 I will recount the gracious deeds of the Lord,
the praiseworthy acts of the Lord,
because of all that the Lord has done for us,
and the great favour to the house of Israel
that he has shown them according to his mercy,
according to the abundance of his steadfast
love.

8 For he said, 'Surely they are my people,

children who will not deal falsely';
and he became their saviour
9 in all their distress.
It was no messenger or angel
but his presence that saved them;
in his love and in his pity he redeemed them;
he lifted them up and carried them all the days
of old.

The Gospel (28th December – 1st Sunday of Christmas): Matthew 2:13-23

13 Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.' 14 Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, 15 and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I have called my son.'

16 When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. 17 Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

18 'A voice was heard in Ramah,
wailing and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.'

¹⁹ When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ²⁰ 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead.' ²¹ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. ²³ There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, 'He will be called a Nazorean.'

⁶ There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸ He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

First Reading (4th January 2026 – 2nd Sunday of Christmas): Jeremiah 31:7-14

⁷ For thus says the Lord:

Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,
and raise shouts for the chief of the nations;
proclaim, give praise, and say,
'Save, O Lord, your people,
the remnant of Israel.'

⁸ See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north,
and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,
among them the blind and the lame,
those with child and those in labour, together;
a great company, they shall return here.

⁹ With weeping they shall come,
and with consolations I will lead them back,
I will let them walk by brooks of water,
in a straight path in which they shall not stumble;
for I have become a father to Israel,
and Ephraim is my firstborn.

¹⁰ Hear the word of the Lord, O nations,
and declare it in the coastlands far away;

say, 'He who scattered Israel will gather him,
and will keep him as a shepherd a flock.'

¹¹ For the Lord has ransomed Jacob,
and has redeemed him from hands too strong
for him.

¹² They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion,
and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord,
over the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and over the young of the flock and the herd;
their life shall become like a watered garden,
and they shall never languish again.

¹³ Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance,
and the young men and the old shall be merry.
I will turn their mourning into joy,
I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.

¹⁴ I will give the priests their fill of fatness,
and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty,
says the Lord.

The Gospel (4th January 2026 – 2nd Sunday of Christmas): John 1:10-18

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John testified to him and cried out, 'This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me."') ¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.