**29th December 2024**

**Call to worship**

We gather here,
young and old,
wise and questioning,
fearful and joyful,
full of doubt and full of hope.
Let us put our trust in God,
Christ-child and heavenly king,
as we gather to worship,
to learn and grow as God’s people.

**A gathering prayer**

God of the old and the new,
**be with us.**
God of the past and the way ahead,
**be with us.**
God of need and of plenty,
**be with us.**
As the year turns,
**we look back with thanks,**
**we step out in hope,**
**we put our trust in you. Amen.**

**A prayer of approach**

God of all time,
Christmas is over but our journey has just begun.
We have offered our carols but have songs yet to be sung.
We have wisdom to learn, and truths to discern –
so much learning and growing to do!
As we gather today to worship and pray,
we rejoice that our teacher is you. **Amen.**

**A prayer of adoration**

God of all wisdom, for your Word that inspires and instructs us:
**we praise you!**
For the life of your Son, who helps us to grow in faith and holiness:
**we praise you!**
For the knowledge that as one year ends and another draws near, you are with us:
**we praise you!**
For all the blessings of life:
**we praise you!**
In the name of Jesus and in the power of the Spirit:
**we praise you! Amen.**

**A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness**

**A prayer of confession**

Living God, we are sorry for times when we are stubborn and refuse to learn new lessons;
**in your strength we will begin again.**
We are sorry for being slow to learn from our mistakes;
**in your strength we will begin again.**
We are sorry when our successes make us complacent, not wise;
**in your strength we will begin again.**
We are sorry when we look for you in the wrong places and fail to grow in understanding;
**in your strength we will begin again.**
In Jesus’ name. **Amen.**

**Assurance of forgiveness**

Eternal God,
as a new year beckons, may your truth and wisdom
fill and equip us for all that lies ahead,
that we may grow stronger and wiser
and reflect the love of our Saviour Jesus Christ
in all we say and do. **Amen.**

**A prayer of praise and thanksgiving**

Faithful God,
we thank you that: as your blessing was upon the child Jesus,
**so it is upon us.**
As you prepared and equipped him for his ministry,
**so you prepare and equip us.**
As you guided him through his life,
**so you will guide us.**
As your love shone through him,
**so it can shine through us,**
this Christmas-tide, this new year and always. **Amen.**

The 12-year-old Jesus and his parents visit Jerusalem for the Passover festival. On the return journey to Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph realise that Jesus is missing. After a frantic three-day search, they find him in the Temple, sitting at the feet of the teachers, asking questions and astounding all with his understanding.

Continuing to celebrate the birth of Jesus, we remember people and events that inspire us. We also look ahead to the new year and think about our spiritual goals for 2025.

**Open Mic about Christmas**

* We often hear it said that Christmas is for the children. When we ask children what they are looking forward to most about Christmas, presents, Santa, school holidays, parties, and pantomimes may feature heavily. As we and our families grow older, we might miss our child-centred Christmases. Some adults experience a sense of nostalgia, and even loss, as they reflect on all the best things about childhood, especially Christmas celebrations. Yet Christmas is for adults too. **Which aspect of Christmas just gone do we want to hang on to as we go into a new year?**
* Did anyone wear a Christmas jumper or pyjamas over the festive season? Maybe even festive earrings? We may have worn them on the last day at school before the holidays, at Christmas parties and family gatherings, and even in church. But we won’t be wearing them in the new year. Come 27 December, they are usually packed away for another year. Who knows if they will still fit when we get them out again? Celebrating the birth of Jesus is like putting on new clothes, but something more lasting than party attire: compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness, love (Colossians 3:12-14). **What will help us to grow into these clothes, rather than out of them, in the coming year?**
* **Prepare a pile of 10-30 t-shirts in different sizes from SM through to XXL. Has anyone tried the**[**100 t-shirt challenge**](https://youtube.com/shorts/ZqPNbFNg3KA?si=am3iRVj2_bd-W7Ha) or seen the [video](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-3843978/Don-t-ll-die-Teen-left-distraught-completes-100-layers-clothing-challenge-t-OFF.html) of the teenager unable to remove her 100 layers? ***Ask a volunteer to have a go – how many t-shirts can they put on during the talk? All today’s readings are about growth.***

**Luke 2:41-52**

This is the only account in the Gospels of an incident from the childhood of Jesus. His family are as close as they are devout. Like Samuel’s, they make their annual Passover pilgrimage to the Temple shrine, travelling with relatives and friends in what is perhaps the nearest they get to an annual holiday. Mary and Joseph notice that Jesus is missing from their party on the way home from Jerusalem. They are astonished to find him in the Temple, and the teachers are also amazed by Jesus’ questions and answers (vv.47-48). Curious and quick to learn, he is now at home in his heavenly Father’s house.

We shouldn’t see Jesus here as a stroppy almost-teenager, making a bid for independence and freedom. That would be to place him in our world. Jewish boys of his age would be moving from the security of home, family and village into the uncertainties of the public world. His mother wouldn’t have been much older when she travelled south from Nazareth in Galilee to stay with Zechariah and Elizabeth in Judea. There is every reason to believe that Joseph and Mary have been good enough parents to bring Jesus to this moment, and that they continue to nurture his growth and maturity (v.52). But they too have a lot to learn. Though he returns obediently to their household, life there will never be the same. Jesus is starting to prepare for all that his heavenly Father’s house symbolises. Twenty years on from this incident, his conversations with the Temple authorities will take a more sinister turn, as curiosity turns into the kind of questioning that eventually brings about his execution.

**Watch the clip from the Chosen**

Relate with Jesus’ experience aged 12

**You will need**: [*The Chosen* Season 1 Episode 5](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NqgnUec_tZQ) and the means to play it.

* Watch 12-year-old Jesus in Jerusalem as envisaged by the creators of The Chosen Season 1 Episode 5.
* Encourage the young people to try and connect with the boy Jesus by asking some of the following questions, as appropriate to your group:
– **Have you ever been lost/wandered off in a busy place? What happened?**– What questions would you like to ask the top leaders of the church if you could?
– **What stresses out your parents that you’re not bothered about?**
* What does (might) it feel like to be 12 years old? What pressures do you experience? How do you unwind? How might Jesus have felt aged 12?
* **What do you think Jesus did between ages 12-30 to grow in wisdom and faith**? What might his everyday life have been like?

**A glimpse of God           E S**

Consider the childhood experience of Jesus

* We see lots of images of Jesus as a baby or aged 30-33, but can the children imagine what Jesus might have looked and been like as a child or teenager? Encourage them all by saying that Jesus probably enjoyed similar kinds of activities (or their first-century equivalents!).
* Then talk about what Jesus means when he says: ‘Didn’t you know that I would be in my Father’s house?’ Talk together about the special nature of Jesus.
* Explain that this passage reveals who Jesus really was – we see how puzzling this is for his parents, but Jesus keeps learning and growing, pleasing both God and the people around him.

**Growing up                 S**

Think about the coming year as an opportunity for growth

**You will need**: **height chart or cupboard door, pen.**

* Use a height chart to measure all the members of the group, marking it on the chart. (Or use the inside of a cupboard door or similar and date them).
* Ask the children how tall they think they will be a year from now. Agree to come back in a year’s time and mark how tall they are then.
* Ask: **How would you like to grow in faith this year? What things could you do to help you develop in your relationship with God?**
* Like Jesus and Samuel, we can grow in faith. But it takes study, learning and practice.

**Colossians 3:12-17**

Colossians is written to a church whose confidence in Christ is being tested by the range of spiritualities on offer from the pluralistic Greco-Roman world. The letter’s message centres on Christ as God’s supreme revelation (Colossians 1:15-20), with believers sharing his hidden heavenly life through the faith of their baptism (3:1-4). This passage summarises the life of the baptized community, whose members are clothed during the drama of baptism to symbolise their calling to make visible the characteristics of Christ, especially love. Baptismal clothing is to be worn in a one-off ritual but also, metaphorically, in daily life (vv.12,14), as believers learn what it means to grow in Christlikeness. Baptismal living is corporate. It nurtures the attitudes and actions that hold people together – inwardly in the confidence that comes from God’s forgiveness, and outwardly in the practice of mercy and compassion. The ‘word of Christ’ (v.16) – the story of God’s coming among us in Jesus – plays an important part in the growth of Christian wisdom and maturity, as it shapes worship and spreads into ‘whatever you do’ (v.17), not least through the spirit of thanksgiving (mentioned three times in vv.15-17).

* In the reading from Colossians, Paul talks about clothing ourselves in the qualities of God and, above all, love. What does it mean to be clothed in these qualities? We don’t actually ‘wear’ love, but can we make a choice to be loving in the way we treat others? How many t-shirts did the volunteer manage to put on? Putting on the t-shirts all at once is impossible, as is trying to learn everything we need to know for our spiritual growth. Can you commit to work on one area as a New Year resolution?
* In our Gospel reading, we see the 12-year-old Jesus questioning and discussing the things of God with his teachers. How old do you need to be to be a teacher? Perhaps not as old as we think. Which young teachers and leaders do we find inspiring? (Invite/ share examples of children/young people showing special skills or leadership, e.g. Malala Yousafzai, a [young Chris Packham](https://www.chrispackham.co.uk/chris-packhams-biography) or see websites below.) What qualities do they share? Jesus started to develop their special skills when they were young and continued to grow and learn. What helps us to grow spiritually?

**Questions for God              W E A**

Discover more about faith through prayer

**You will need**: paper or sticky notes and pens.

* Explain to the children that Jesus asked some big questions when he was in the Temple.
* Ask the children to think about any questions they have and explain that God welcomes our questions, big and small.
* Invite the children to write their questions on the paper or on the sticky notes. Gather them together and pray over them, giving the children the opportunity to discuss these as they wish, now or at a later stage.

[10 Young People Who Changed the World](https://www.waterford.org/education/kids-who-changed-the-world/)
[9 young leaders making a difference for children worldwide](https://www.voicesofyouth.org/blog/world-childrens-day-9-young-leaders-making-difference-children-worldwide)

**Thought for the week**

**Read out in place of a sermon if you wish**

*Use a snow-globe or glitter-jar to illustrate this talk.*

How old do you have to be to be a teacher? Normally, in the UK, you need to have a degree, although a [new undergraduate teaching apprenticeship](https://getintoteaching.education.gov.uk/train-to-be-a-teacher/teacher-degree-apprenticeships) could change that. But of course, formal education is not the only place we learn. Today our readings remind us that children and young people can also be teachers, ministers and leaders.

Isaiah 11:6 says, ‘A little child shall lead them’. This passage is talking about when the Saviour comes to bring God’s kingdom. It’s talking about the coming of the Christ child, the Christmas child. When God’s kingdom fully comes, Isaiah says, there will be peace instead of violence; the powerful will not harm the powerless; a vulnerable child will be safe.

It’s not really a prophecy about a child king or prime minister; although perhaps it could help make a case for a return of the old tradition of appointing ‘Boy Bishops’ on St Nicholas Day, 6 December. Chosen from one of the choirboys, he would undertake bishop’s duties until 28 December, from wearing bishop’s robes, leading services and collecting donations to even preaching a sermon! (This [tradition was actually revived](https://www.archbishopofyork.org/news/latest-news/archbishop-york-unseated-chorister-bishop-just-one-day) in 2022 in York, with the Archbishop of York being ‘unseated’ by a chorister for a day!

Most churches don’t elect boy bishops any more, but there are young people who inspire and lead us. Which young people have inspired you? Malala Yousafzai comes to mind, the teenager from Pakistan who was shot by a Taliban gunman for attending school as a girl. She became a global advocate for women’s right to education, and the youngest ever Nobel Peace Prize winner. Then there’s Greta Thunberg, the young Swedish activist who started the school strike for climate change and challenged world leaders at the United Nations climate summit to turn words into action, raising global awareness of climate change, especially among young people.

The Colossians reading lists some of the qualities of a follower of Jesus – meekness and patience might not be what we associate with such passionate young women! But we do see their wisdom, and the love and compassion for our world and everyone in it, that leads them to act for change.

The naturalist and conservationist Chris Packham is another leader who started young. Like Greta, he is autistic with a diagnosis of Asperger’s, and has experienced bullying and unhappiness growing up. His passion for nature started early, filling jam jars with collections of bugs and tadpoles. His autobiography, [*Fingers in the sparkle jar*](https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/433031/fingers-in-the-sparkle-jar-by-chris-packham/9781785033506), refers to the glitter of fish as he swirls them in a jar of pond water. Like Julian of Norwich writing of seeing all creation in a hazelnut, he sees *‘the essence pure and simple of beautiful life*’ in the sparkling, whirling water. Is this the wisdom that all our readings today speak of?

**In our other readings today, Jesus who, through his answers to the teachers at the synagogue, already showed an amazing understanding. These are stories of all ages learning and growing together, which can inspire us to do the same. We learn from Jesus that listening and asking questions are important ways to learn, something we can practise at any age. Children are naturally curious and often ask the questions we are afraid to ask.**

**Luke 2:51 tells us that Mary treasured these precious memories of Jesus in her heart. As we look back on the past year, which sparkling moments do we want to treasure and remember? It may be a person that inspired us, an event that uplifted us, or just an everyday act of kindness. As we continue to celebrate the birth of the Christ child, let’s be especially mindful of children and young people who have touched our lives this year.**

**Spiritual growth chart                W E S**

**Helping our spiritual growth**

**You will need**: copies of the [spiritual growth chart](https://www.rootsontheweb.com/media/27534/aaa-spiritual-growth-chart-29-dec.pdf); pens.

* Hand out copies of the spiritual growth chart; you could also prepare a large one to display as an example. These can help us to plan and practise ways to grow spiritually in the coming year.
* Invite people to help each other to complete them in small groups; families, couples, small groups might like to complete one together. Share a few examples. Invite suggestions for one area you might all do together as a church, as your New Year’s resolution.

 **Write resolution              W A**

Take steps to grow in faith

**You will need**: A5 paper, pens and envelopes.

Discuss making New Year resolutions that take steps forward in faith.

Encourage brave decisions involving:

* learning something new and stretching faith;
* keeping a prayer journal;
* planning a charity event,
* or an initiative for the year like Eco Church or Fairtrade Church.

Ask individuals to write their resolution(s) on two pieces of paper – one they take home, the other they should put in a self-addressed envelope for you to post at the end of January, as a reminder.

**Thanks in advance            W E A**

Give thanks to God for people who help us grow

**You will need**: blank thank you cards or blank folded cards, pens.

* Think of people who will help you to develop in the coming year (parents, teachers, grandparents, group leaders, team coaches).
* Write a card to one or more of these, thanking them in advance for all they will do this coming year. Quietly say a prayer of thanks for each person as you do this. Take the cards away to give to these people.

**Prayers of intercession**

Heavenly Father, as we continue the festive season and New Year looms before us, we remember those who find this time difficult. We pray for those feeling the ache of bittersweet memories, as we think about the story of Jesus as a boy staying behind in the Temple; how it must have pierced Mary’s heart to recall this in later years, to realise that this was the turning point of her boy growing up to fulfill his destiny.

**Be with us, O Lord, in the passing of the years.**

We pray for all those who have suffered bereavement this year, for whom the pain is still raw; and we pray for all of us who remember loved ones gone from us in past years, as we mark yet another year from their passing. Help us to be grateful for the good times we shared, and to rejoice in the knowledge that we will meet again.

**Be with us, O Lord, in the passing of the years.**

Father, we pray for all who enter 2025 with health issues, physical or mental. New Year is a time when worries become concentrated and overwhelming in the darkness of midwinter. May the light of Christ and the warmth of God’s love surround them at the threshold of the new year.

**Be with us, O Lord, in the passing of the years.**

Lord, we pray for your Church in challenging times. May leaders discern the way forward, the best way to present and live our faith in the year to come; and may we all discern how we might do our best, however humble, to help and support the Church’s efforts. We pray that this will stem from our own spiritual seeking, as we continue to learn and grow in knowledge of you in 2025. We pray for the community that surrounds us, for people of all faiths and none; that we might live in peace, Lord, loving our neighbours and mindful of one another’s needs.

**Be with us, O Lord, in the passing of the years.**

Heavenly Father, we pray for a world which seems to face greater uncertainties than ever before. We hold in our hearts the victims of conflicts and climate change; those who have lost loved ones in fighting or floods, wildfires or droughts. We pray for the dispossessed, who have lost homes and livelihoods to missiles or storms. We pray for all who travel in search of refuge and a new beginning, as the Holy Family did to keep Jesus safe.

**Be with us, O Lord, in the passing of the years.**

Last but not least, Father, we pray for visitations of happy memories at this time. May the faces of those who uplift and inspire us make us smile and give us hope for the future. May the lengthening of days increase our energy so that we enter the new year with plans and projects. May the joy of this season of our Lord’s birth stir in us a desire for spiritual renewal and rebirth, and growing strength to face the future in faith and hopefulness.

**Be with us, O Lord, in the passing of the years.**

**Amen**

**A sending out prayer**

Word of Wisdom,
as you have taught us,
**may we share your Word with others.**
Sparkling Light,
as you have shone on us,
**may we shine your light to others.**
Precious Love,
as you have grown in us,
**may we show your love to others. Amen.**