

**PARISH OF SOUTHMINSTER  
MAGAZINE OF THE  
CHURCH OF ST LEONARD**



and also for Steeple Parish

**The Church of  
St Lawrence & All Saints**



Remember last year!

**DECEMBER 2025**

Mary's response: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

Luke 1: 38

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To cover our costs we have to charge for this magazine. The charge per issue is £1 but if you pay for the whole year in advance the charge will be £10 - (obviously a bit saved!)

If you receive this printed version please tell your deliverer whether you want to continue from January 2026.

**NOTE FROM THE EDITOR:**  
*Articles for the January magazine should be with Kath Dunstan by, at the latest, Sunday 14th December*  
*New contributors are welcome.*

## Norman Pratt's December Reflections

Christmas is coming! Mercifully it's coming at a decent pace, one day at a time. Now we're in Advent it will come at a more stately pace, one week at a time.

I don't think I'm alone in thinking that generally speaking everything else in life appears to be going too fast - everything from vehicles to supermarket self check-outs to how often my computer needs new settings. By the time we get a newspaper its news is out of date. Events rushed on to the television or smartphone make the newspaper look like an ancient document.

Nor is the news, when we get it, pleasant reading. Perhaps for Baby Boomers and Generation X, ironically, the end of the Cold War in the 1990's marked the end of normality, and the Two Towers attack signalled a new and more chaotic world. Thankfully the BBC valiantly presents feel-good stories interspersed with the inevitable horrors of Gaza and Ukraine, but there is no getting away from our country's politics appearing to be degenerating into continual chaos.

And things happen fast. This is particularly true of the impact of Artificial Intelligence, or AI. One of the reasons young people are finding it difficult to get their first job is that AI has beaten them to it. AI is even beginning to take over the music industry from musicians. One estimate suggests that AI has halved the number of novelists.

It is probably too late to stop AI, because we are too dependent on it for essential services. But it is not too late to regulate AI, so that on the Internet upsetting material is decently locked out of instant access, and harmful material is kept to a minimum.

A related problem is the decline of reading. Only about a third of young people now read for pleasure. Many can't count, reasoning that they can use the calculator on their phone, so there is no point remembering those Times Tables!

As we, or some of us, become increasingly skilled at using our Smartphones to help us live out our lives, we are in danger of losing some of the skills that served our great grandparents and now ourselves very well. Generations before that knew how to grow their own food. One skill humans learned about 1700 years ago was silent reading. We even know the name of the man who first taught himself that particular skill - Ambrose. Before him a small percentage of people could read, but only out loud!

People all over the world are probably better informed now than they have ever been. This is largely thanks to the development of television and more recently smartphones. Unfortunately much of the information we receive is designed to entertain us - so that we are forced to look at the adverts! Some of the adverts of course provide useful information. But to find out particular information that we are searching for can be difficult.

I recently came across a story on Youtube that I was so pleased about that I left a comment recording my satisfaction. Another viewer immediately wrote back to me saying he simply didn't believe the story - and 'AI and searching the Internet' had failed to find the story anywhere else!

As it happened, I hadn't believed it myself to begin with. So I'd checked it up by searching for a reliable newspaper which might have run the story. Sure enough, 'The Independent' had run the story about a week earlier. The viewer who wrote to me had simply trusted in AI and Google to make sense of what is going on in the world. Unfortunately learning to search the Internet for information should have been on the school curriculum,<sup>4</sup> but generally speaking it hasn't been.

The actual story was, as it happens, a very important one. You might have stumbled across it on a newsfeed on Facebook, but otherwise it was only 'The Independent' that picked it up. It was that 'The Vatican has clarified the Virgin Mary's role in the Catholic Church, stating that she did not help Jesus to save the world from damnation'.

This is a massive change in Roman Catholic teaching. For hundreds of years they have encouraged the tradition that we are saved through Jesus **and** Jesus' mother Mary. The Church of England, and Protestants generally, believe we are saved through Jesus Christ alone. And it's not just words, as anyone with a Catholic friend or has been to a Catholic country will know.

Fairly recently I attended a Catholic Mass for the first time in my life, and the words in the service were mostly identical to the ones we use in our Anglican Communion Service - except for a reference to the saving power of Jesus **and** Mary. So now the Catholic Church has discarded this tradition. It now follows the teaching of the Bible on this - that it is Jesus alone who saves us from our sins.

So as we approach Christmas let's remember Mary's response to the angel's request for her to be part of God's plan: 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word'. To be one of us, Jesus had to be born like one of us, and for a while to be totally dependent on other human beings. He would develop a brain with a finite number of neurons, just like us. He too would have to work hard to develop skills - in his case to become a builder and joiner. He would also have to learn Scripture off by heart which was the only way possible where you don't have universal literacy and printed Bibles. And like us he would have had to learn how to apply it.

As we await his second coming, a happy Christmas to you all!

# Staying Afloat

by Brenda Sheppard

For many of us this time of year can be really exciting can't it, with buying gifts, sending cards and decorating homes, but on the other hand it is a time for some of financial difficulties and it's hard to even keep their heads above water. It almost feels as if they are drowning in debt with the extra expense.

With overwhelming problems, it can, for some, lead to depression which can feel like drowning.

Depression can be overwhelming and isolating and many people describe it as struggling to "stay afloat" and look for ways to drown their sorrows and hope someone or something happens to throw them a lifebelt.



We read in Mark chapter 4 the story of Jesus calming the storm. He and his disciples were in a boat crossing from the region of Galilee to another region across the water. A furious squall came up and waves broke over the boat so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was asleep in the stern and the disciples woke him and said "Don't you care if we drown?" Jesus then rebuked the wind and waves and all went calm. He said to His disciples "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

It sometimes feels, doesn't it, that we wonder where Jesus is when things get really tough. Like the disciples, our faith is really tested at times, and we wonder if Jesus really cares if we drown!

But we do know that The Good News is that Jesus came to be our lifesaver, He throws us a lifebelt! This Christmas time we look for the coming of our Messiah, our Liberator, Rescuer, Redeemer and Saviour. He came to save us from our sinful self. He came to help us see a new way forward and we can do that by opening our hearts to Him and asking Him into our lives to help us stay afloat.



The only way to keep our heads above water is to convince ourselves we are going to make it. We need to trust that Jesus is near and He really does care, and help comes often in unexpected ways. So, let's be vigilant and call out to him in our storms of life and Jesus tells us in Luke 11 v 9-10 "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks the door will be opened."

Let us amidst all the clamour and preparations that Christmas can bring remember that the greatest gift we can receive is Jesus into our hearts and it is entirely free and we are truly indebted to Him for His ultimate sacrifice for us.

## **Happy Christmas!**

Lots of books are available on the shelves at the back of church for you to borrow and enjoy, and then - of course - return. If you have books that you don't need any more, speak with Christine Lucas about donating them to church.

## **We are the Church..... But what does that mean?**

We're not just gathering every Sunday for worship, although that is important, we have other roles to play in our lives: Worship, Prayer, and being the Good news by our words and actions (*See our mission statement on the back page*)

How can we do this? Obviously prayer enables us to understand what God is asking us to do. Challenges of being actively involved in community events need His help, but His presence with us removes fear and strengthens us. Often we are questioned about why we serve the community in unusual ways, so reminding people that God prompts us is important. Sharing about the value of our faith can inspire our listeners to consider its possible assistance for them.

So many people think that the church building is the focus of Christianity. Although it is an important asset (despite its expensive maintenance needs) **WE ARE THE CHURCH.** Jesus told His disciples that He would be with them at all times. This happens for us through the Holy Spirit. Some of our regular community links are through LITTLE LIONS, CHATTERBOX, SATURDAY CLUB, THE HIVE, THE LOCAL FOOD PANTRY and our participation in annual events such as the FLOWER SHOW, 'Light up a life' for FARLEIGH HOSPICE and various STEEPLE GATHERINGS.

This month join us for the annual

**CHRISTMAS TREE FESTIVAL** in church on

Saturday 13th December from 2pm until 4pm.

when various community groups will display their skills. Enjoy the refreshments too .. and conversations of course!

**Kath Dunstan**



## **Prayer Ministry on Sundays after the 11am service**

Please come to the area outside the Chapel if you have a particular need for prayer, (for yourself or someone close to you) where there should be two people available to pray with you. Pre-service prayer occurs too, so feel free to join them with your supporting prayers or your urgent requests.

Obviously church members will be available to pray with you at other times too, so do ask if necessary.

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### **Services at St Leonard's Southminster.....**

**Following page 11 this completes the month.**

#### **Sunday 28th December**

##### **08.00 Holy Communion BCP**

Leader/Preacher

I Corinthians 1 : 26 - 29

Matthew 2 : 13 - 18

Sidesperson

#### **1st Sunday of Christmas**

Rev'd Ken Dunstan

Celebrant

Celebrant

Keith Hatfield

#### **10.00 Café Church**

Leader/Preacher

Readings as above

Intercessions

Prayer Ministry

Audio-visuals

Sidesperson

Refreshments

Rev'd Peter

Linda Payne

Fiona Begley

Sarah Prendergast & Sylvia Adams

Christine Lucas

Kath Dunstan

Frances Hatfield & Kathy Carnell

## **Sunday 7th December**

### **08.00 Holy Communion BCP**

Leader/President/Preacher  
Romans 15 : 4 -13  
Matthew 3 : 1 - 12  
Sidesperson

## **2nd Sunday of Advent**

Rev'd Peter / Norman Pratt  
Celebrant  
Celebrant  
Gordon Baker

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### **11.00 Family Holy Communion**

President/Preacher  
Readings as above  
Intercessions  
Prayer Ministry  
Audio-visuals  
Sidesperson  
Refreshments

Rev'd Peter / Norman Pratt  
Kath Dunstan  
Brenda Sheppard  
Christine Lucas & Kathy Carnell  
Christine Morgan  
Paul Lucas  
Sally Culff & Maureen Smith

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## **Saturday 13th December**

### **14.00—16.00 CHRISTMASTREE FESTIVAL**

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## **Sunday 14th December**

### **08.00 Holy Communion BCP**

Leader/President/Preacher  
James 5 : 7 – 10  
Matthew 11 : 2 - 11  
Sidesperson

## **3rd Sunday of Advent**

Rev'd Ken Dunstan  
Celebrant  
Celebrant  
Leon Flack

### **11.00 Family Celebration**

Leadeers  
Prayer Ministry  
Audio-visuals  
Sidesperson  
Refreshments

Team: Karen, Jenny, Dawn  
Jenni Blomfield & Frances Hatfield  
Sylvia Adams  
Gordon Baker  
Denise Mason & Yvonne Thurbon

**Sunday 21st December****08.00 Holy Communion BCP**

Leader/President/Preacher

Romans 1 : 1 - 7

Matthew 1 : 18 - end

Sidesperson

**4th Sunday of Advent**

Rev'd Ken Dunstan

Celebrant

Celebrant

Gordon Baker

**11.00 No service today** (*see below*)**17.00 Service of Lessons and Carols**

Leader

Audio-visuals

Sidesperson

Refreshments

Rev'd Peter

Christine Morgan

Brenda Sheppard

Social Committee

**Wednesday 24th December****CHRISTMAS EVE****16.00 Crib Service**

Leaders

Karen, Jenny, Dawn

**23.30 Midnight Holy Communion**

Leader/Preacher

Titus 3 : 4 - 7

Luke 2 : 1 - 20

*Other roles t.b.a.*

Rev'd Peter/Jenny Pratt

**Thursday 25th December****CHRISTMAS DAY****09.30 All-age Family Holy Communion Service**

Leader/Preacher

*Other roles t.b.a.*

Rev'd Peter

# Steeple Church News

Steeple Church has services every Sunday morning at 9.15am unless otherwise advertised

We have Morning Prayer on the first Sunday each month, a Family Service on third Sunday and Holy Communion on the second and fourth Sundays.

An on-line service for those preferring to worship from home is available each week on [www.stleonardsouthminster.org.uk](http://www.stleonardsouthminster.org.uk)



Early on Remembrance Sunday, Deputy Lieutenant Charles Anderson read the names on Steeple's war memorials and laid a wreath before he went on to take part in the ceremony at the Burnham-on-Crouch memorial.

The Chairman of Steeple Parish Council, Jo Partridge was present and laid a wreath for the Parish Council. A wreath was also laid by the Rotary Club of Burnham-on-Crouch & Dengie Hundred.

A little later, we had a full Remembrance Service conducted by Norman Pratt, timed to include a "two minutes silence" at 11 am, when a larger than usual congregation heard the names read once again.

We now look forward to the December services, starting with our Christingle on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> December at 4pm.

Children will be provided with materials to make a Christingle to present to their mother. The service will culminate with the lighted Christingles being paraded up the aisle to the altar.

Steeple Church contacts:

Rev'd Canon Peter Begley, Vicar, 01621 772 300

Fiona Ashworth, Churchwarden,

Rhona Leech, Assistant Churchwarden

& PCC Secretary

Teresa Julien, Assistant Warden,

Peter Marshall, PCC Treasurer & Verger,

**Steeple's December Services in brief**

(Service titles and leaders only)

7th 09.15 Rev'd Peter & Jenny Pratt  
4 pm Christingle

14th 09.15 Holy Communion Rev'd Ken Dunstan

21st 09.15 Morning worship with Christmas Carols  
Rev'd Ken

24th 23.30 Midnight Holy Communion at Southminster

25th 09.30 United Christmas Family Holy Communion  
at Southminster

28th 09.15 Holy Communion Rev'd Ken

If you need more information speak to the churchwardens.

## Henry Church Cleaning Club 2025



The cleaning continues on in the Church and we are blessed to be part of a really faithful team but there is always plenty of room for new recruits as some of us are slowing down a bit!! We meet fortnightly on a Friday morning from 9am to 11am. If you could spare just a little time during those 2 hours or even if you could come monthly it would be a great help.

**December dates are: 5th and 19th**

If you would like to give it a try and would like a rota please speak to me, Brenda Sheppard, or contact me on phone or by email You will be made very welcome.

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## SAMARITAN'S PURSE

We are pleased to be able to tell you that 75 shoeboxes were sent this year. This included 19 boxes from St Leonard's School.



We are praying for the children who will be receiving these Christmas gifts wherever in the world they live.

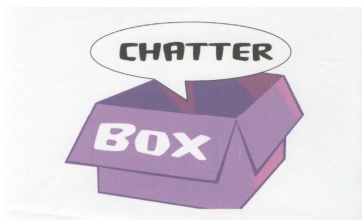
Locally we will be collecting new toys and toiletries as usual on our **TOY SERVICE** (30th November) and all these collected items will be taken to the Women's Refuge. They have received similar gifts from us every year and have been truly grateful. Let us pray for all the people at the Refuge who are in need, not only at Christmas of course.

## **SOUTHMINSTER MEMORIAL HALL**

**LUNCH CLUB** meets on most Mondays.  
If you would like any information please phone  
Dave Christie 07775 758118.

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### **Fancy a chat?**



At the Memorial Hall  
10.00 - 12.00 Thursday mornings

As well as chatting there's tea, coffee, biscuits (and sometimes cake) jigsaws, crafts, newspapers, board games - and chatting isn't compulsory!

## **DENGIE HUNDRED LADIES GROUP**

**Tuesday December 16th**

**Hand bells Christmas party**

For further details contact Paula Neall 01621 773243



**LITTLE LIONS'** usually meet on Wednesday mornings in the Memorial Hall but this is **during term-time only**. It is for babies, toddlers & their carers. The families join the main services, especially the Family Celebrations every second Sunday.

**POSSIBLE ROTA DETAILS: YOUR AVAILABILITY FOR 2 MONTHS**

We can worship regularly in church again, but with appropriate safety limitations, so we need to be well-prepared. Please let Paul Lucas know if you are willing to be part of his volunteer team but cannot be available on any of the following dates.

January 2026	4	11	18	25
February 2026	1	8	15	22

**PLEASE REMEMBER THAT IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO FULFIL YOUR DUTY YOU SHOULD CHANGE WITH SOMEONE AND INFORM THE WARDENS OF THE ARRANGEMENT.**

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**SATURDAY CLUB**

for Primary School children

**Saturday morning (monthly) in church**  
**9.30 am - 11.30 am            £1 per child**

Children can join in craft, music, games etc.  
or just spend time chatting with their friends.

As usual, the day after Saturday Club is our  
Family Celebration in the church at 11 am.

Keep praying for everyone who has recently lost a loved one, and for others who are in need of healing and general care. Pray for all medical personnel, local and wider afield, and all the regular carers. Don't forget all the local farmers who are struggling with effects of recent weather problems. And also remember people who have become unemployed for various reasons - and the people who are trying to help them.



**Who are we?**

**We are part of God's Family --- the Church.**

**Everyone is invited to be part of this family.**

To keep aware of what is happening, and to participate on line with services, log into the website

<https://www.stleonardsouthminster.org.uk/>

Also, we have a WhatsApp group entitled

“Together Apart Our Church”. Lots of people are involved in this.

These links have been greatly appreciated by regular Church family members and also by people who have not, to date, attended our church services. It is good to ‘allow’ God to point us in possible new directions and then to respond.

**God has a plan .... with hope for future.**

If you would like specific prayer, please contact the vicar. preferably by email but otherwise on 01621 772300

### **A notice about our offerings to God.**

Many of us use the facility of the offering plate to give our gifts to God. Whether we are attending in person, or not, it is always a good time to think about a standing order to the church so that we are still bringing our gift. Many of us are doing this already – Thank you, but those who may be wondering how they can continue their giving through Standing Order the details of the church bank are here:

Barclays Bank

Sort code: **20.54.30**

A/c No. **80825107**

A/c Name: Southminster Parochial Church Council.

**For Steeple use:** Sort code: **20.54.30**

A/c No. **60842494**

A/c Name: Steeple Parochial Church Council.

## Some December events not in Southminster

Tillingham will be celebrating with

### **Carols on the Green**

outside the St Nicholas Church

Featuring **THE REMEDY BAND**

on **Friday December 19th at 6 pm**

Join the singing and enjoy refreshments  
for about 1 hour.

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The St Lawrence Singers

Welcome you to a Christmas Concert

### **“A STARRY NIGHT”**

**On Friday 12th December**

**at St Lawrence Newlands Barn CM0 7LL**

Entry £10 (Refreshments included) with raffle

Funds in aid of St Lawrence Newland Church  
and Helen Rollason Charity.

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### **PRAY FOR SOUTHMINSTER:**

w/b	7 December	Central - East
w/b	14 December	Central - South
w/b	21 December	South - West
w/b	28 December	Central - West





# WHO ARE WE? Mission Statement



“To be a people offering praise and worship to God and serving him by being the Good News by our words and actions”

**Web Site** [www.stleonardsouthminster.org.uk](http://www.stleonardsouthminster.org.uk)

**Contact:** [vicar@stleonardsouthminster.org.uk](mailto:vicar@stleonardsouthminster.org.uk)  
**Telephone** 01621 772300

If you wish to contact the Church regarding a Safeguarding issue please contact us by telephone on 07745 688845 or via [safeguarding@stleonardsouthminster.org.uk](mailto:safeguarding@stleonardsouthminster.org.uk)

**See pages 10-11 for details during this season.**

**Weekly notices, covering any changes, will be available to read on the outside church notice-board.**

## SUNDAY SERVICES

**See page 18 and others for Special Christmas Services**

**8:00 am** Holy Communion (Book of Common Prayer 1662)

**11.00 am** Holy Communion or Morning Worship

**Steeple Services** similarly continue at **9.15am**

**Children and Young people** are always welcomed especially for the **Family Celebration Services.**

## WEEKDAY SERVICES:

**Monday. Wednesday & Friday at 8 am Morning Prayer**

**Tuesday at 8.30 am Just Prayer**

**‘LITTLE LIONS’ usually meet on Wednesday mornings**

In the Memorial Hall but this is **during term-time only.**

It is for babies/toddlers & their carers.



**BIBLE STUDY GROUPS** meet in the church on **Mondays (10 am) and Thursdays (8 pm)**

Details of the actual programme are available in church and on the notice boards.