

## The Guest

This church year, as you may remember, we have an underlying theme for our life together which is 'hospitality of spirit'. Later in the magazine I have written a brief update on this, and during Advent the focus of our gatherings links in with different reflections around the guest. Throughout the Bible, in stories of everyday life, we see people preparing for and welcoming guests or being received as guests. In Luke's gospel, where a lot of action is set around meals, we are challenged to see how Jesus moves in and out of being guest and host in different situations, even though he describes himself as having no place of his own (Luke 9.58). During this Advent season I am pondering what it means for us to be welcomed by God, and to welcome God and each other into our lives.

As we recall the first Christmas, 2025 years ago, the readings that we will reflect on include the calling of John the Baptist to prepare the way for Jesus. There are all sorts of things that we do to prepare for guests, and you might be planning some of them now if you are inviting guests this Christmas. John the Baptist prepared people for Jesus' coming by calling them to examine their lives and turn to God. A bit like us getting our house in order! The arrival of Jesus is both expected – the Old Testament is filled with prophecies about him – but his arrival is also unexpected. God waited for Mary's yes. When God knocks at the door of our lives, it is up to us to invite God in, God does not barge in. And when we welcome God in, it is an extraordinary thing that God puts himself at our mercy. Jesus came as a vulnerable baby, dependent on his parents. And still today when Jesus comes into our lives, he does not order us about but gently invites us to live in a different way. If we then choose to live a different way, our life will never be the same again. Just like Joseph, as we welcome God and make room in our lives, then a 'holy disturbance' arises, our lives get reoriented with God at the centre. After all the years I have been a Christian, it still feels amazing to me, that God would give us such a choice about responding to God's knock at the door of our lives, and also to the loving welcome offered to each of us. I hope this Advent and Christmas time you might choose to respond to God in a way that puts God more firmly at the centre of your life as we move into 2026.

During this season there are also plenty of opportunities to invite people to events at church, and to come along yourself. Do pick up a Christmas services postcard and give them away to your neighbours and people you meet. There are all sorts of different events happening, and hopefully something for everyone! We will start with our Christmas carol sing-a-long on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> December which will be a great event to invite people to. We will have the top 10 carols to sing, the name of our lion will be announced, and mince pie eating will begin 😊 In week commencing 8<sup>th</sup> December we will welcome Kingsholm Primary School and our local caring communities to several different services. And as we continue to share the gifts we have been given with the community around us, we will be packing Christmas hampers for families in need during our 10.30am service on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> December. The Blue Christmas service on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> December at 5pm will be a quieter reflective space. Then on Christmas Eve we will have an interactive crib service at 10am and a traditional midnight communion starting at 11.30pm. Christmas Day morning we will have a simple communion service, and then people are invited to bring food to share with others if you would like to stay on for lunch, so that everyone has someone to have lunch with on that special day.

As we move into 2026, we will be having time to pray together, a new course exploring Christianity, vicarage socials, and hopefully St Catharine's Got Talent! So do keep a look out for more information. Much, as always, in our church life to be thankful for and to pray for. May God bless you in this Advent and Christmas season.

Every blessing Jo