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From the Church of England Diocese of Bath and Wells



December 2023

Let's make it an Eco Advent

This year across Bath and Wells, church and school communities, as well as families, are being encouraged to have an Eco Advent. You can join in and combine the spirit of Advent with a commitment to the environment as you enjoy an eco-friendly journey to the manger... from the comfort of your own home.

Every day, as the countdown to Christmas continues, you can explore ways to reflect on and appreciate God's creation and share simple actions to take care of it better. Through Eco Advent, each day leading up to Christmas can be meaningful, both spiritually and environmentally.

Ruth Slade, Growing Faith and Everyday Faith Adviser says, "More and more people are aware of the environmental impact of Christmas and as Christians, of course, we are committed to caring for creation. We wanted to offer a fun resource to both celebrate our journey to Christmas and at the same time reflect on our duty to care for this



beautiful world that God has gifted us.

"As well as offering daily Bible verses, prayers and reflections, everyone can join us in our Advent journey by first setting up a starry spiral path to a manger, and follow the daily tasks we are sharing on our website and social media channels. In true eco-fashion, there's no need to buy any special resources, just use what you have to hand to craft what you need to create your starry spiral and manger."

A helpful guide to joining in with Eco Advent is available to download from bathandwells.org.uk/eco-advent, where you will also find the daily Advent tasks. They will also be shared on our diocesan [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [X \(formerly Twitter\)](#) feeds throughout Advent. ■

News in brief

A step of faith

It was a joyous day in Wells Cathedral on Saturday, 4 November when 86 people were confirmed by Bishop Michael, Bishop Ruth and Bishop Christopher - there were so many fitting them all in the group photo was a bit of a challenge!

Bishop Michael said, "What an amazing afternoon. It has been such a privilege to be with so many different people, each with their own story, each taking their unique step of faith and looking forward to the future together."



A special visitor

The Chaplaincy team at Hinkley Point C, Bridgwater received a special visitor recently, when the His Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of Somerset, Mohammed Saddiq, paid a visit.

Lead Chaplain Ewen Huffman, the first salaried chaplain in the construction industry in the UK,

Praying for football success

As a pioneer in Whiteway in Bath, Rachel Spence journeys alongside her community in a host of ways, this includes helping to set up her local community football team, Whiteway FC. Now Club Secretary and keen supporter, Rachel says, "It is a special team, established by a local man who caused trouble in his community in the past and now wants to give back. He started it to give the young men in his community all the benefits being part of a team offers and hopefully prevent them going down the path he went down. Every team member is sponsored, and St Barnabas' is one of the sponsors ■"

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and his team of seven volunteer chaplains hold spiritual ceremonies before major construction activities and regular prayer meetings for the broad mix of people employed there. The Lord Lieutenant met with Christian and Muslim members of the workforce and took part in Friday prayers ■

A unique story

By Michael Beasley, Bishop of Bath and Wells

When I speak to my Mum on my birthday, she often recalls to me the events that surrounded my arrival in the world. These include nearly being born in the hospital lift, my older brother being smuggled in to see me under my dad's overcoat and of various aunts sneaking onto the maternity ward out of visiting hours by wearing their WRVS uniforms.

Each of us has a unique story about our birth. At Christmas we'll be recounting once again the story that we share about another birth - the birth of Jesus. Across the world we'll be re-telling and re-enacting what happened in Bethlehem more than 2000 years ago. We'll recall the journey of Mary and Joseph, the birth in the stable, the arrival of the shepherds, the song of the angels, the visit of the Magi.

Our own birth stories are unique to each of us. Jesus's is common to us all. And not just because we all know about it. For in our recollection of Jesus' birth, we'll also be remembering that that in him, God came to be at one with us. In Jesus God arrived to share fully in our humanity, experiencing complete

solidarity with every aspect of our human condition. Jesus is 'God with us' – in trenches in Ukraine, bomb shelters in Israel and Gaza, in hospital wards where loved ones die, in relationships where there is conflict and distress.

Just as much as he is with us in our greatest joys and our deepest woes, Jesus is also for us. One of the earliest teachers of the Church said this: 'He became what we are so that we might become what he is.' The baby born in Bethlehem stands with us not only in all that we experience. This child also comes to offer us the possibility of opening every part of our lives to the transforming power of God's life of love and joy and peace. He comes so that every day we can become a little more like him.

This is the good news of Christmas and may it be yours this year.

A very Merry Christmas to you all.

Bishop Michael



Let's take it outside

Julie Perry is the Children's and Family's Worker for the Parish of Minehead and runs a weekly outdoor Toddler Church.



Fun on the beach at Toddler Church

How did you get started?

When I took on the role four years ago, I knew from the start I didn't want it to be a baby and toddler group in a church, I wanted a faith-based baby and toddler group and before long we ended up taking it outside completely.

Why outside?

For me, it is where I feel closest to God and it's a way I can share that passion. One mum told me, "When the children are outside there are no boundaries." And that is true, you can take that as physical boundaries, or to learning and spiritual growth.

Where do you meet?

We hold it in a different location every week. We have the beach on our doorstep, safe parks and woods, streams, and more, which is great as lots of our families don't drive.

Do the families come to church?

Not necessarily, but we have found it can be a stepping stone into the church

family for some. I make it very clear to everyone coming along that this group has a gentle faith element. I would hate for someone to come along and not realise.

What is that faith element?

One thing we have in each session is what I call our holy ritual. It can be as simple as having a moment of silence before snack time. It is an opportunity for children to learn how to listen and be calm. As we are outside that can be really powerful. With the breeze blowing through your hair, a seagull squawking in the background, it's like your senses are heightened to everything.

Will you be joining in with Eco Advent?

I am keen to incorporate it into our activities. I am holding a Messy Christmas Craft session at the end of November and I will be sharing it with the many families who attend. One of our activities will be crafting a stable they can then take home and use for Eco Advent. I also plan to use it in our weekly toddler church.

Hear more from Julie at bathandwells.org.uk/toddler-church

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