

CONTACT

January 2026



Volume 67 - Issue 1
Sawston Free Church

Churches Services and Dates for Your Diary

SFC Services-(also available via zoom) SFC email: secretary@sawstonfreechurch.org.uk,

| | |
|------------|---|
| Sun 04 Jan | 10.30am : Morning Worship – David Lloyd 03.00pm : Messy Church |
| Sun 11 Jan | 10.30am : Covenant Service Holy Communion – Phil Nevard Followed by a Bring & Share Lunch |
| Sun 18 Jan | 10.30am : Morning Worship – Phil Nevard |
| Sun 26 Jan | 10.30am : Go4th |

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| The closing date for February Contact is Sunday 18 th January |
|---|

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The monthly magazine of
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Dear Friends,

Christmas isn't always as we planned it, is it? The services I planned went pretty much as I planned them and it was a joy to celebrate with my churches in Sawston, Whittlesford and Clare. I hadn't banked on catching a cold and gradually losing my voice over the last weekend, but it held out just about as long as it needed to.



My domestic Christmas was a different matter. With 8 and sometimes 9 adults in the house you do have to do some advance planning – not least about what everyone will eat for two weeks, but also what we will do that will suit the varying tastes and age-ranges.

As it turned out, just about everyone (except for Kirsty, whose blood, I suspect, has been replaced by IRN Bru over the years!) fell ill. It felt a bit like Christmas in a WWI field hospital as I picked my way through the groaning patients littered about the sitting room carrying my Florence Nightingale lamp and dispensing lemsip, cough-syrup and tissues. Most of the activities we had imagined simply didn't happen.

It wasn't the Christmas we had planned, but it was the Christmas we were given.

And perhaps that, in its own way, was the lesson of it. So much of life arrives like that. We plan carefully, imagine how things will unfold, and then reality wanders in and rearranges the furniture. Christmas itself began that way: no room, no crib as planned, angels and shepherds turning up uninvited, a story that refused to follow sensible expectations. God did not wait for conditions to be perfect before coming but stepped into the uncertainty and the interruption.

As we move into a new year, many of us will be making plans again. Some will be hopeful, some cautious, some already held lightly because experience has taught us how quickly things can change. The good news of Christmas is not that everything will

go according to plan, but that God is present even when it doesn't. In the quiet revisions, the cancelled intentions, the unexpected turns.

So as January opens and the year stretches ahead, may we plan wisely but hold those plans lightly. May we be open to the goodness that arrives in forms we didn't anticipate. And may we trust that, planned or not, God is already at work among us, bringing light even into the most improvised of moments.

Every Blessing,



Rev'd Phil Nevard
Phil

January Prayers



Please give thanks for the Christmas services, for the families and children who brought such joy.

For some the New Year brings financial challenges, please pray for those struggling, for the food bank and organisations helping those in need.

A Prayer for the New Year :

*God of Mission
Who alone brings growth to your Church,
Send your Holy Spirit to give
Vision to our planning,
Wisdom to our actions,
Joy to our worship,
And power to our witness.
Help our church to grow in numbers.
In spiritual commitment to you,
And in service to our local community,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen*

Anne Pegram

Christingle

On Sunday, 7th December, we celebrated `Christingle. The Messy Church Team would like to thank everyone for coming along and having a very enjoyable afternoon.



Epiphany and Candlemas

Two Quiet Festivals That Help Christmas Keep Its Depth (by Rev'd Phil Nevard)

For many people, Christmas feels as though it ends the moment the decorations come down. Yet in the church's calendar, Christmas keeps unfolding long after the tree is packed away. Two often-overlooked festivals help us do that: Epiphany and Candlemas.

Epiphany, celebrated on 6 January, remembers the visit of the wise men to the child Jesus. It marks the moment when the light of Christ is recognised beyond his immediate family and community. Strangers from far away notice the star, follow it, and discover something holy where they did not expect it. Epiphany is about revelation: seeing more clearly who Jesus is, and realising that God's love is wider than we imagined.

Prayer ideas for Epiphany

Epiphany prayers often work well with light and direction. You might light a candle and pray simply:

- for clarity where life feels confusing
- for openness to God appearing in unexpected people or places
- for the courage to follow where truth and compassion lead

A helpful question for reflection is: Where might God be drawing my attention at the moment?

*God of light,
you revealed yourself in an unexpected place
to unexpected people.
Help us to notice your presence where we are not looking,
and to follow your light even when it leads us beyond what feels familiar.
Amen.*

Candlemas, on 2 February, comes forty days after Christmas. It recalls the presentation of Jesus in the temple, where Simeon and Anna recognise him as "a light for revelation." Traditionally this is the day when candles are blessed, and it marks a turning point. The Christmas story begins to look forward toward the adult life of Jesus, with its challenge, cost, and hope.

Candlemas sits beautifully between seasons. The days are still dark, winter is not yet over, but the promise of lengthening light has begun. It reminds us that faith is not only about beginnings, but about staying faithful as the journey unfolds.

Prayer ideas for Candlemas

Candlemas prayers suit stillness and honesty. Lighting a candle, you might pray:

- for patience in the waiting seasons of life
- for faith to trust God with what lies ahead
- for light to remain when the road feels uncertain

*Faithful God,
as we hold this light,
remind us that you walk with us
from beginnings into what comes next.
Give us patience for the waiting,
and courage for the journey ahead.
Keep your light burning in us.
Amen.*

Together, Epiphany and Candlemas remind us that Christmas is not an ending, but a slow revealing. Light noticed, light trusted, light carried forward into the rest of the year.

January Flower Rota

Please remember that we are preparing the new Rota for 2026. We will be putting a reminder in the Weekly notes to sign up as we will need your help especially for the first few months in the New Year.

| | |
|--------------------------|------------|
| 11 th January | Yvonne S |
| 18 th January | Mary S |
| 25 th January | Rosemary L |



***Thank you again for your support from the flower team.
Rosemary Harriss, Rosemary Livings, Dawn Haughton and Vivien Ford.***

As I see it ...

by Mike Wilson

Christmas Shoe Boxes

(Please note that the views expressed in this article are those of the author, Michael Wilson, who owns the copyright, and not in any way representative of the views of Sawston Free Church.)

On 19th December 2025, President Putin delivered his annual marathon press conference. He ranged chaotically over everything from world affairs (including Ukraine) to an invitation to attend the wedding of a young man who proposed to his fiancé there and then, live on world television. The BBC's Steve Rosenberg asked whether there were to be any new 'special military operations' like the one in Ukraine. In other words, was Russia planning to invade the likes of Poland, Finland and the Baltic States?

Putin replied, *'There won't be any operations if you treat us with respect, if you respect our interests just as we've always tried to respect yours.'* That sounds reassuring until you remember that there is a war in Ukraine precisely because Russia believes it has an 'interest' in Ukraine, which Ukraine itself, and the Western powers, do not 'respect.'

On the very same day, Marco Rubio, the extremely erudite US Secretary of State, was in Washington explaining to the world the foundations of President Trump's foreign policy. He declared, *'We reserve the right, and have the right, to utilise every element of national power to defend the national interest of the United States, And no one can dispute that. Every country in the world reserves the same option. We just simply have more power than some of them.'*

The two leaders, Putin and Trump, operate on exactly the same principle: *Every nation has the right to take from another nation anything that it is in their interest to take, provided they have sufficient power.*

It is, surely, a policy for perpetual conflict, at every level from global warfare to quarrelling neighbours?

The policy says, does it not, that my neighbours have a 'right' to take what they like from my garden (including to move the fence), and to stop me doing anything they might not like my doing in my garden, provided they are strong enough to do it and I am not strong enough to stop them.

The bully rules supreme, the weakest goes to the wall, and the majority live in a state of perpetual fear and subjugation.

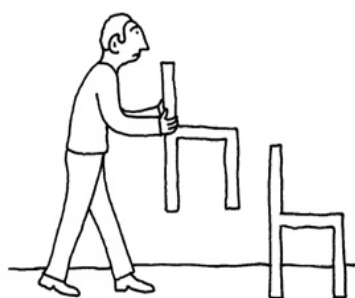
Were my theology rooted in Old Testament Law, I would have little difficulty arguing with these two presidents. I would understand the language. Old Testament Law is strong on rights, property, and punishments. But Old testament Law doesn't work, which is why I am a man of the New Testament. Jesus repeatedly contradicted the Old Law because he perceived that the Old Law almost invariably twisted itself round to favour the strong over the weak, just as it does today.

The Law is fine, until it falls into the hands of greedy and powerful people, which it almost invariably does. At that point, it becomes a monster. Jesus' Way of Love is radically different, but far harder to codify.

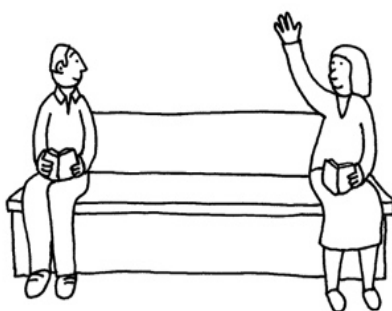
It seems to me that the place to begin with Putin and Rubio is to criticise their word 'right'. In New Testament language, we don't really 'own' anything. We have no 'right' to anything. Rather, everything is gift, born of the generosity of divine love. Dozens of Christmas shoe-boxes go out from Sawston every year. When a child finds themselves with one of our boxes full of goodies, surrounded by other children who do not, what is that child to do? And those other children, wide-eyed but empty handed – what are they to do?

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

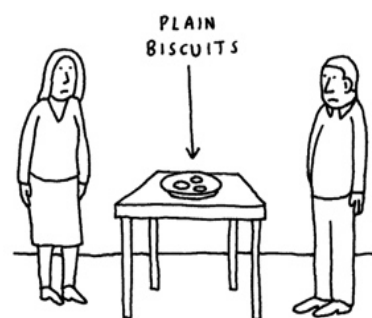
HOW THE CHURCH CAN HELP



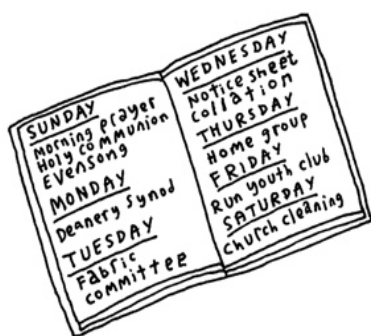
EXERCISE



MEETING NEW PEOPLE



HEALTHY EATING

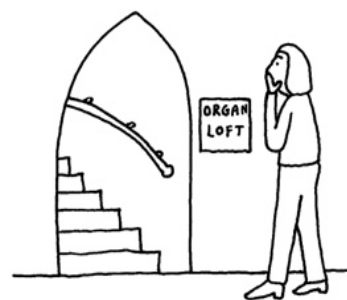


GETTING ORGANISED

AT THE PCC WE'LL DISCUSS THE APCM,
CW VS THE BCP, THE LLM'S CRB,
AND THE OLM'S BAP. OH, AND
THERE ARE LETTERS FROM THE DAC,
THE DDO, THE HOB AND THE ABC



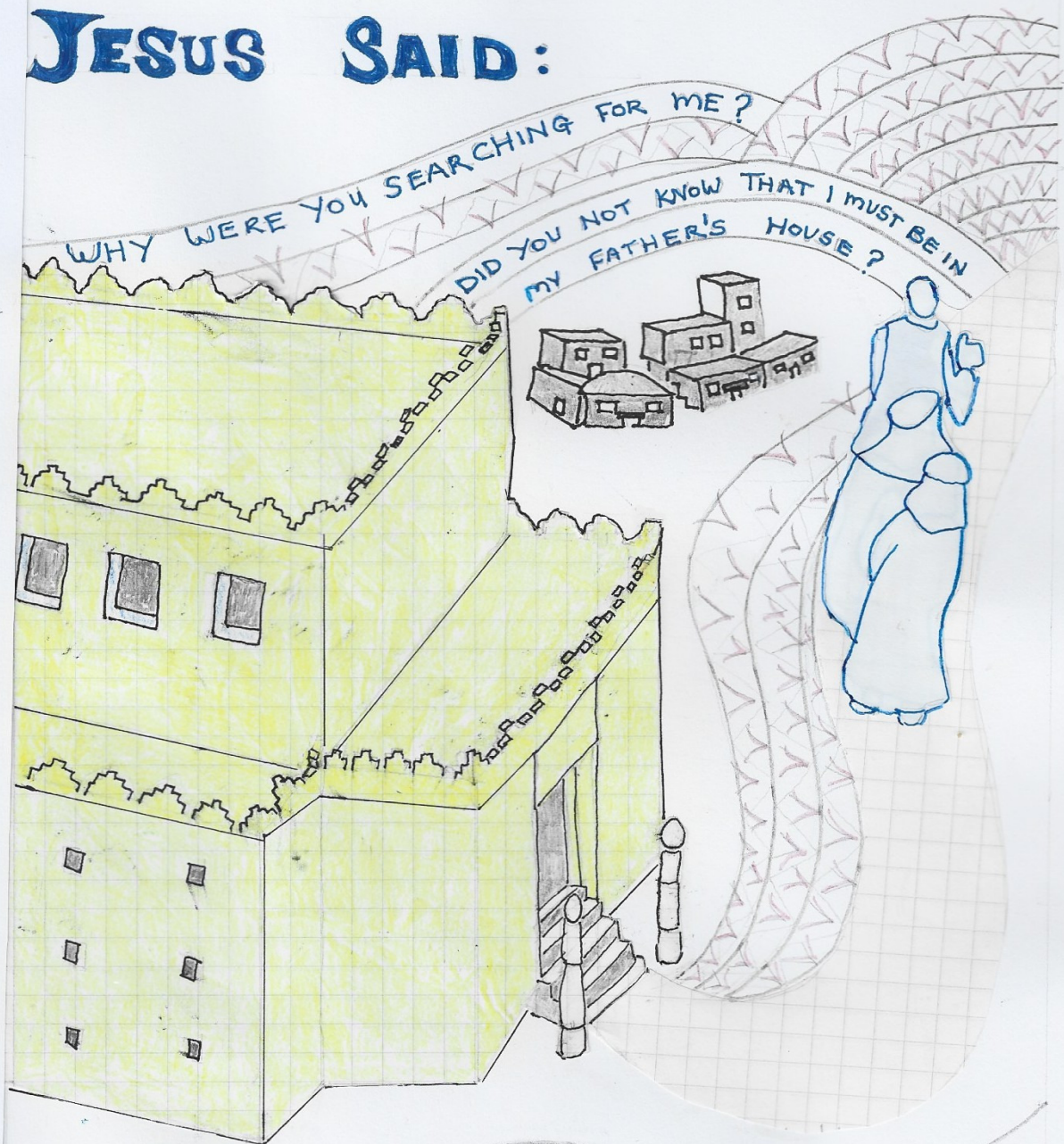
LEARNING A NEW LANGUAGE



TRAVELLING TO NEW PLACES

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JESUS SAID:



With thanks to Dawn Haughton

Footprints and Christmas Lunches

If you didn't manage to have a Christmas lunch in Footprints during December you missed a treat.!

I was fortunate enough to eat two, not in the same week I should add. One with our Church Craft Group and the second with FISH. From memory I believe there were 18 of us for the Craft Group meal and 9 for FISH.

On each occasion the table was laid with a white cloth, Christmas crackers and serviettes at each place setting and lit tea lights at various places. As the cafe was already decorated with Christmas lights and baubles everything looked beautiful.

Then of course the meal !! Meat eaters and vegetarians all catered for. Jugs of gravy and cranberry sauce on the table, hot plates, everyone served very quickly and efficiently by students and staff. Sprouts, parsnips, carrots and roast potatoes together with pigs in blankets and stuffing balls, what more could anyone ask for ? All this was followed by Christmas pudding with a choice of custard or cream, coffee or tea and a chocolate mint.

There were no complaints from anyone only complements and all the complements were thoroughly deserved. How Anj and the staff manage to serve so many meals so quickly from that small kitchen I can't imagine, but they do.

Craft group now expect the date for our next Christmas meal to be included in their calendar for 2026 as I think this is the third year running we have had the pleasure of lunch in Footprints.

The staff and students make us welcome at every Craft Group meeting so we are very grateful to them for their hospitality and kindness and look forward to seeing them again throughout 2026.

Yvonne Sparrow on behalf of all members of SFC Craft Group

Reflections on the Psalms of Ascent

(Rev'd Phil Nevard)

We started something new in the magazine back in November: a series of reflections on the Psalms of Ascent. These were songs for people on the move, heading up to Jerusalem. They remind me of my own walk on the Pennine Way – or rather, my almost-walk, because I didn't finish it. That unfinished journey has stayed with me, and it's given me a way of looking at these psalms. After all, most of our lives are like that too: not neatly tied up, still in progress. My hope is that these reflections might give us space to think about our own unfinished journeys, and to notice how God is with us along the way.

In November we looked at Psalm 121 (part 1). This is part two!

I will lift up my eyes to the hills— From whence comes my help?
My help comes from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth.

He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber.
Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord is your keeper; The Lord is your shade at your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day, Nor the moon by night.

The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul.
The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in From this time forth,
and even forevermore.

From the first stanza to the second there is an abrupt change of voice. We were in the first-person, but now we are in the third-person. Some scholars suggest that this is the Psalmist having a kind of internal dialogue with himself, but others have it right, I think, when they remind us that the Psalms are the worship/prayer/songbook of a nation - they are meant to be sung/read in community, in congregation. We are meant to sing them to and with each other.

This is a call and response. Someone comes with a question about where to find help and a statement of faith that it comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. The congregation (or the priest) responds with a series of reassurances about God's help.

There's nothing complex in here, the metaphors pile on top of one another reassuring me that God ensures my safety - that I can rest in God's presence, I will find no danger.

God will not allow me to stumble...

God is "keeping me" and he won't nod off or get distracted...

God is keeping the whole nation, and he won't nod off and never sleeps

God is always at my side shading me from the harsh sun

God is always at my side shielding me from whatever might befall me at night

God is a 24-7 protector

God will preserve me from all evil

God will preserve my very soul not just now, but always and for ever.

It's a very comforting list! Little wonder that this Psalm is so popular - it's what we all want to hear.

Of course the psalmist isn't daft, and neither are the People of Israel. These are a people who know as well as anyone else that they are not protected in a bubble of safety from all danger and all peril...

they know they will stumble

they know it sometimes seems like God has nodded off

they know the whole nation can be dragged off into slavery

they know the harsh heat of the desert sun

they know bad things will happen by moonlight

they know it will feel at times that God has abandoned them

they know they will not be persuaded from the vilest evil

they know their souls are in danger now and probably always will be.

So what are these words?

They are words of faith, not fantasy. They're not a contract with God that guarantees smooth paths and easy journeys. They are something more honest, more precious than that. They are the words we speak to each other when the path is rough, when someone has lifted their eyes to the hills and doesn't know what lies ahead. They are the community's response to a trembling voice asking: "Where will my help come from?" And the answer, sung with hope and memory and love, is: "From the Lord, who made heaven and earth."

These words are not a denial of pain or evil. They are a declaration—defiant, even—that whatever comes, we will not walk alone. That God's presence is not proven by the absence of suffering but by the refusal to abandon us in it. These words do not pretend we are untouchable. Rather, they affirm that we are held. That in stumbling, in slavery, in sunstroke and in the shadows of night-time, in the darkest valleys of evil and despair, still—still—our going out and coming in are seen, known, and accompanied by the Keeper of Israel.

That's why we keep singing this psalm. Not because it's literally true in the sense of always-pleasant weather and a hazard-free life, but because it's ultimately true. Because it's a song that binds us together in trust—not in our circumstances, but in the character of the One who walks with us. This is not a promise of safety; it's a promise of presence. And that is enough.

Why do I say this is an unfinished journey? I say it's unfinished because these confident words of safety in God's keeping will need to be recalled and re-spoken time and time and time again. We will need the company of the people of God to sing them to us, to whisper them to us, to shout them at us right up to the day we take that step into the deepest mystery of all - and even then, we will need to hear those words that we will not stumble, and that he who keeps us will not slumber, he will preserve our souls from this time forth and for evermore.

O Keeper of Israel,
when the road is steep and the sun is fierce,
when the night feels long and the path uncertain—
remind us that we do not walk alone.
Speak your promises into our fear,
and help us speak them to one another.
Hold our going out and our coming in,
now and always.

Amen.

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at

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The **Footprints Café** is a community cafe offering a wide range of reasonably priced Snacks and Meals together with Teas & Coffees, Cold drinks, Cakes and Pastries.

We are open Monday to Friday from 8.30 am to 3.30 pm. Breakfasts are served until 11.30 am.

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