

# Hush your noise, people of strife, and hear the angels sing

Alan Smart recalls a particular carol service he attended in Afghanistan in 2015



Alan, pictured during his time in Afghanistan

I don't find Christmas memorable, at least not in the literal sense. We tend to do the same things, see the same people, eat the same food and sing the same songs every year. I enjoy it all the same.

But the Christmas that remains most memorable to me is curiously not about the big day itself or even the night before, but a carol service on 11 December 2015. I was living and working at the British Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan at the time. The Embassy was located in the 'Green Zone' – a large and heavily fortified area designed to keep us safe from Taliban attacks. Generally it worked, sometimes it didn't.

We were gathered at the Ambassador's residence, drinking, eating, singing carols with a few Bible readings thrown in for good measure. Halfway through the evening there was a massive

explosion nearby. The air moved as it does when that happens and then there was the unmistakable sound of machine guns and smaller explosions. The nearby Spanish Embassy had been targeted by the Taliban in a suicide bombing, quickly followed by an incursion by other Taliban who, as usual, were intent on killing as many people as possible before they were in turn cut down. I remember standing outside under a clear night sky listening to the fighting a few hundred yards away where people were fighting for and losing their lives. There was nothing to be done. After a while we went back inside and continued singing carols and eating and drinking. I think we all felt secretly pleased we had maintained a suitably British sang froid response.

I can't remember where I was for Christmas that year although I suppose my diary would tell me. I only remember 11 December. However, what I do remember every year is that somewhere when we are singing, drinking and eating there are fellow Christians under fire, suffering, living in terror and all too often dying. Thousands upon thousands of them in the Sudan, Nigeria, Ukraine, Gaza and in places we never hear of.

Enjoy Christmas, don't feel guilty, but do thank God for the coming of Christ into the world and find time to pray for those thousands – for all too often when men fail He is their only saviour.

# Saint Peter and Saint Paul



Edenbridge Christmas 2025



## O Little Town of Bethlehem

Rev David Flagg reflects on Christmas in the light of life today in Bethlehem

In 2013, I made a life changing visit to St George's College beside the cathedral in East Jerusalem. A highlight was to meet the then Dean of the Cathedral, Hosam, who is now Archbishop in Jerusalem. Here is a spiritual leader and a deeply human being, totally committed to his homeland. An Israeli Arab, he follows in the footsteps of Jesus – known as 'the boy from Nazareth', where Hosam too grew up.

Over recent years many Christians in Palestine have been leaving – it's all too much – yet there remains the place where the Word-made-flesh came amongst us. Hosam made it clear recently when our own Archbishop of York was visiting him that his flock really value brave visitors. Archbishops Stephen and Hosam risked visiting the West Bank, where they experienced just a small taste of what Palestinians face every day: in the South Hebron hills they were followed around and at one point blocked in by a mixture of threatening Israeli settlers (a practice against international law) and police. 'A normal day here' says Hosam.

Physically going there makes the experience real but we can also 'go there' in spirit as we tune in to those oppressed in their own homeland. This may help us realise that Jesus too came into an occupied land (the Roman authorities were responsible for Him being in Bethlehem for their census).

Today I find myself wishing today's Christians in Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and, dare we say it, the now ruined territory of Gaza, some 'blessing' rather than a superficial 'happy' Christmas.

And I reflect that as then, so now: Emmanuel – 'God-with-us' – is right where we all are in the worst possible locations and situations.



**Sunday 21 December**

6.30 pm Service of Nine Lessons and Carols

**Christmas Eve, Wednesday 24 December**

3.30 pm Christingle (free tickets for this service available from House of Envy from 9 December)

11.00 pm Carols (from 11 pm) and Midnight Mass (at 11.30 pm)

**Christmas Day, Thursday 25 December**

9.30 am Christmas Eucharist

## On Christmas night all Christians sing

Music plays a powerful part in the church celebration of Christmas. Director of Music Fiona Glidewell explains how she chooses which pieces the choir will sing

The music you will hear in church over Christmas has been in the pipeline for a while. I started thinking about it in October, after we had sung at Southwark Cathedral, looking at what we've sung over the last few years and what we haven't sung for a while, then thinking of

some new pieces we might like to try. We have four carol books I can look through and loads and loads of sheet music, and the choir always has plenty of suggestions! I also check who will be here at Christmas so that I know which voices to depend on, and I see how much

time we have to rehearse. This year we have a carol concert as well as the carol service so it's even more busy than usual. I like to choose both traditional and more recent pieces, such as, this year, 'My Lord has Come', written by Will Todd in 2011. I usually include one of John Rutter's carols; this year the juniors are singing his 'Star Carol'.

One of my own favourites is 'The Three Kings' by Cornelius, as is the setting by Darke of 'In the Bleak Midwinter' – we aren't singing either this year! It is usually the music that strikes me but sometimes it can be the words. We sang 'Advent Calendar' for Advent a couple of years ago and the words by Rowan Williams are beautiful.



The choir at Southwark Cathedral in October after singing Evensong

## (Knitted) angels from the realms of glory

Distributing knitted angels to local schools is a tangible demonstration of generosity, says Barbara Mitchell

When I was a chaplain in a Methodist school I was eager to find activities from the Methodist tradition to use with the school community. I discovered that in the North East of England several churches knitted angels which were distributed to remind people of the Christian message of the birth of Christ and the angels' song of peace and goodwill. So, I recruited knitters and crocheters to make angels, which were given to pupils on the last day of the

Christmas term. This was a success, so the next Christmas I asked people to knit 170 angels for the children at Crockham Hill School. The children







loved them so last year we did some for Edenbridge Primary School – over 240 angels! I had enough for them also to fly to The View School, care homes in Edenbridge and Bridges. This year I have about 200 angels ready and one Grandma has knitted enough for Four Elms School, which her grandchildren attend.

Knitting angels is simple to do. It uses small amounts of yarn, which might otherwise end up in landfill, and reminds both creators and recipients that, regardless of your religious beliefs, Christmas should be a time of generosity of time and thought towards other people.




## All simply wrapped...

Some more eco-friendly ways to wrap your gifts

Do you realise that most wrapping paper cannot be recycled? A handy test is to scrunch a piece up into a ball. If it bounces back it probably can't be recycled but if it stays put it's likely recyclable (though you still need to remove tape, ribbon etc).

-  Re-use gift wrapping paper and ribbons where possible, cutting off what you can't use any more
-  Measure and measure again – cut paper to size, so you don't waste anything
-  If the paper you have cut seems too small, try using it at an angle
-  If you have two small pieces of wrapping paper, try adding them to the same gift



-  for a unique look (see above)
-  Use Kraft paper for an eco look and add embellishments, such as small ribbons etc from Christmas crackers
-  Upcycle small containers or tubes such as kitchen roll inserts (see below), cut to size, and add some chocolates or jewellery, for example – it will keep them guessing what's inside!



Kathleen Skinner