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December 2026 / January 2027

BUILDING TOGETHER IN WORSHIP, WITNESS AND SERVIC

The Cairn

News from St. Anne's Scottish Episcopal & Methodist Church in Dunbar

Rector's Letter

December is full of anticipation, isn't it? I'm looking forward to all the sparkly lights, carol services and nativity scenes. Once I've worked my way through the shopping lists, gift wrapping and other preparations, I will enjoy my family's excitement as they discover their presents under the Christmas tree on the big day. Yet, I'm also aware that the pressures and the emotional demands of all these preparations can easily obscure the real purpose of our Christmas celebrations.

One of my favourite things about Dunbar is the view out to sea from the park on the Bayswell Road. I love gazing out at the Bass Rock.



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It is such a huge, solid presence. Centuries have come and gone, and the Bass Rock has remained; home to thousands of gannets and witness to an ever-changing world.

Imagine my surprise, then, when one day I turned the corner to enjoy this now familiar view and discovered that the Bass Rock had disappeared! The clouds were so thick and low that this enormous rocky island was completely concealed. I knew it was there, as it had been for millennia, but that day I simply couldn't see it, no matter how hard I tried. It was entirely hidden from view.





It occurred to me that there are things we know to be real through the eyes of faith, even when we cannot physically see them. However, clouds and darkness can cause us to doubt what we believe and hope for. John's gospel encourages us to hold onto these things. The opening verses tell us, 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.' The light John is referring to is Jesus Christ.

As we enjoy the sparkle and excitement of December, we also enter the season of preparing to receive the greatest gift of Christmas: God coming into our world in the person of Jesus Christ. With him come the gifts of hope, peace, joy and love.

Jesus brings gifts which will last way beyond Christmas Day. They will sustain us, strengthen us and equip us throughout the year ahead.

At the end of January I will celebrate the first anniversary of my arrival at St Anne's. It's been a year filled with meeting many wonderful people, learning how things are done here and being inspired to try new things. Throughout it all, Jesus has faithfully guided me, answered my many and varied prayers, brought me peace when I've really needed it, and given me much joy too.

I hope and pray that, amid all the busyness and excitement of Christmas, you will also perceive the light of Christ shining through. May you know his hope, peace, joy and love this Christmas, and receive all that you need for the year to come.

Harriet



You'll Grow Into Them

As a kid, I remember that there was always a moment towards the end of the summer holidays when you knew they were nearly over. Nobody actually announced it. The sun might still be shining, your bike was still lying where you'd abandoned it the night before, and there were technically several days of freedom left. But then your mother said the words every child dreaded:

"We'd better go and get your school uniform."

And that was it. Summer was officially finished.

First came the school shoes, chosen less for their appearance than their ability to withstand whatever you intended doing in them for the next twelve months. Then came the dreaded trip up town for trousers, bought deliberately too long because "you'll grow into them". This usually meant spending the first few weeks of term with turn-ups deep enough to store your lunch money in.

There was a new school bag, although only if the old one had reached the point where its contents were actually falling out of it. Everything had to last in those days. A scuffed bag wasn't replaced; it acquired character.

And, of course, there were hand-me-downs. Having an older brother or sister meant that some items of school uniform already had a future owner allocated to them. A blazer or jumper wasn't worn out; it simply moved down the family pecking order. And judging by what I see today, this is one back-to-school tradition that has survived remarkably well.

"It'll do you fine" remains one of the great parental arguments against unnecessary expenditure. But amid all the recycling, there was still the small pleasure of something genuinely new: freshly sharpened pencils, pens, rubbers and rulers, and pristine new

jotters waiting to be carefully covered with centrefolds from your favourite music or football magazine, a decision sometimes requiring more thought than anything you eventually wrote inside them.

Finally came the haircut.

This was rarely a matter for negotiation. Nobody asked what style you wanted. You were taken to the barber, put in the chair and emerged ten minutes later looking as though you had recently enlisted.

Then, on the appointed morning, off you went.

Our parents largely got us through the school gates with the required clothing and equipment and assumed the school would take it from there. There were no electronic updates during the day. Nobody tracked our progress on an app. As far as I remember, my parents had only the vaguest idea what I actually did between nine o'clock and half past three.

Not anymore.

I now observe, as an interested grandparent, the considerably more sophisticated ritual of going back to school.

Uniforms can be ordered online from M&S without anyone having to trail round the shops. WhatsApp parent groups spring back into life. School apps provide timetables and notifications. Lunches are paid for electronically. Packed lunches come with nutritional advice. Laptops and tablets are charged and online calendars begin filling up.

Parents can now receive more information about what little Suzie was up to on a Tuesday afternoon than my parents received about my entire primary education.

And then there is the photograph.

This seems to be an essential part of the modern first day back. The child stands at the front door in immaculate new uniform, hair brushed, shoes gleaming, school bag strategically positioned, while a

photograph is taken to record the occasion on Facebook or Instagram if your mother is particularly cool.

Yet, for all that has changed, I wonder if the children themselves have changed quite as much.

There is still that strange mixture of excitement and apprehension on the first morning. Who will my teacher be? Will my friends be in my class? Where will I sit? Will the work be harder? Will everyone notice my new haircut?

And perhaps, somewhere, there is still a child walking through the school gates wearing trousers slightly too long and shoes that feel a little too big.

Because generations change, classrooms change and childhood changes, but growing up still involves those little moments when we have to leave the familiar behind and walk through a door into something new.

We don't always feel ready for it.

But perhaps our mothers were right all along.

You'll grow into it.

Rab



God in the Sciences - Follow the Star

Jesus' welcoming committee included Eastern scholars who learned about His birth through their study of astronomy. I can't help thinking that the arrival of these people at Bethlehem is a link between a very early form of science (albeit mixed in with their own form of religion) and Christian faith. What better way to discover God than to explore the world and follow the evidence wherever it leads? But what exactly was the star of Bethlehem? Scientists have investigated this question over the centuries, coming up with a variety of answers.

First, there is the idea of a supernova: the massively bright explosion caused by a dying star. On rare occasions a supernova can be seen from Earth with the naked eye, remaining visible for several months. We now know that Herod the Great died around 4BC, so the actual date of Jesus' birth must be a little earlier. The supernovae that might match this timing were one in the Andromeda galaxy between March 8BC and September 7BC, and another in the constellation of Capricorn in the Spring of 5BC.

Next, comes a planetary conjunction. The alignment most commonly associated with the star of Bethlehem was between Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation of Pisces in 7BC, but not everyone is sure whether this would be extraordinary enough to be the 'star' mentioned in the Bible.

Finally, the bright astronomical object that drew the Magi could have been a comet. This idea came from Sir Colin Humphreys, Professor of Materials Science at Cambridge University, and Oxford astronomer WG Waddington, who found that a comet was recorded by Chinese astronomers between March and May, 5BC. Humphreys then speculated that the 'no room at the inn' scenario came about because

Jesus was born during Passover, and the Magi visited Jesus in May or June.

People interpret the biblical account of Jesus' birth in all sorts of ways, but there's very little argument from serious historians that Jesus of Nazareth actually existed. Whatever the true explanation for the 'star of Bethlehem' may be, there's plenty of evidence that an astronomical event could have happened at the time of His birth.

I think it makes perfect sense that if God was going to enter His own creation and take on the form of one of His own creatures, it should be marked by a very significant physical event!



This article is one of a series written by Dr Ruth M Bancewicz, who is Church Engagement Director at The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion in Cambridge. Ruth writes on the positive relationship between Science and Christian faith.

The promise of advent

Choral piece composed by Dom Besig and lyrics by Nancy Price

Throughout a troubled world, we wait to see a sign.
To give us hope and courage, to calm our hearts and mind.

Throughout a troubled world, a light will soon appear.
To guide us through the shadows and cast away all doubt and fear.

According to the Word, our God will send a son.
To bring us all salvation, to join us all as one.

According to the Word, this child that heaven sends
Will live and reign forever and make us whole once again.

Isaiah once fortold it, God's promise of a king,
Soon, we will all be behold Him and know the peace He brings.

This child of humble birth will change the world forever,
Sharing God’s love with all on earth.

Margaret Laidlaw



Dividing Our Time

Have you noticed how the calendar months seem to have been allocated to assorted causes and activities?
Some of the better known ones are “Veganuary” - widely adopted as vegan diets for the month of January. “Dry January” , abstinence from alcohol, is also a well known observance. It’s “Love your Liver” month!

Movember, when men grow a moustache throughout the month, and Decembeard, when beards are grown in December, are also widespread. The sprouting of facial hair offers the bearers the chance to talk about cancer screening, treatment and research……prostate cancer in Movember and bowel cancel for December.

There’s lots more to divide our time, these being just a few UK examples

February is LGBTQ+ history month

March is prostate and ovarian cancer awareness month

April is autism acceptance month

May is national walking month

June is PRIDE month

July is plastic free month

August is happiness happens month

September is Alzheimer’s Disease month

October is breast cancer awareness month : pink ribbons!

Goodness me! How are we supposed to know?

Within our church life time is also divided and thankfully we do have some clues to help us know where we are in the year…..liturgical colours. At St Anne's these are fairly light touch, the priest's stole being the sole clue so do take note of it.

We have 2 seasons of preparation and repentance, in Advent and in Lent, during which purple is the colour. At seasons of celebration such as Easter, Christmas, baptisms, weddings, confirmations and ordinations, the priest will be wearing white and gold. At Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit inspired the early church and continues to inspire today, red is worn, as it is for the remembrance of martyrs.

Then at all other times, the colour is green. It's easy therefore to regard the "green weeks" as the less important or significant weeks in the church year. I like to think of the green time as the growing time; time to deepen our faith, to widen our understanding of discipleship, and to study and learn more. We are called to grow into the likeness of Christ; green is the season to allow time and space for transformation.

As we begin a new church year on Advent Sunday, and a new calendar year in 2027, we have a whole smorgasbord of choices as to how we divide our time. Whatever the year holds for you, may it be filled with joy, blessings and gratitude.

With love in Christ

Anne

by Meister Eckhart

What good is it to me if this eternal birth of the divine Son takes place unceasingly but does not take place within myself?

And what good is it to me if Mary is full of grace and if I am not also full of grace? What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to a Son if I do not also give birth to him in my time and my culture?

This, then, is the fullness of time: When the Son of God is begotten in us. In this birth you will discover all blessing. But neglect this birth and you neglect all blessing. Tend only to this birth in you and you will find there all goodness and all consolation, all delight, all being and all truth.

Amen

Noreen



Bringing Hope Through Debt Advice This Christmas

As we approach Christmas, many of us look forward to celebrations with family and friends, sharing gifts, meals and moments of joy. Yet for a growing number of people, this season can also bring anxiety and worry, particularly when money is tight and debts feel overwhelming. While Christmas speaks powerfully of hope, peace and God's love for all people, financial hardship can make those promises feel distant and out of reach.

It is in this context that our Debt Advice Service continues to play an increasingly important role across East Lothian. As an ecumenical, faith-based service, our work is rooted in the Christian calling to stand alongside those who are struggling, offering practical support, compassion and dignity without judgement.

The service continues to grow and develop. Our partnership with The Ridge in Dunbar remains a vital part of our work, while we have now established a strong presence at The Pennypit Pantry in Prestonpans. We are also strengthening our relationship with Carers of East Lothian and continue to provide money and budgeting advice in East Linton. These partnerships help us reach people where they are and ensure that support is accessible within local communities.

Behind the service is a dedicated team of staff and volunteers who generously give their time and skills. Alongside our paid coordinator, we now have ten volunteers serving in a variety of roles. Five are directly involved in providing debt advice, while others support Dunbar Foodshare and assist with income and expenditure work, administration and other essential tasks. Their contribution enables us to offer help to more people and families across East Lothian.

We are particularly delighted to congratulate Michael Harvey, who has recently become an Approved Money Adviser. This brings to three the number of team members qualified to provide statutory debt solutions, including bankruptcy advice. This represents an important strengthening of the expertise available

within the service and increases our ability to support people facing complex financial situations.

We are about to welcome a new part-time caseworker, providing additional capacity for client work and allowing our coordinator to devote more time to developing the service in Prestonpans, Musselburgh and Tranent. This marks an important next step as we seek to build stronger relationships with churches, community groups and local organisations throughout these communities.

Since the service began, we have supported 274 cases and helped address £2.6 million of debt. These figures, reported in October, represent far more than statistics. Behind every case is a person, a family or a household seeking a way forward through difficult circumstances. Each conversation, budget plan and debt solution offers an opportunity to restore hope and reduce the burden that financial worries place on people's lives.

The Christmas story reminds us that God came into the world not among the wealthy and powerful, but among ordinary people facing uncertainty and challenge. Jesus' ministry consistently drew him towards those carrying heavy burdens, offering compassion, hope and practical care. As a church-based service, we seek to reflect that same concern for our neighbours today.

Debt can often leave people feeling isolated, ashamed or trapped. Christmas reminds us that no one is forgotten by God and that hope can be found even in difficult circumstances. Through listening, supporting and walking alongside people on their journey towards financial stability, our Debt Advice Service seeks to be a small but tangible expression of that hope.

We remain deeply grateful to everyone who supports this work through volunteering, prayer, encouragement and partnership. As we celebrate the birth of Christ this season, may we continue to share His message of hope, compassion and practical love with all who need it most.

Pam

Christmas smiles

No room

The Sunday School teacher was telling the story of the Nativity and had just finished the part about there being ‘no room at the inn’. A small voice piped up: ‘Well, I blame Joseph. He should have booked.”

The night before Christmas

‘Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house
Not a creature was stirring, except Papa’s mouse.
The computer was humming, the icons were hopping,
As Papa did last minute Internet shopping.
The stockings were hung by the modem with care
In hope that St Nicholas would bring new software.
The children were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of computer games danced in their heads.



...no I don't think you're the real Father Christmas!
I think you're up there pinching lead off my roof!!

Next year?

The grandson had just taken a photograph of his ancient grandmother who'd come to stay for Christmas and was celebrating her 89th birthday the same day. "Grannie, I sure hope I'll be able to photograph you on your 90th birthday," he said.

"Why not?" his grandmother shrugged. "You look healthy enough."

Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus

The teacher asked her Sunday School class to draw pictures of their favourite Bible story. She was puzzled by Kate's picture, which showed four people on an airplane. She asked her which story it was meant to represent. "The Flight to Egypt," was her reply.

Pointing at each figure, the teacher ventured: "That must be Mary, Joseph, and Baby Jesus. But who's the fourth person?"

"Oh," explained Kate happily, "that's Pontius – the pilot!"

Three wise men

What if the 3 Wise men had been 3 Wise women?



They would have asked directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, cleaned the stable, made a casserole, brought some practical presents and there might have been peace on earth!

A Christmas recipe to try out



A wedge of Stilton is a delicious find in your festive fridge. And why not fold it into warm soda bread this year along with ruby-red cranberries, rather than simply saving it for the cheese board?

The recipe takes just 25 minutes to bake. It will fill your kitchen with the most heavenly of smells and is perfect served with a hearty spread of butter.

Overview

Prep time: 30 minutes

Cook time: 25 minutes

Ingredients

- 400g Wholegrain Flour
- 1tsp Bicarbonate of Soda
- 1tsp Salt
- 25g Butter
- 100g Dried Cranberries
- 120g Stilton (roughly diced)
- 400g Buttermilk

Method

1. Preheat the oven to 200 degrees Celsius. In a large bowl, combine the flour, salt, and bicarbonate of soda
2. Rub the butter into the dry ingredients with your fingertips until it resembles fine breadcrumbs. Add the Stilton and cranberries, mixing them with the flour until they are evenly dispersed
3. Pour in the buttermilk and combine with a butter knife, then knead until combined
4. Shape into a round and place into a cast iron skillet or onto a lined baking tray
5. Use a sharp knife to score the round very deeply, marking it into quarters
6. Bake at 200 for 25-30 minutes, then cool in the skillet or

From 'The English Garden'

What's on at St Anne's



Advent reflective morning

Step aside from the busyness of Christmas preparations. Make time and space for silent reflection. Followed by coffee and conversation.

Saturday 5th December at 10:30am



[Contact for queries: Sharon Morgan 01368 864582]

Next Silent Reflective Morning

2nd January

Christmas services

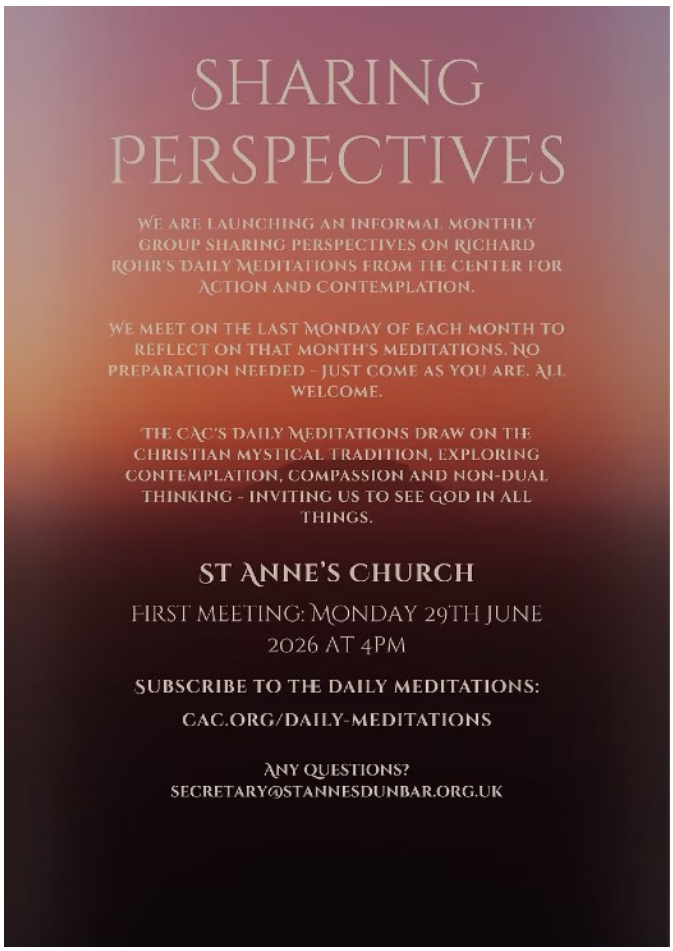
Thursday 24th December - Crib service at 6pm

- Midnight service at 11:30pm

Friday 25th December - Christmas Day at 10:30am

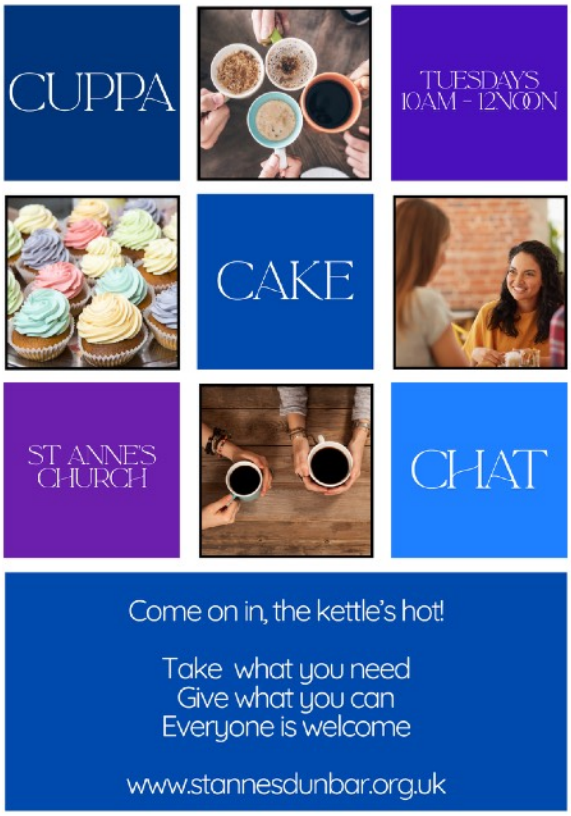
Sunday 27th December - Methodist service at 10:30am

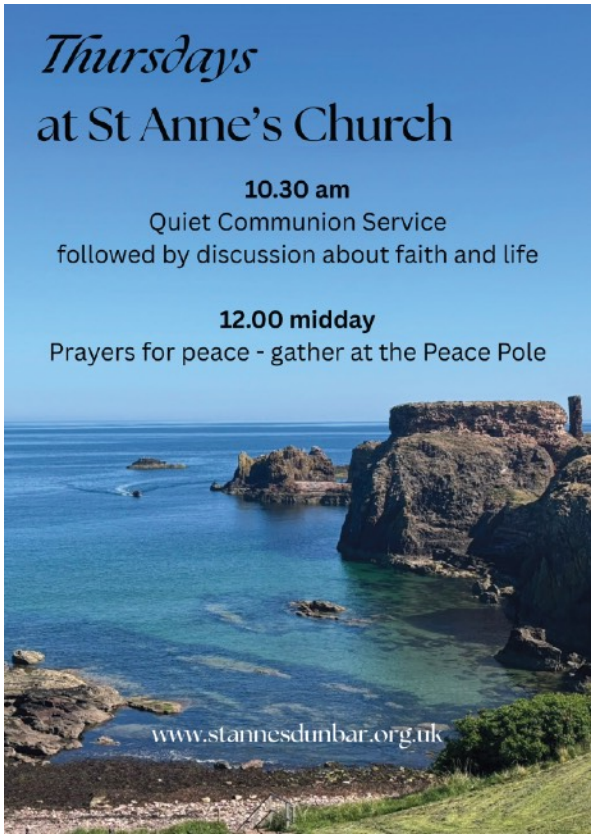


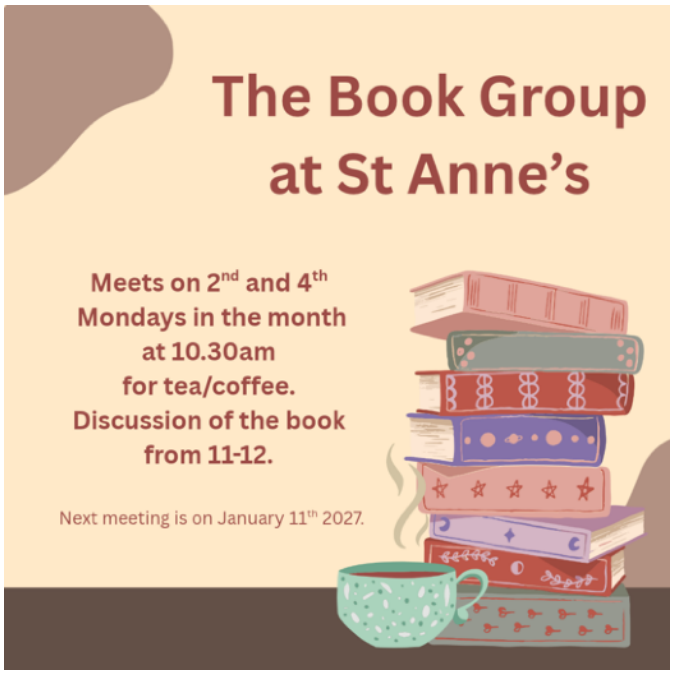


Anne's Pantry

The next Anne's pantry is on the 13th December. Please bring along home made cakes, biscuits or any other home made goods. This will be the last opportunity to buy St Anne's Christmas puddings.









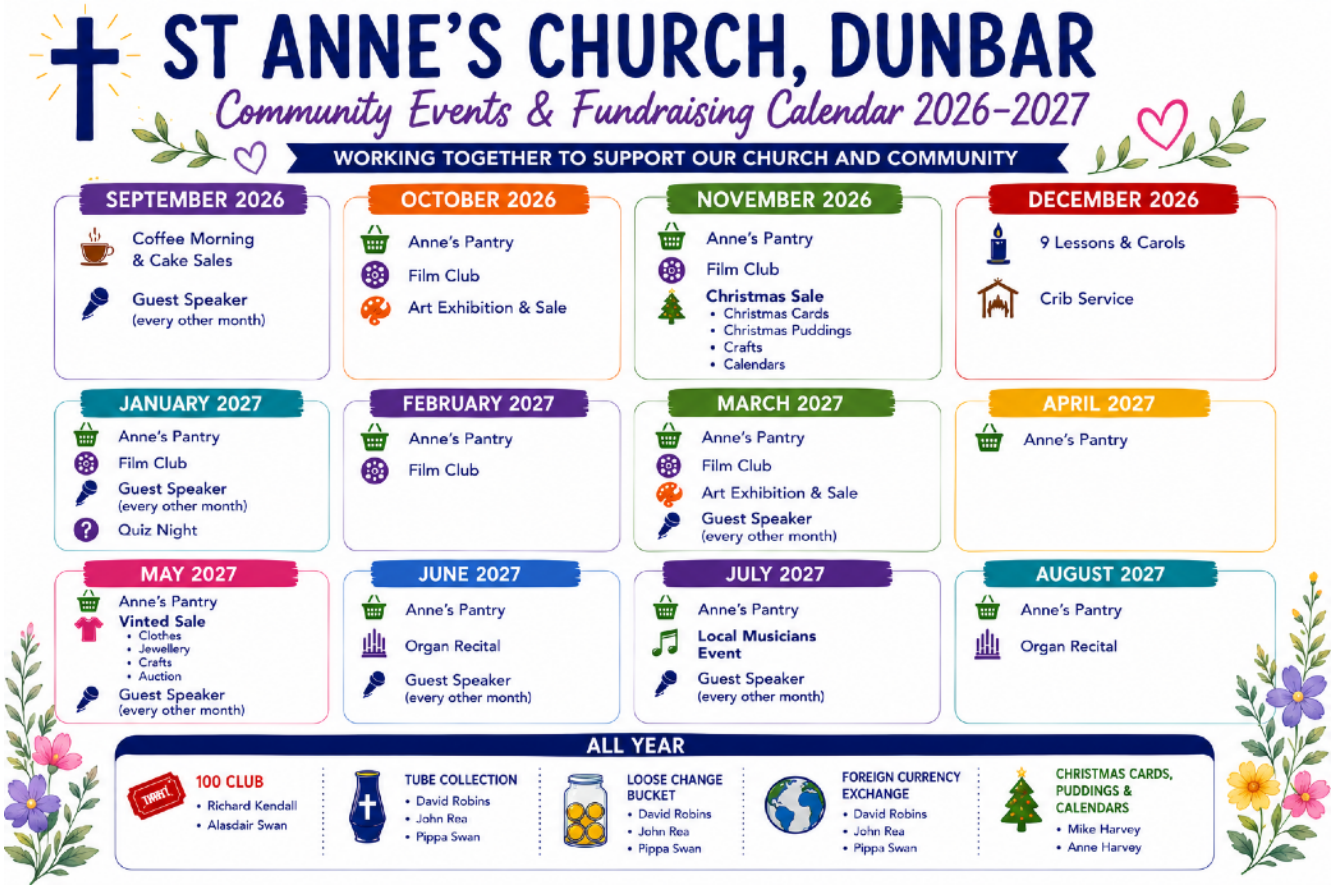
'Walking with Angels' is this years Advent study book. The Advent study group will begin on Thursday 26th November and runs for 4 weeks. All are welcome. The book costs £10

Stained glass in East Lothian from an art history perspective

Saturday 23rd January at 3pm

Tickets on the door £7.50

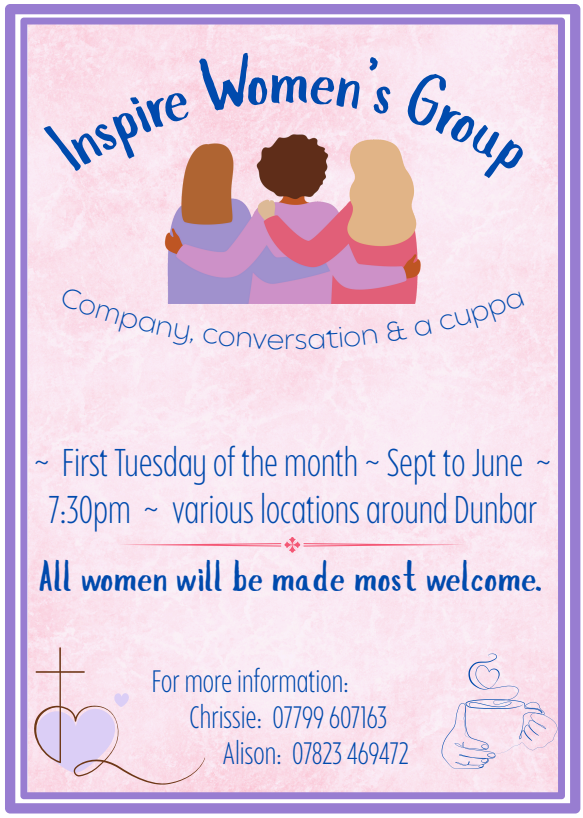




What's on elsewhere







Readings and Rotas

Sunday 6th December (All age Christingle service)

Isaiah 40: 1-11, Mark 1: 1-8

Readings: Rosemary

Intercessions: Robert
Chalice: Robert
Organ: Brian

Sunday 13th December

Isaiah 61: 1-4, 8-11, John 1: 6-8, 19-28

Readings: David

Intercessions: Noreen
Chalice: Stuart
Organ: Diana

Sunday 20th December

Romans 16: 25-27, Luke 1: 26-38

Readings: Caitriona

Intercessions: Sharon
Chalice: Sharon
Organ: Brian

Christmas Eve

Hebrews 1: 1-12, Luke 2: 1-20

Readings: Rosemary

Intercessions: Robert
Chalice: Robert
Organ: Brian

Christmas Day

Titus 3: 4-7, Luke 2: 8-20

Readings: Robert
Intercessions: Harriet
Chalice: Robert
Organ: Diana

Sunday 27th December

Galations 4: 4-7, Luke 2: 22-40

Readings: Chris
Intercessions: Mark
Chalice: Mark
Organ: Brian

Sunday 3rd January (Epiphany)

Ephesians 3: 1-12, Matthew 2: 1-12

Readings: Alasdair
Intercessions: Noreen
Chalice: Robert
Organ: Diana

Sunday 10th January

Acts 19: 1-7, Mark 1: 4-11

Readings: Brian
Intercessions: Sharon
Chalice: Sharon
Organ: Brian

Sunday 17th January

1 Samuel 3: 1-20, John 1: 43-51

Readings: Stuart
Intercessions: Mark
Chalice: Mark
Organ: Brian

Sunday 24th January

Jonah 3: 1-5, 10, Mark 1: 14-20

Readings: Rupert
Intercessions: Liz
Chalice: Stuart
Organ: George

Sunday 31st January (Methodist covenant service)

Deuteronomy 29: 10-15, Jeremiah 31: 31-34, John 15: 1-10

Readings: Mike
Intercessions: Anne
Chalice: Anne
Organ: Brian

All readings use the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible

Services at St. Anne's

Sunday

10.30am - Holy Communion

Young Church every 1st and 3rd Sunday

Thursday

10.30am - Holy Communion followed by coffee and chat

12.00pm - Prayers at the Peace Pole



Rector: Revd. Harriet Johnston

email: rector@stannesdunbar.org.uk

Rest days Friday & Saturday

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Event Bookings David Robins: events@stannesdunbar.org.uk

Organ Enquiries Brian Dale: organist@stannesdunbar.org.uk

Magazine (contributions) comms@stannesdunbar.org.uk

Please send Cairn contributions by the third Sunday of the month

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