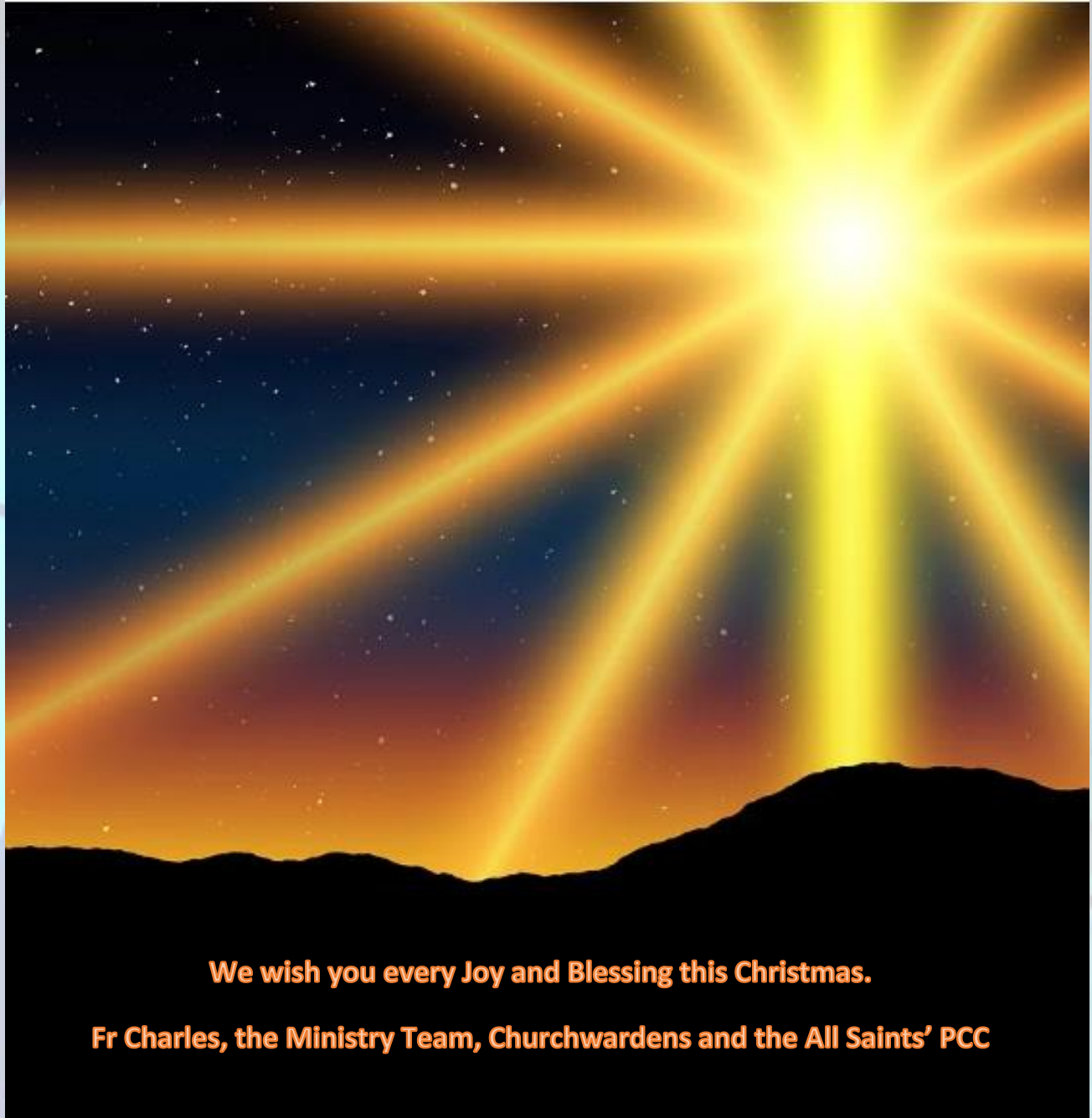


ALL SAINTS NEWS

21st December 2025
4th Sunday in Advent



We wish you every Joy and Blessing this Christmas.

Fr Charles, the Ministry Team, Churchwardens and the All Saints' PCC

Contact us

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The views and opinions expressed in this Newsletter are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of the All Saints Church community.

A potted history of the Christmas tree

From pagans to Queen Victoria

“Within this thicket there lurks a name...” Ian Hamilton Finlay

Waldemar Januszczak - January 2025



It may have passed you by that 2024 was a significant anniversary. Unless, of course, you live in Germany, in which case you could not have missed it. Exhibitions were opened. Television films were screened. Articles were written. Because 2024 was the 250th anniversary of the birth of Caspar David Friedrich, the German Romantic genius and painter of Christmas trees par excellence.

By “Christmas trees” I do not mean the heavily baubled light scaffolds we favour today or the fold-away silver sort we bring out of the garage — the ones made in China. Those are what Christmas trees have become. They are not what they were in Friedrich’s time.

In Friedrich’s time Christmas trees were beacons of hope: eternal evergreens connected to the heavens; mystical proof of the fertility of nature. They were reminders, too, of Christ’s ultimate sacrifice. At Christ’s Mass we celebrate his birth, but we need also to remember that he was born to die for us, on a wooden cross. Sorry. This is not stuff they tell you in a Tesco cracker.

For Friedrich, all of nature was a feast of religious symbols. When he looked at a broken ice floe he saw the wreckage of human hope. When he saw a rocky mountain he heard a Wagnerian chorus of angels in the sky. When he glimpsed a ruin on a hill he saw the end of the world. He was not a happy bunny. But he was a pictorial genius whose work sits on the summit of landscape art. And most of it has trees in it.

The story of the Christmas tree is both modern and ancient. Modern because before about 1830 there were no Christmas trees as we know them. Ancient because around the time of the winter solstice — that’s around Christmas to you and me — pretty much every ancient society marked the shortest day not with the happy yodelling of Slade or the drunk-tank laments of the Pogues, but with symbolic displays of evergreens.

The Egyptians, the Chinese, the Jews, they all celebrated the winter solstice with leafy wreaths and signs of nature’s slumbering fertility. Evergreens, especially fir trees, were favoured because they ignored the winter and seemed eternal. For the Vikings, Yggdrasil, the great tree of life, connects the underworld (Niflheim) with the earth (Midgard) and the realm of the gods (Asgard). In every pagan society tree worship was a common practice. Even our own Druids were at it. You don’t have to have sat through the entire cycle of *The Lord of the Rings* to sense the pagan origins of the humble Christmas tree.



All this came to be codified in Germany. The modern Christmas tree is specifically a German invention. In medieval street theatre and Passion plays, the feast of Adam and Eve, ie Christmas, had as its main German prop the “paradise tree”. Usually a fir tree decorated with apples, it represented the Tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden. The same tree from which Eve would later pick the forbidden apple, causing us to be thrown out of the garden.

Paradise trees migrated to the German home and became a staple of domestic decoration at the feast of Adam and Eve. Decorated with paper figurines and cookies symbolising the sacred Host, they were an indoor reminder of the sins of Eve and the sacrifice of Jesus. Apples from the Tree of Knowledge turned prettily into coloured baubles hanging from the branches.



According to a persistent legend, the man who added lights to the spectacle was no less a religious giant than Martin Luther. Coming home in the dark, the legend goes, the great Protestant reformer noticed how beautiful the stars looked poking out from behind a looming fir tree. As soon as he got home he told his children to wire some candles to the paradise tree so the flickering fires could approximate the beautiful effect of stars at night. The lit-up Christmas tree was born.

For the next 200 years it remained a north European habit favoured, in particular, by German Lutherans. As a Protestant creation, it could not and did not cross over quickly to the Catholic home. Friedrich's family were strict Lutherans. His father was a candle-maker, so there was never a shortage of lights on the Friedrich paradise tree. What was in short supply was good cheer.

Friedrich's mother died in 1781 when he was seven. A year later his sister died, followed by a second sister who succumbed to typhus. In 1787 he watched his younger brother drown when the two of them were fishing on winter ice. According to some versions of the story, the younger brother was trying to save Caspar David when the ice cracked.

Ice came to play a dark symbolic role in Friedrich's art, as did the looming fir trees of northern Europe. His breakthrough picture, the painting that made him famous, the so-called *Tetschen Altar*, from 1808, shows a looming German mountain covered with fir trees, silhouetted against a setting sun. In the middle of the trees we can make out a crucified Christ on a cross.



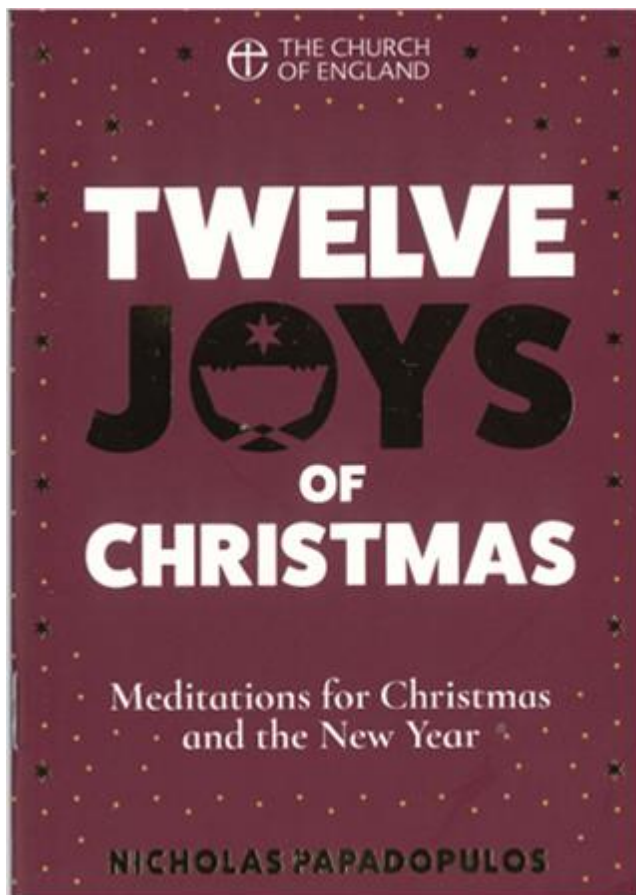
Friedrich unveiled the painting in a special display at his studio on Christmas Day, 1808. To approximate the effects of a small chapel he lowered the lighting and mounted the picture on a black cloth. The critics were aghast. "It is true presumption when landscape painting wants to slink into the church and creep on to the altars," snapped Basilius von Ramdohr, the man of the day.

In Britain there's a shortage of Friedrich's work. The National Gallery owns just one. It's a winter scene with lots of fir trees, of course, a gothic church looming up in the mist and in the foreground a wooden crucifix in front of which a cripple is praying, his crutches thrown on to the snow. Hope mixed with despair: Friedrich in a nutshell.



Famously, it was Queen Victoria's German husband, Prince Albert, who popularised the Christmas tree over here. Having a German royal family proved especially helpful with the spread of yule customs. The teenage Victoria remembered having a tree in her bedroom. But it was the publication, in the Illustrated London News in 1848, of a picture of the royal family in Windsor enjoying Christmas round a decorated fir that supercharged the fashion. Within a decade every middle-class household in Britain had a mini-Yggdrasil in the parlour.

In America, meanwhile, it was Moravian emigrants from Germany who brought the fashion with them. An important leap was made when Thomas Edison's company invented the string of electric lights. On the surface, at least, they hid the yule-time darkness that concerned Friedrich. But only on the surface.



Explore the joys and traditions of the Christmas season.

Beginning on Christmas Day and ending on the Eve of Epiphany, this booklet offers a theme, a short reading reflection and prayer, chosen and written by Nicholas Papadopoulos, for this special time of year.

Copies are available in the Atrium



Clifton Church of England



Parish Lunch



Join us in the Randall Room after Parish Mass for a

'Bring & Share' Parish Lunch for Epiphany

Sunday 11th January 2026 @ 12.30pm

The first event in this year's All Saints' Social Calendar!

Please sign up on the list in the Porch with your name and the dish you'll be bringing to share – just to avoid duplication – and we'll all share the feast!

Cash Bar

Bring a friend, or just come and share a delicious lunch with good company

All Saints Parish Office
0117 974 1355; www.allsaintsclifton.org



Christmas ²⁵ @ All Saints

SUNDAY 21ST DEC 5:00^{PM}
Christmas Carol Service

WEDNESDAY 24TH DEC 4:00 FOR 4:30^{PM}
Christmas Story

WEDNESDAY 24TH DEC 10:00^{PM}
Midnight Mass

THURSDAY 25TH DEC 10:00^{AM}
Christmas Day Eucharist with Carols



CHRISTMAS EVE THE CHRISTMAS STORY



4 PM
HOT
CHOCOLATE
& MINCE PIES

4.30-5 PM
CAROLS ROUND
THE CRIB

ALL AGES
WELCOME

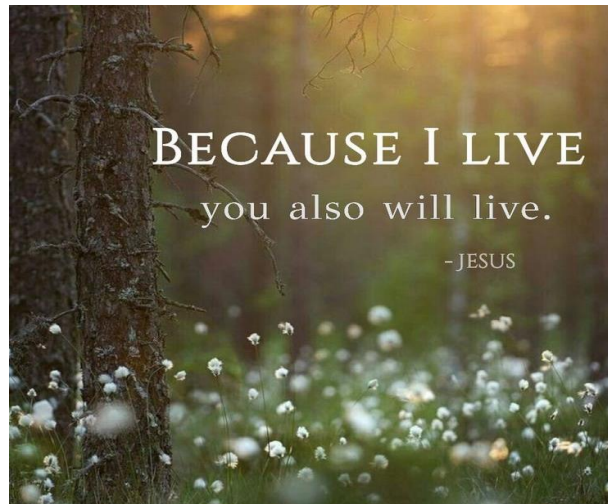


Prayers Requests

'In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.'

(John 14: 19).

Please let Fr Charles know of anyone who would like to be remembered within the weekly prayer list or anyone who you would like to be remembered in prayer.



Those of the parish and our hearts whom we remember in our Prayers:

Sunday

Tabitha Clark, Ruth and Richard Harding, Katie Norman, Neal Gordon, Joyce Shepherd, Cynthia Ashford Nicky Epina Sarah Jean Bradford Andrew French Swarna Simpson Jenny Oates Sister Rosie Martin Rogers John Pedlar Gillian Clark Pepe Messel William and Lincoln Gwladys Hughes Sue GayLard – Hughes Aiden Downton.

Monday

Sathia Aruliah Susie King Arthur Cleaver

Tuesday.

Pam Parker Oussama and Claire Sader

Wednesday

Katrina and Katherine King, Philip Miles, Samantha Tucker, Maureen Mumford Vy and Angel Wray

Thursday

Remie Clarke

Friday

Charlotte Hopkins, Caroline Semon, Nadine Benn The O'Sullivan family

Saturday

The Departed

Hugh Farry Lucille Osafa Mary Whittington Diana Verity Rhona Bennett

Years' Minds - this week we remember:

Geoff Knott Samuel Racy Leslie James Deborah James Caryl Fox Jim York
Jo Drewett Hayden Rees

ALL SAINTS PRAYERS

Mon 22	O Rex Gentium (O King of the nations) <i>O King of the gentiles and their desired One, the cornerstone that makes both one: come, and deliver man, whom you formed out of the dust of the earth</i>
Tue 23	O Emmanuel (O With Us is God) O Emmanuel, king and lawgiver, desire of the nations, Saviour of all people: Come and set us free, Lord our God.
Wed 24	<p>Christmas Eve</p> <p>Almighty God, as we prepare with joy to celebrate the gift of the Christ-child, embrace the earth with your glory and be for us a living hope.</p> <p>Christmas Story 4.00 pm for 4.30 pm Christmas Midnight Mass 10.00 pm</p>
Thurs 25	<p>Christmas Day</p> <p>You have given us your only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin: grant that we, who have been born again and made your children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit.</p> <p>Christmas Eucharist with Carols 10.00am</p>
Fri 26	<p>Mass 10.00am Stephen, Deacon, First Martyr</p> <p>We pray for all those who are in preparation for ordination and those who will be ordained this year. May they and your whole Church have a rich outpouring of God's grace. We pray also for their families, friends, for all those who support and encourage them on their journey and for those with whom they will serve.</p>
Sat 27	<p>John, Apostle and Evangelist</p> <p>We pray for our friends. John was the 'disciple whom Jesus loved', we pray for and give thanks for those who are close to us, whose opinions are important to us and for whom we care.</p>
Sunday 28	<p>The Holy Innocents 1st Sunday of Christmas</p> <p>Remembering the infanticide of Herod the Great, we pray for all children who suffer death, injury and loss in the war zones of this world. A child, 'Nour', in Syria aged 6 described: "Nour was such a kind, friendly girl, but I watched her go crazy. She is always alone. She won't talk. She won't eat. She wakes the neighbours with nightmares. The fear stopped her mind. She is too shocked to have a personality anymore."</p> <p>Early Worship 9.00am Parish Mass 10.30am</p>

We are committed to safeguarding children, young people, victims of domestic abuse and vulnerable adults.

If you have any Safeguarding concerns please contact :
The Parish Safeguarding Officers - Caroline Davenport
& Janice Callow at safeguarding@allsaintsclifton.org

If you would like to give regularly to the Church, please set up a standing order to the church account, details below

Parochial Church Council of All Saints
Account No. 65256747 sort code 08 92 99
Gift Aid forms are available from the office
office@allsaintsclifton.org