

Dear Friends and Colleagues -

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴²In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! ⁴³But why am I so favoured, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy.

Luke 1:41-44

Yesterday was the first Sunday of Advent—a season that invites us to slow down, take a breath, and prepare our hearts for the coming of Jesus. Advent is a time of expectation and hope, but it's also a time that can feel very different depending on where we are in life. The Church of England's theme this year is "The Joy of Christmas." Joy is a word we hear everywhere in December—on cards, in carols, even on shop windows—but let's be honest: joy isn't always easy to find.

For some, Christmas is a season of celebration—family gatherings, laughter, and traditions that warm the heart. For others, it can be a difficult time. Loneliness, grief, financial pressures, or simply the stress of trying to make everything "perfect" can weigh heavily. So, what does real joy look like? And where do we find it when life feels complicated?

In Luke 1:41-44 we see that Mary goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth after Angel Gabriel tells her she is going to give birth to Jesus. As Elizabeth hears Mary's voice her baby, John the Baptist, "leapt in her womb" when Mary greeted her. That leap was pure joy—a response to God's presence. Joy isn't about everything being perfect; it's about recognising that God is with us, even in the ordinary and the messy moments of life.

The Young Leaders Award has created four themes to help us explore joy in a deeper way this Advent:

- **Joy in Connection** – Mary's story
- **Joy in Trusting** – Mary and Joseph's story
- **Joy in Sharing** – The Shepherd's story
- **Joy in Following** – The Wise Men's story

If you'd like to explore these themes further during the Christmas period, the Young Leaders Award Collective Worship resources are available [here](#). And for adults, the Church of England has produced Twelve Joys of Christmas, a set of reflections by The Very Revd Nicholas Papadopoulos, Dean of Salisbury. These meditations take familiar festive traditions—from Christmas jumpers to pantomimes—and uncover deeper truths about God's love. You can find them [here](#).





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As we journey through Advent, let's look for joy—not just in the big celebrations, but in the small, everyday moments: a kind word, a shared laugh, a quiet prayer. Joy may not always be loud, but it is always possible. And maybe, just maybe, we can be the reason someone else finds joy this season.

Prayer

Lord Jesus,

Thank You for the gift of Advent—a time to pause and prepare our hearts for Your coming. Help us to find joy in connection, in trusting You, in sharing with others, and in following Your way. For those who feel lonely or burdened this season, bring comfort and peace. May Your presence fill our lives with hope and joy that lasts beyond Christmas Day.

Amen

From Lynsey Norris, **Assistant Diocesan Director of Education**

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January dates for your diary...

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January dates for your diary...

-  **Governor School Induction**
Thursday 15th January 2026, 10am-12pm
-  **Collective Worship Cluster**
Tuesday 20th January 2026, 4pm-5pm
-  **Developing the Spiritual Life of the School**
Wednesday 28th January 2026, 4pm-6pm
-  **Headteacher Briefing**
Thursday 29th January 2026, 10am-11am
-  **Governor and Clerks to Governor Briefing**
Thursday 29th January 2026, 5:30pm-7pm