

Marksman

February/March, 2026



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From the Manse



One of the things I love about this time of year is the fact that every morning, and late afternoon, there is the sense that the days are lengthening, that winter is receding, and the promise of spring is just around the corner. It does not surprise me that the early Christians pegged the celebration of the birth of Jesus onto the festivals of light associated with the shortest day, so that with the birth of Jesus in midwinter, (in the northern hemisphere at least), his birth brings a sense of optimism that the Light really has come into the world. For me, this is symbolised by the lightening of the skies in the morning which is obvious by only the second week of January, just as the Christmas trees and their lights are coming down.

Even with the cold and frosty weather since the turning of the year, the daffodils in the manse garden are already stretching their green shoots up through the earth, and I know it won't be too long until they grow heads, and open, and the welcome sight of colourful daffodils will be seen, not just in my garden but many others to brighten my morning walks even further.

Advent carried with it a sense of hope as we looked forward to the coming of the Christ-child, and equally to the Second Coming of Jesus, when God's Kingdom of justice and joy will truly be fulfilled. The birth of Jesus was definitely a time of hope, as we celebrated his birth, and perhaps even began to think, like Mary, of what his life may bring to pass.

However, the Church year marches on relentlessly and we didn't stay there long.

We are currently in the season of Epiphany, which means revelation, when we learn more about Jesus and his mission, God's mission, in our world, but I am very aware

that Lent is just around the corner! The supermarkets are thinking even further ahead, as the Easter Eggs were already on display in some of the shops before the new year began. They are optimistic they can persuade us to buy some early, then to give into temptation and eat them, and then buy more before Easter actually arrives!

However, the Christian sense of hope is not the same as optimism. Optimism is the belief that, having assessed the evidence, a positive change is coming. Hope is the certain assurance that God is faithful to his promises, and will deliver for his people even when, outwardly, there is no evidence that things will change for the better. Our hope helps us persevere as we remember that God, mysteriously, wonderfully and unstoppably is in the process of transforming the world. We are called to embody that hope in the way we live now. The love of God, revealed to us in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, defines who we are, transforms us completely, and empowers us to share the love of the God who loved us first. Hope is the inevitable consequence of a life lived close to Jesus.

In the Autumn term, in our Bible study groups, we studied the book of *Daniel*. We found we were familiar with the first half of the book, the stories of Daniel in the lion's den kept safe by God, and of his three friends who did not perish in the blazing furnace, of Daniel's faithfulness, and determination to continue to pray to his God, even when told it was punishable by death. What we were not familiar with were Daniel's visions of the future, of the battles, and the creatures that filled his dreams. But, when we pushed through to the end, and began to understand them, Daniel's visions were full of hope for the future, of a time to come, in an uncertain time ahead, when God's

From the Manse



Kingdom will come fully into being and the righteous will rise to eternal life.

This hope of Daniel, is echoed in the book of *Revelation*, which tells of a time, to which all of history is heading, a time when all reality will finally align with God's will, and all contradictions of pain, and suffering will cease. No more injustice, no more cancer or dementia, no more depression, no more death. It speaks of a time which we eagerly anticipate when we see all that Jesus won through his death and resurrection.

So, my hope is, that in the midst of whatever you may be experiencing: cancer, dementia,

anxiety and depression, or bereavement, whatever is going on in your life that seems contradictory to God's loving nature, you have courage and hold onto hope. Trust that death does not have the final answer, but Jesus does.

May you hear the voice of Jesus, in the darkness of whatever is going on in your world, and follow him into the Light. A world of love and peace, without end.

Your friend and minister,

Sonia

My Lent Book for 2026

Over the last couple of years, I have chosen a book for us to read during Lent, and I've done the same this year. My hope is that this allows us as individuals, and as a congregation, to deepen our understanding and our faith, and consider our part in bringing in the Kingdom of God.

This year, I have chosen a book called *Our Radiant Redeemer*, by Tim Chester.

It contains 47 daily reflections all based on the transfiguration of Jesus, which illuminate the meaning of the cross and resurrection. When we gaze at Jesus, in all his glory on the mountain top, we will be reminded of how dazzling he is, and how brilliant our future with him will be. As we look deeper, we will discover that it is not just Jesus who is transformed, for he promises we will be too.

Tim is a Lecturer in Historical Theology and Spiritual Formation for *Crosslands Training*, based in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, who seek to equip ministers and all believers in the work of ministry and mission. He has a PhD in theology and PgDip in History and 25 years' experience of pastoral ministry. He lives in rural Derbyshire, where he is part of a new church plant. He has written over 40 books, and writes in very readable style in short chapters, and is easy to understand.

Ash Wednesday is the 18th of February. All it requires from you is the commitment to read 3-4 pages each day, with a Bible verse to focus on and perhaps a hymn verse or poem to think about. Get your copy directly from me, or if you prefer, order the e-book online.

Worship Matters



Thank you to everyone who has attended the joint services with Sherwood Greenlaw. It is good that we can worship together as we head towards a union.

Sunday 8th February	:	Joint service with Sherwood Greenlaw at St Mark's
Sunday 15th February	:	Transfiguration Sunday, Holy Communion
Wednesday 18th February	:	Ash Wednesday
Sunday 22nd February	:	Thinking Day/Founder's Day with Girl Guiding and Scout Association
Sunday 1 st March	:	Andy leading worship. (Sonia weekend off)
Sunday 8th March	:	Joint service at Sherwood Greenlaw (Sonia on holiday 4 th – 10 th March)
Sunday 29th March	:	Palm Sunday services at 11am and 7.30pm

Joint services in Holy Week across the Church of Scotland churches in Paisley.

Services start at 7.30pm, with tea and coffee available from 7pm, apart from Maundy Thursday when the service will begin at 7pm with tea and coffee afterwards.

Palm Sunday 29 th March	:	St Mark's (Oldhall) (led by Sonia)
Monday 30 th March	:	St George's
Tuesday 31 st March	:	Paisley Abbey
Wednesday 1 st April	:	Paisley North
Thursday 2 nd April	:	Oakshaw Trinity
Good Friday 3 rd April	:	Sherwood Greenlaw (led by Sonia)
Saturday 4 th April	:	Paisley South
Easter Sunday 5 th April	:	Paisley West

Funerals

8 th December 2025	:	Colin Brown, Auchmannoch Avenue
16 th December 2025	:	Douglas Kemp, Kinpurnie Road
15 th January 2026	:	Ian Kinloch, Kingsley Care Home (formerly of Killearn Drive)





Session Report

I am pleased to report that great progress is being made regarding our upcoming union with Sherwood/Greenlaw Church. We have held several well attended, from both sites, joint services and these will go ahead monthly or thereabouts until full union we hope later this year. There is to be a full meeting of both Kirk Sessions on the 27th of January.

The festive season has now passed and the regular church activities are restarting. We are pleased to continue hosting *Ralston Seniors Club* lunches on Fridays and send thanks to the volunteers who help run this essential service. On the theme of volunteers, our thanks continue to those who work in the church café serving and clearing up, but also those who do all the food preparation, without whom it just wouldn't work.

Many thanks go to our volunteers who prepare the refreshments for after service get-togethers - for a catch up on the gossip and scandal.

As some of you may be aware our church cleaner has been on long term sick, but thankfully should be back in harness by this time. We wish and pray for her continued good health.

I am indebted to all those who undertook cleaning tasks in Gillian's absence. Everyone was very diligent in their duties and kept the whole building in a neat, clean and tidy manner.

We can always do with more willing participants in the many church activities to ensure a continuation of our work within the community.

Colin B. Reid, Session Clerk



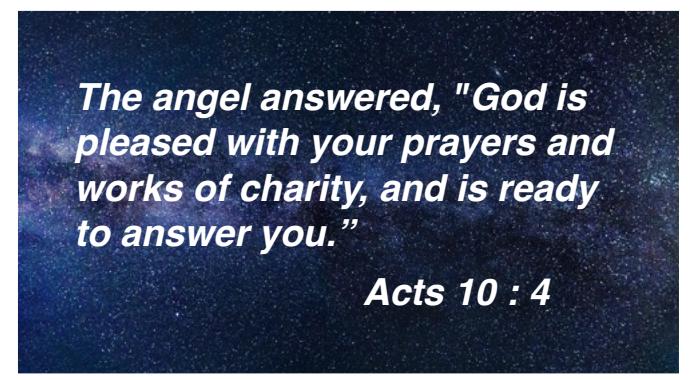
Sunday Duty Team Rota

DATE	TEAM	LEADER	DATE	TEAM	LEADER
01/02/2026	6	Dr C. Reid	01/03/2026	2	Mr A. Taylor
08/02/2026	6	Dr C. Reid	08/03/2026	2	Mr A. Taylor
15/02/2026	1	Mr J. Goodall	15/03/2026	3	Mrs C. Hair
22/02/2026	1	Mr J. Goodall	22/03/2026	3	Mrs C. Hair
			29/03/2026	4	Mr G. Black

Prayer Diary



FEBRUARY, 2026		
Sun	1	Pray for our service this morning and for Sonia as she leads us.
Mon	2	Our streets for prayer this week are Golf Drive, Hawkhead Road and Killearn Drive.
Tue	3	Pray for our 39 th Brownies and Rainbows today.
Wed	4	Mid week service. Prayer Group on Zoom and in the church.
Thu	5	Give thanks for the Flower Team and the work they do.
Fri	6	Remember our Boys' Brigade in your prayers today. LIFT (Ladies in Fellowship Together) meet tonight to discuss church action on poverty.
Sat	7	Bible Study on Zoom at 10:15 for 10:30.
Sun	8	Be with us as we gather for worship today. This is a joint service with Sherwood Greenlaw here at St Mark's.
Mon	9	Pray for the following streets this week – Kinpurnie Road, Lanfine Road and Marchbank Gardens.
Tue	10	39 th Brownies planning for Thinking Day and starting Kindness Interest Badge.
Wed	11	Mid week service. Prayer Group on Zoom and in church followed by Bible Study in church at 7:45. Pray for the 39 th Brownies and Guides today.
Thu	12	We pray for the Green Team this week. Pray for The Junction and for the young folk who attend.
Fri	13	World Radio Day – give thanks for ways the gospel is shared through radio.
Sat	14	Pray for all who are living in areas of conflict.



Prayer Diary



FEBRUARY, 2026		
Sun	15	May we know your presence with us this morning. This is Transfiguration Sunday and we celebrate Communion today.
Mon	16	These are our streets for prayer this week- Netherdale Drive, Newtyle Road and Newnham Road.
Tue	17	Pray for all who help out cleaning the church.
Wed	18	Ash Wednesday today and we celebrate the beginning of Lent. Mid week service. Prayer Group on Zoom and in church.
Thu	19	The Worship team are our focus for prayer today. Haven Café on this afternoon.
Fri	20	World Day of Social Justice.
Sat	21	Bible Study on Zoom at 10:15 for 10:30. 39 th and 39 th A Brownies attending County Thinking Day in Erskine to celebrate 100 th year of Thinking Day.
Sun	22	Be with Sonia as she prepares and leads us in worship today. Today we welcome Guiding and Scout Groups to church to mark Thinking Day/Founder's Day.
Mon	23	The following streets are for our prayers - Oldhall Road, Ossian Road and Penilee Road. Pray for the Guild as they meet weekly.
Tue	24	39 th Brownies Thinking Day activities. New Brownies make their promise and awards given.
Wed	25	Mid week service. Prayer Group on Zoom and in church followed by Bible Study in church at 7:45. 39 th A Brownies are thankful for another new member making her promise.
Thu	26	We give thanks for the Pastoral Team as they seek to care and support us.
Fri	27	Remember the Street Pastors as they are out and about.
Sat	28	Pray for the Emergency Services and the work they do.

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

Hebrews 11 : 1



Christmas is a busy time in the church calendar and this year was no different. With school assemblies and *Messy Church* on the last week in November, where we looked at Advent and Christmas, it was a month of Christmas. I am certainly not complaining as I enjoy the Christmas season, and it is a great privilege being able to speak with different people about Jesus coming into the world.

Messy Church was well attended again and the average attendance for the year was 32, which is an increase on previous years. In November we had a range of activities including a Nativity Scene that folded into a present and we decorated our *TREEmendous* event tree. The young people attending helped tell everyone the Christmas Story.

As well as us going up to the school for the assemblies, the whole school came down for their Christmas services on the last day. The school choir came down to the Pastoral Committee *Afternoon Tea* and sang very well. All the P6s came down to the church to do *ADVENTure* – a morning workshop looking at what Advent is all about. Some of the young people were surprised by some of the details that have been added to the Christmas story over the years.

The Junction has been running well with the two separate groups meeting on alternate Thursdays. We have had a total of 43 young people coming along since we started the two groups in October. Each night is similar with time to play games (consoles, pool, table top games, etc) followed by a few 'big' games where everyone is all together and then time to do what they want at the end.



The young people thought of doing a Christmas movie themed tree for the *Zoom* event so the quotes and films on the tree were their suggestions.

The church website was not working properly during December. One part of it needed updating and once updated would not work correctly with the rest. I am very grateful to the team at *JoomLead* that managed to resolve the problem and get the site back up and running again. Please speak to me if you have any ideas of other things that could possibly go on to the website. And speak to Jen or me if there is anything you would like us to put up on to the church's social media (*Facebook* or *Instagram* accounts).

Planning has begun for the *Easter Children's Holiday Club*. Last year we had 93 children come along during the week with just under 70 on the first day. We are planning for another busy and fun week. The holiday club will be on for anyone in P1 to P7 from 10am to 12 noon with the theme still to be decided. This is likely to run during the first week of the school holidays (6th to 10th April), but I just need to confirm we have enough volunteers that week. Please speak to me if you would like to help at *Holiday Club*.

As I reflect and plan for the year ahead, I have been drawn to the *Psalm*s and in particular *Psalm 127* : 'Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain.' I will endeavour to seek God in all that I plan and do and ask for your prayers to help me and the wider church do that this year.

God bless,
Peter





Flowers in Church

01/02/26	Miss I. Higgins
08/02/26	Mr D. MacKay
15/02/26	Ms C. McKay
22/02/26	Boys' Brigade Junior Dept.
01/03/26	
08/03/26	Mrs J. MacKenzie
15/03/26	
22/03/26	Mrs A. McLeod
29/03/26	Dr C. Reid

Ladies Delivering Flowers

01/02/26	
08/02/26	Mrs J. Dempster
15/02/26	
22/02/26	Mrs M. Robin
01/03/26	
08/03/26	Mrs C. Love
15/03/26	Mrs S. Tonner
22/03/26	
29/03/26	Mrs J. Dempster

The Haven

Drop-In Café

(for anyone living with dementia, including their families and friends)
in

Ralston Community Café
2 - 4 p.m.



Future Dates

Thursday 19 February
Thursday 19 March



39th Paisley Brownies (Tuesday)



Our sweet making prior to Christmas was a huge hit with the girls. We were delighted that Jen Morgan, our Visiting Elder, and Joy Kilby came along to help with the activity, and did all the packing for the girls to take home. (And received samples each as a thank you!)



Over the Festive Period, some of the girls have used their Recipe Books provided to make fudge and peppermint creams, and we've had wonderful photos sent in of them creating and decorating gingerbread, making cookies, and other sweet treats. Two of the girls have completed the *Kitchen Creations* badge.

We were delighted that the GirlGuiding tree was awarded the Winner at *TREEmendous*, and it was great to see so many of the girls and their families visit on the morning.

We enjoyed our trip to the Panto to see *Snow White* (oh yes we did), and found *Zootropolis 2* a really entertaining visit to the cinema.

We started 2026 with a non-uniformed night, and the hall was filled with Ludo, Twister, Snakes and Ladders, Jigsaws, Cards, Dominoes, and paper copies of Hangman and Dots and Boxes.

The girls had a free rein to play with friends or on their own, and it's fair to say Twister was the favourite game of the night. We've started on a new badge, *Compendium of Games*, which dovetails nicely with the new *Games Master* badge.



The girls will be creating their own games, coming up with rules, and testing it out on the other girls, so it should be an interesting experience.

We were joined by Rainbow Mia Doherty moving up, and we look forward to working with Mia on her Brownie Promise. Brooke, Sabaha and Vidhi have now moved on to join the Guide company.

Later in the month we'll be encouraging the Brownies to take part in the *RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch*, and having various activities around birds. We'll also be making bird feeders for the girls to take

39th Paisley Brownies (Tuesday)



home and use in their gardens. We are delighted that there is a new Interest Badge which fits in seamlessly: *Birdwatching*. (A certain Mr Tonner is keen to get that badge!)



Looking to February, we'll be planning our *Thinking Day* activities. This is the 100th anniversary of *Thinking Day*, and there is a big party to be attended over at Park Mains,

Erskine, to which we hope to encourage a few of the girls to attend. There will also be the *Thinking Day* Service at St Mark's on *Thinking Day* itself (22 February).

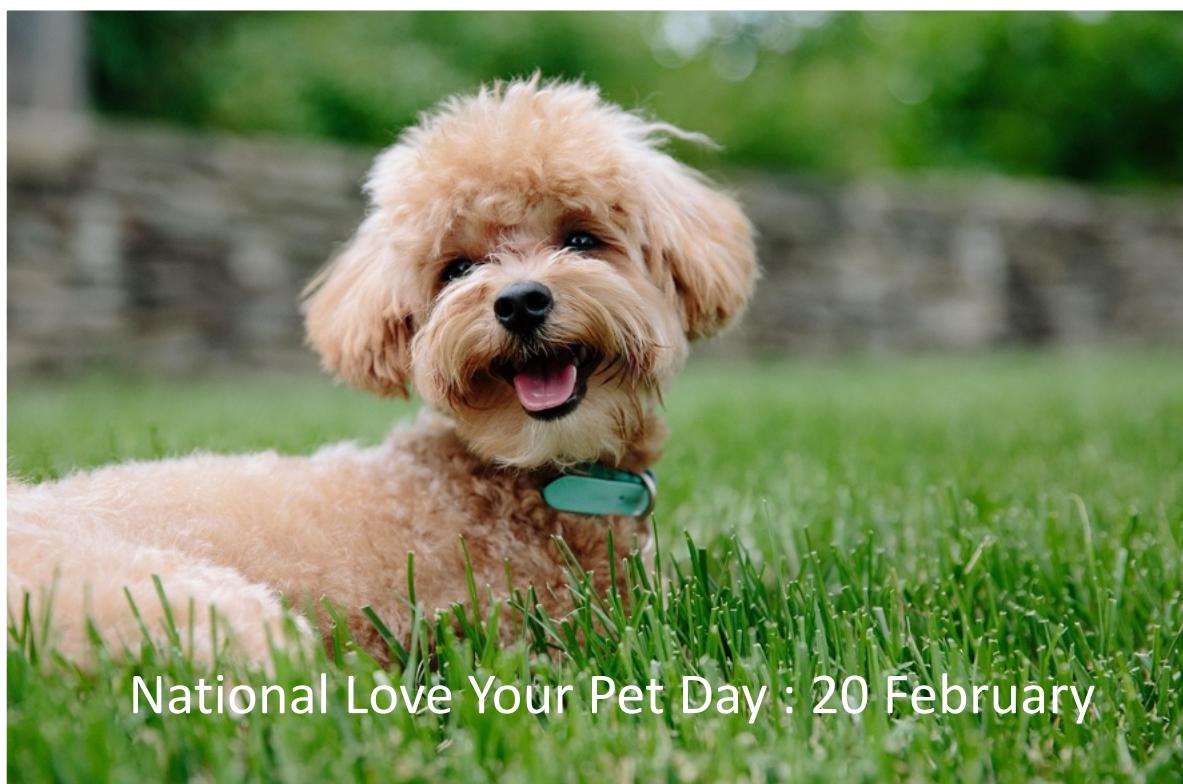
During March we'll start a new Skills Builder, and will be focussing on *Kindness*, which is another new Interest Badge, and leads us nicely into Mother's Day and Easter.

We have a Pack Holiday booked for the first weekend of May, so we'll also fit in some planning for a theme and activities for the girls who will join us at that.

So a busy start of the year for us.

Sheena Tonner

Brownie Leader



National Love Your Pet Day : 20 February

39thA Paisley Brownies



What a fun end to 2025 we had! We visited *Paisley Arts Centre* for the pantomime which was *Snow White*. It was a great production and the Brownies thoroughly enjoyed the show ... and the ice cream at the interval! The Brownies interacted very excitedly with the cast and Grace was invited to help explain the plot.



Many of the Brownies were also able to join in the dance and song at the end of the show.



During November, the Brownies and the Rainbows (1st East) collected bars of chocolate and other 'sweet treats'. Snowy Owl delivered these to *Renfrewshire Foodbank*. We were delighted to announce that the donation weighed in at an amazing 14.5kg. It was good to demonstrate the *Brownie Law* by 'thinking of others before ourselves', especially at Christmas.



We were also delighted to make decorations for the *Girlguiding* tree for the *TREEmendous* event on 6th December. It was lovely that our efforts resulted in a winning entry.

Well done to all the Brownies and Rainbows who contributed and to those who came along and voted.



In December, we had a large number of girls who reached the age where they move on from Brownies. Three of the girls intend to move on to Guides to continue their Guiding journey. We wish Charlotte L, Maisie and Nina good luck in this new stage.

Unfortunately, 6 other girls are not continuing in Guiding at this time and we wish them all the best for the future. Charlotte C, Esme, Francesca, Leah, Poppy and Poppy will all be welcomed back into Guiding at any point in the future, should they wish to return.

Brownies returned to meetings in January when we welcomed a new member. Sadie had completed her journey in Rainbows and it is great have her joining our fun.

More Brownies have been working at home on *Interest Badges* and we have been able to present the following recently :

My Rights : Aoife

Games Master and Crafts : Eve.

The following *Theme Awards* have also been achieved :

Be Well : Aoife, Eve and Poppy

Know Myself : Aoife and Eve

As a result of these efforts, both Aoife and Eve have now gained the *Bronze Award*. Well done Brownies!

At weekly meetings we are continuing with our programme and are now working on *Skill Builders* for *Skill for my Future* theme. When we report in the next *Marksman*, we hope many will have completed a *Skill Builder*.

The volunteer leadership team, as always, are looking for new experiences for the Brownies. Currently, we are looking forward to attending the County Event to celebrate 100 years of *Thinking Day* on Saturday 21st February. This is taking place in Park Mains High School in Erskine and we have 10 Brownies and 2 Leaders involved. We also hope some of the Brownies will be able to attend the *Thinking Day Service* in St Mark's on 22nd February.

We also have planned a trip to the *Festival of Friendship* which is being organised by Greenock Division of *Girlguiding*. This will even involve a train trip to Greenock in April. Finally, our annual trip to *PGL Outdoor Centre* in Dalguise is booked for a small group in May.

If you know of anyone (young person or adult) who would like to join *Girlguiding*, a warm welcome awaits them!

(www.girlguiding.org.uk).

Christine Hair

Brown Owl



World Thinking Day

22 February, 2026

Ralston Community Café



14 February celebrates the second anniversary of the opening of *Ralston Community Café*, and what a busy two years we have had. We are now fully embedded in the Ralston community, and have many regular customers who make a visit to the café part of their weekly routine.

Most of what is consumed in the café is produced in the church kitchen, where the kitchen team produce a wonderful array of soups, bakes, scones and savouries. We use local suppliers to provide the coffee (*Gatehouse*) and milk (*Abercorn Dairies*), and the *Corner Shop* is visited on occasion when we run out of last minute supplies.

Surplus goods are occasionally picked up from *Booker* in Paisley free of charge, which are used in the production of our food products, or passed on to others who can benefit. Our spent coffee grounds are donated to *Friends of Barshaw* for their use. Both these initiatives mean that St Mark's is doing its bit to reduce food waste and contribute to the environment. *Renfrewshire Foodbank* collecting tins are available at the till, and the café is delighted that they are also contributing to the Foodbank through its customers.

The front of house team look forward to welcoming our customers. Visitors with four paws are very welcome, and are greeted enthusiastically with a doggy treat. We would welcome further volunteers, so if you have a few



spare hours and would like to get involved, please contact Meena, our Café Manager, or pop in to have a chat. No experience is necessary, and training will be given where appropriate.

From the beginning of December, we have also been open on Saturdays, and this has allowed those at work or school during the week the opportunity to visit, or indeed an opportunity to volunteer. Carry-out coffees/teas and soups are also available, so families taking children to activities on Saturday mornings can grab a coffee as they are passing.

Gift Vouchers are available to purchase, and these can be used at anytime throughout the year, and can be a thoughtful gift.

Ralston Art Club provides the café space with their works of art, which are available for purchase, and the church receives a contribution from sale.

Bicycles are available at the café, and can be borrowed at no charge. So, as the Spring beckons, you may consider taking a cycle ride around *Barshaw Park*. This initiative has recently been awarded the *Cycling Friendly Community Silver Award*. (See P.15)

Our Ralston Community Café Facebook page is currently unavailable, but we are hopeful that this will be rectified very soon, and Meena will be able to post updates on our daily fare.

If you haven't yet been in for a coffee, please do. You'll be made very welcome.

Café Opening Hours

Wednesday	: 9.00 am to 2.30 pm
Thursday	: 9.00 am to 2.30 pm
Friday	: 9.00 am to 4.30 pm
Saturday	: 10.00 am to 3.30 pm

St Mark's Wins National Cycling Award



Cycling
FriendlyTM

Community

Award

This is to certify that

St Mark's Church

Has achieved

Cycling Friendly Communities Silver

Awarded
01/26

Valid until
01/29

**Cycling Friendly,
a Cycling Scotland programme**

cycling.scot

Scottish charity SC029760

I am delighted that our church and our café have received a *Cycling Friendly Communities Silver Award* from *Cycling Scotland*, the nation's cycling organisation, for our commitment to making it easier for more people to enjoy the benefits of cycling.

To achieve the award, we have run *Dr Bike* maintenance sessions ; set up a bike library ; installed facilities (stands and repair stations) ; delivered training sessions and organised group rides.

Going forward, the hope is to organise regular rides to Ross Hall, Pollok and Bellahouston Parks and other places as the weather improves, starting with some group skills sessions in the school playground or library car park.

Jok

TREEmendous Christmas Event, 2025



We kicked off the festive season with our annual *Zoom* Christmas Event on the 6th of December.

14 community groups took part in the tree decorating competition : *Friends of Barshaw*; *Kingdom Ambassador Church*; *Ralston Art Club*; *Paisley Nazerene*; *Ralston Out of School Care*; *Ralston Parent Council*; *Messy Church*; *The Guild*; *St Mark's Guiding*; *St Mark's Pastoral Care*; *Ralston Seniors Club*; *St Mark's Boys' Brigade*; *St Mark's Youth Groups* and the *Ralston Community Caf * all produced beautiful decorations for their trees.

A huge well done goes to the *Girl Guiding* team who, after a very close count, came away victorious. We also had a fantastic group of community stall holders, providing a wonderful variety of Christmas gifts for all our visitors.

A big thank you to everyone who came along, contributed to the Church *Baking and Craft* stall and bought a cuppa and a cake which helped us to raise over £1000 pounds for church funds.

Keep an eye on our social pages to find out what is coming up next at St Mark's!



Saint Valentine and the Miracle of the Bees?



Saint Valentine was a real Christian clergyman and martyr who lived in Rome during the 3rd century AD, though his exact identity and actions are obscured by legend. Several different accounts exist, even referring to two or three different saints, all called Valentine and all martyred on February 14.

Saint Valentine is generally portrayed as a heroic, sympathetic, and romantic figure and the association of *Valentine's Day* with romantic love as we know it today largely dates back to medieval poets, such as Geoffrey Chaucer, in the 14th century, who linked the saint's feast day with courtly love and the mating season of birds.

The most common legend about the saint's life states that the Roman Emperor Claudius II outlawed marriage for young men, believing single soldiers were more effective in battle. However, Valentine, defied the decree and secretly performed Christian marriage ceremonies for young couples. For this, he was sentenced to death.

While Saint Valentine is often associated with love and romance, his connection to bees is a lesser-known, but equally important aspect of his legacy. He was known for his gentle and caring treatment of bees, and it is said that he would often talk to them and bless them with his prayers.



According to one popular story, while Saint Valentine was imprisoned for performing marriages in secret, he came across a blind girl who had a great love for bees. He taught her how to care for them and soon she was able to see again. This miracle was attributed to the healing powers of the bees and, from then on, they became a symbol of Saint Valentine's compassion and care for others. In this story, before his execution he is said to have written her a farewell note signed, 'From your Valentine', an expression still used today.

Many beekeepers have come to regard Saint Valentine as their patron saint, and they celebrate his feast day on 14 February by placing honey and wax candles on his altar. They believe that his blessing will help their hives thrive and that his intercession will protect their bees from harm.

The association of Saint Valentine with bees is also a reminder of the interconnectedness of all living things and the importance of caring for the natural world around us.

As we celebrate Valentine's Day, let us also remember the importance of caring for the natural world and the creatures that inhabit it, including our precious bees.



Prayer Diary



MARCH, 2026	
Sun	1 As we come to worship you today, make our hearts ready to hear what you have to say to us. Be with Andy as he leads us in Worship.
Mon	2 Streets for prayer this week are Ralston Avenue, Roffey Park Road, and Rosshall Avenue.
Tue	3 World Wildlife Day. Presbytery Conference in Bishopton. Pray for a good discussion and relationship building.
Wed	4 Mid week service. Prayer group on Zoom and in church.
Thu	5 Thank you for the Finance Team who look after our finances.
Fri	6 We pray for the church café, for Meena and the volunteers.
Sat	7 Bible Study on Zoom at 10:15 for 10:30.
Sun	8 Joint service at Sherwood Greenlaw this morning. May we know a good time of fellowship together.
Mon	9 Pray for the following streets this week – Rotherwick Drive, School Road and Southwold Road.
Tue	10 Pray for Peter and Sonia as they work in the school. 39 th Brownies continue with Kindness badge work.
Wed	11 Mid week service. Prayer group on Zoom and in church followed by Bible Study in church at 7:45.
Thu	12 Thank you for the Christian Education Team.
Fri	13 Remember the work of the Anchor Boys and Boys' Brigade, their leaders and helpers and the young folk themselves.
Sat	14 We pray for those who care for others in so many different ways. Be with them and encourage and strengthen them.

World Wildlife Day : 3 March, 2026



Prayer Diary



MARCH, 2026		
Sun	15	Bless our worship this morning and be with Sonia as she leads. We pray for the young folk who attend TRASH.
Mon	16	We pray for the following streets this week- Springfield Avenue, Strathmore Avenue, Tylney Road and Woodend Drive.
Tue	17	Take time today to stop and give thanks for the many blessings God gives us.
Wed	18	Mid week service. Prayer group on Zoom and in church.
Thu	19	We pray for all our Elders today and in the coming week. Be with them as they carry out their work for you here. Haven Café on this afternoon.
Fri	20	Pray for the other churches who use our building that you would bless them.
Sat	21	Bible Study on Zoom at 10:15 for 10:30. Last till after Easter.
Sun	22	As we gather, may we know a deep sense of fellowship together.
Mon	23	Our streets for prayer are for those outwith our district.
Tue	24	39 th Brownies – Mother’s Day crafts.
Wed	25	Mid week service (Last one?) Prayer group on Zoom and in church followed by Bible Study in church at 7:45. Last till after Easter.
Thu	26	Remember Dawn and the choir members who lead us in worship each week.
Fri	27	Pray for Sherwood Greenlaw and St Mark’s congregations as we work together this coming year.
Sat	28	We pray for all who live alone. May they know your presence and comfort.
Sun	29	As we approach Easter, may we realise afresh what it really means to us on this Palm Sunday.
Mon	30	Pray for the following streets this week – Allanton Avenue, Alton Road and Atholl Crescent.
Tue	31	39 th Brownies Easter Crafts. Pray for Holy Week services.

God bless the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory to God!

Luke 19:38



Figs



The symbolism of the fig is complex and multifaceted, reflecting its long history of association with both the physical and spiritual aspects of human existence.

This symbolism is to be found in many different cultures and contexts, often linked to fertility, prosperity, security, medicine, knowledge and religion. They also appear in creation stories and origin myths in many cultures.

For example, in **ancient Rome** figs were considered sacred, were linked to prosperity and fertility and even to the founding of Rome itself in that Romulus and Remus were said to have been discovered as infants under a fig tree and raised by a she-wolf.

In **ancient Greek** rituals both men and women would be beaten with the branches of fig trees to promote fertility. Figs were also a staple for **Olympic athletes** as it was believed they provided 'restorative power' and strength.

Even today in **Morocco**, for example, figs are thrown at weddings to wish the couple fruitfulness.

Fig leaves have been used to cover nudity in art and, of course, in **Genesis** when Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit and, having become aware of their nakedness, sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

In some interpretations, the *Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil* itself is depicted as a fig tree.



In some folklore, fig leaves are believed to act as a barrier against evil spirits, making rituals performed under a fig tree safer.

Fig trees are also thought to protect people from malevolent creatures. In **Greek mythology**, for example, the branches of one fig tree saved Odysseus from being sucked into the deadly whirlpool created by the hungry sea monster, Charybdis.

Another story from **India** tells how a sage called Kabir was brushing his teeth with a twig. When he discarded his toothbrush, it transformed into a gigantic fig tree whose crown spread to cover a hectare of land.

Fig trees are also associated with many **Hindu deities**. The roots of one Indian species represent Brahma the Creator, the leaves, Shiva the Destroyer, and the trunk, Vishnu the Preserver.

In **ancient Egypt**, Pharaohs believed that when they died, their souls would encounter a fig tree at the edge of the desert, and that the goddess Hathor would emerge from the foliage to welcome them to heaven.

The fig tree is also central to **Buddhist** teachings, as the tree under which Buddha attained enlightenment.



Figs in the Bible



Figs and fig trees appear nearly 200 times in the Bible, serving as essential sources of food and powerful spiritual symbols. Indeed, the fig tree is often used as a metaphor for Israel itself and the health of the tree reflects the state of the nation. The tree or fruit would be healthy and abundant when Israel was obedient to God's law and withered when rebellious.

Sitting under one's own fig tree is also a classic biblical idiom for a life of safety, rest, and divine blessing.

By contrast, prophets like Jeremiah and Hosea used the destruction or barrenness of fig trees to warn of impending divine judgment (e.g. **Jeremiah 8:13**).

Figs were a staple food, often pressed into cakes for easy transport and long-term storage. (**1 Samuel 25:18**)

Here are just a few more of these references. Perhaps you would like to look these up and see how they fit into the context of the chapter. Or, maybe challenge yourself to find some other references.

Deuteronomy 8:8 : Figs are listed as one of the seven species of the Promised Land, representing God's abundant provision.

1 Kings 4:25 : The phrase 'every man under his own vine and fig tree' is used to describe the peace, safety, and prosperity of Solomon's reign.

Hosea 9:10 : Early fruit on the fig tree symbolises the health of Israel both spiritually and physically.

Micah 4:4 : A prophetic vision of the future, Messianic age where all people will live in security under their own fig trees.

In the New Testament, Jesus used figs to teach that true faith must produce 'fruit'—deeds and character that reflect a healthy relationship with God.

Matthew 21:18–22 & Mark 11:12–25: Jesus curses a barren fig tree that had leaves, but no fruit. This signalled judgment on Israel's spiritual sterility and the Temple's lack of genuine worship.

Luke 13:6–9 : *The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree*, in which a gardener pleads for one more year to cultivate a fruitless tree, symbolising God's patience and the need for repentance.

John 1:47–50 : Jesus tells Nathanael he saw him 'under the fig tree' before they met, leading Nathanael to recognise Him as the Son of God.

Revelation 6:13 : In a vision of the end times, stars fall to earth like 'untimely figs' dropping from a tree shaken by a gale.



Ralston Seniors Club

Where friendship, fun and good health meet.

Every Friday at St Mark's Church

11.15am – 2.00pm



Membership & Volunteering Enquiries

Phone: 07721 911 234

Email: ralstonseniorsclub@stmarksoldhall.org.uk

and leave your contact details.



International Day of Happiness : 20 March



Please send articles for the *Marksman* to the editor at :

marksman@stmarksoldhall.org.uk

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