

*Excellence for All*

*Service to Others*

*Inspired by Christ*

Dear Parents, Carers, and Friends of St John's,

As we approach the joyful celebration of Christmas, it is a privilege to reflect on what has been a truly positive and enriching start to this academic year. Our school community has once again demonstrated the vibrancy, faith, and commitment that make our Catholic mission so special.

From the very first weeks of term, our students have embraced opportunities to learn beyond the classroom. Educational visits and trips have broadened horizons, deepened knowledge, and strengthened friendships. Within school, we have gathered together for memorable whole-school events: our moving Remembrance Assembly, where students reflected with dignity and respect; the Community Tea Party, which brought together generations in fellowship; and our beautiful Carol Service, led by our Year 7 choir, a highlight of our Advent journey, reminding us of the true meaning of Christmas.

Charitable action has been at the heart of our school life this term, with an excellent example of this being our recent Christmas Shoebox Appeal, in partnership with the Salvation Army. Together, we filled an incredible 170 boxes for underprivileged children in the Gravesham area. This act of generosity embodies the Gospel values we strive to live by, and I am deeply proud of the compassion shown by our students and families; thank you so much for your support with this.

Our students have also competed with great enthusiasm across a whole range of sports, with the most noteworthy of achievements being the recent performance of our gymnastics squad, where several of our teams emerged as winners in the Regional Finals and, in so doing, have once again qualified for the National Finals in Stoke next Spring.

Our new Year 7 cohort has made a truly wonderful beginning to life at our school. Their enthusiasm, resilience, and eagerness to learn have been evident in every aspect of school life, and they have quickly become valued members of our community.

Meanwhile, our examination cohorts are working diligently towards their summer assessments. Their focus and commitment give us every confidence that they will achieve their very best, supported by the dedication of our staff and the encouragement of their families.

I am delighted to share that we remain heavily oversubscribed in all year groups, a testament to the trust and confidence placed in us by families across the area. This year, we have just been made aware that we have received over 900 applications for just 180 places in next summer's Year 7 intake, including more than 300 first preferences. Such demand is both humbling and affirming, and we remain committed to providing the highest quality Catholic education for all entrusted to our care.

As we celebrate the birth of Christ, I extend my heartfelt thanks to our staff, students, governors, and families for their unwavering support and partnership. Together, we continue to nurture faith, inspire learning, and build a community rooted in love and service. May the peace and joy of this Holy Season be with you and your loved ones. On behalf of everyone at the school, I wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

With every blessing,  
Matt Barron, *Headteacher*

## Christmas Shoe Box Appeal

A huge 'thank you' to everyone who donated items for our Christmas Shoe Box Appeal which we undertook in conjunction with the Salvation Army, and a very special 'thank you' to those many students and families who filled a whole shoe box on their own. Your generosity has been overwhelming!

Thank you also to all those who supported with this endeavour in school, especially Mrs Brown, Mrs Mackinlay, our Junior Leadership Team, our School Council (Image Right), and our Pastoral Teams; between them they helped to pack shoe boxes with age appropriate and gender-specific items all ready to be taken to the Salvation Army Centre in Gravesend.



This year we filled a record total of 170 boxes which will be given out at Christmas by the Salvation Army to underprivileged children across the Gravesend area, a charitable act which is totally in keeping with the Catholic Social Teaching principle of 'Option for the Poor and Vulnerable' which our students have been learning about all year.



(Mr Barron, Hannah & Dylan - Year 13s – with the shoe boxes at the Salvation Army Centre in Gravesend)

Thank you once again to everyone involved & Merry Christmas to you all!

Mr D. Walton, *Associate Headteacher*

## Parish Christmas Bazaar

On Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> November, St John's proudly hosted our Parish Christmas Bazaar.

Staff and pupil generously gave up their day to help set up, run various stalls and, at the end of the event, helped to ensure that the school was spotless and ready for Monday morning.

The event raised an impressive £6,700, which will contribute towards the building insurance costs for our parish churches.

As you can see from the photo, there was no shortage of Christmas cheer. Everyone involved had a wonderful day!



Susanne. *Chaplain.*



## Stratford Fieldwork.

In Term 2, Year 11 Geography students completed a day of urban fieldwork in Stratford, London. Students were able to view the Olympic Park - a key case study of urban regeneration, which they studied during Year 10, and recorded data linked to the benefits of regeneration in the area. They were also able to compare this with areas of Stratford that had not yet been regenerated, which helped to further reinforce the content studied in Year 10 lessons.

The students will need to refer to the methods that they completed during their fieldtrip, and the data that they collected, during their Paper 3 examination next summer.

Despite the cold weather, students had an enjoyable day and were able to take the opportunity to complete some shopping during their lunch break in Westfield's Shopping Centre. Students were impeccably behaved across all

three field trip days and we look forward to the physical field trip later this academic year.

Mr B. Thilthorpe, *Head of Geography*

## Visit to the National Portrait Gallery.

On Friday, 28<sup>th</sup> November, our Year 7 Transition classes visited the National Portrait Gallery in central London, where we sought to experience what it was like to see selected artworks first-hand in a major gallery. For many it was a day of firsts; the first time on a train; the first time thinking about how the portraits had social meaning, or the first time that they had followed a floor plan to locate specific artworks.

The journey started with a brisk march to the station and a busy rail journey to London. From Charing Cross station, we negotiated the hustle and bustle of London during a short walk to the gallery.

In the gallery, the students saw a whole range of portraits including sepia postcards, oil paintings and sculptures. They noted the differences between the various poses over time. Many were able to recognise familiar historical figures or contemporary faces.

Across the day, it was incredibly pleasing to see just how interested the students were with the whole experience and their thoughtfulness in relating to others on the train, in the gallery, and whilst having lunch. They left the train and Trafalgar Square (where they ate lunch) litter free, showing their care of God's creation. The students worked together to locate artworks, shared new discoveries and developed sufficient confidence to ask gallery staff questions. When asked questions, they had thoughtful responses.

The visit was enjoyable and educational on so many levels.

Mr P. Coode, *Head of Transition*

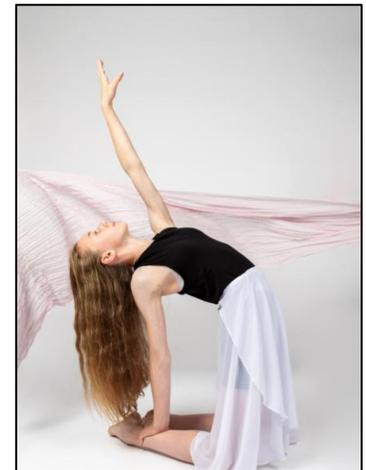


### Performing Arts News



#### Dance Photoshoot 2025

Selected students took part in a professional photoshoot at Dockside Photography Studio in Rochester. The students were both professional and creative throughout the photoshoot, and thoroughly enjoyed the experience.



#### Jasmine Vardimon Dance Workshop

Students from the GCSE and BTEC classes participated in a physical theatre/contemporary dance workshop in Ashford at the Jasmine Vardimon studios. The workshop was led by a member of the company (Riza Maki) who had just returned from a performance tour in the Czech Republic; subsequently, a number of the students who took part, returned to watch Riza perform in the company's production of NOW.

Mrs R. Steadman, *Dance Teacher*



## The Spiritual Life of St John's

The Holy Spirit is definitely hard at work here at St John's over the past two terms. More and more pupils are seeking out quiet moments of prayer and reflection in our school chapel, and our end of term Mass was supported with real reverence by both pupils and staff.

Our young people continue to show a genuine desire to put their faith into action. The newly formed SVP group (St Vincent de Paul), which began with just our Year 12 and 13 students, is now growing into a whole-school initiative. It is inspiring to see pupils turning their concern for others first into prayer, then into action, and finally back into prayer again. We were delighted to host a parish tea and coffee morning, where our older parishioners thoroughly enjoyed spending time with our students.

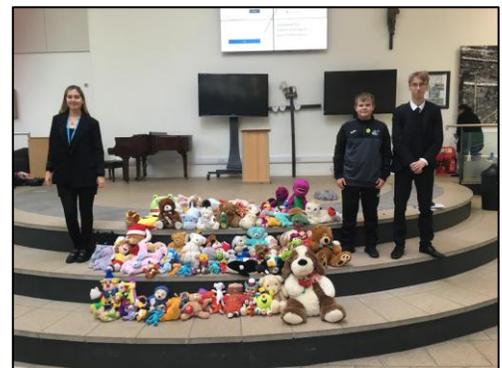


Year 9 and 10 SVPs, 'Called to Action'.

St John's were invited to the first of three sessions at the St Vincent De Paul Centre, Brixton.

Pupils joined St Gregory's Wembley in exploring how small acts of love and kindness can bring the light of Christ into our communities.

On Saturday 22nd November, the school hosted the Parish Christmas Bazaar. It was wonderful to see so many families and parishioners supporting the event. A large number of pupils generously gave up their Saturday to run stalls, help with the 'Wheel of Fortune,' and stay right to the end to ensure the school was left shipshape for Monday morning. Staff and pupils donated over 200 soft toys to the Teddy Tombola, along with bags and scarves for the Accessories Stall.





Throughout this term, pupils from across the school have taken part in several liturgical celebrations. Selected pupils from Years 7 and 8 attended two 'Beginning of the Year' Masses, one for all Diocesan Schools' at Southwark Cathedral, and the other for all KCSP schools at Aylesford Priory.

In addition, Year 7 enjoyed their retreat days at Aylesford, a valuable opportunity to pause, reflect and take stock of their first term here at St John's.

On Tuesday 16th December, our Sixth Form students attended the SVP Carol Service at St Dunstan's in Catford, before heading into central London to see the Christmas lights. Navigating the busy streets filled with festive tourists was no easy task, but the pupils embraced the experience and enjoyed a well-earned break from their regular daily routines.

To bring our Advent journey to a close, we gathered as a whole school for our Carol Service. Our Year 7s then completed our celebrations with beautiful Carols at St John's Catholic Church. A perfect and prayerful way to end the term.

Susanne Gibbons, *School Chaplain*

### Discover Our Catholic Life and Mission

At St John's, our mission of "*Inspired by Christ, Service to Others and Excellence for All*" is at the heart of everything we do. It shapes our learning, our community spirit, and the way we live out Gospel values each day.

We invite parents and students to explore the **Catholic Life** section of our school website, where you will find inspiring examples of faith in action. Here are just a few highlights:

- **Our Patron & House Saints:** Learn about Saint John, and the saints who inspire our school houses; how their lives guide our values and traditions.
- **Catholic Faith in Action:** See how students put Gospel values into practice through service projects, charity events, and community outreach.
- **Prayers and Reflections:** View and access the weekly prayers for different occasions and reflections that support moral and spiritual growth at home and in school.
- **Catholic Social Teaching:** Discover how the seven themes of Catholic Social Teaching—such as *Human Dignity, Caring for Creation* and *Solidarity*—are embedded across subjects in the school curriculum.
- **Collective Worship:** Find details of the Catholic liturgical year. Also included are the aims and opportunities for prayer and mass that unite our school community.
- **Chaplaincy:** Learn about the role of our school chaplain in providing pastoral care and spiritual guidance for students and families.
- **RE Department:** Explore how Religious Education helps students deepen their understanding of faith and develop moral and ethical awareness.
- **Parish Links:** See how we work closely with our local parish of St John's in Gravesend to strengthen the bond between school, church, and home.
- **St John's School Prayer:** Read the prayer that reflects our shared commitment to faith and service.

By visiting the Catholic Life tab, you will see how our school nurtures faith, encourages service, and strives for excellence in all aspects of life. Click the link below and take a moment to explore this vibrant part of our community: [Catholic Life - St John's Catholic Comprehensive School](#)

Mr B. Smith. *Assistant Headteacher (Director of Catholic Life & RE)*

### **Request for Donations of Old Technology**

The Computing department are on the look out for any old technology that people don't want anymore (although it does need to work!) We would very much like to use these items as part of our Computing lessons and Computing club! We are mainly looking for any desktop PCs, monitors, phones, and anything else of interest!

Any questions with regards to these, please email [brobinson@stj.kent.sch.uk](mailto:brobinson@stj.kent.sch.uk) .

Please ensure the devices are wiped of any personal data before giving them to the school.

Mr B. Robinson, *Head of Computer Science*

### **Year 13 Psychology Bethlem Museum of the Mind Trip**

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> September, Year 13 Psychology students visited Bethlem Museum of the Mind to deepen their understanding of mental health and its historical context. The museum focuses on the history of Bethlem Royal Hospital, its programme of care, and its patients.

As part of the visit, students participated in an engaging workshop, where they analysed 'The Maze' painting, exploring its symbolism and psychological interpretations. This activity encouraged critical thinking and linked directly to themes studied in class.

Students were also presented with an insightful overview of the history of treatments for mental health problems, complementing topics such as, 'Schizophrenia' and 'Psychopathology'. They explored various sections of the museum, including exhibits on labelling, diagnosis, constraint, treatment, and recovery.

Students had an enjoyable and informative day that will undoubtedly enrich their further studies.

Mrs O. Collins, *Social Sciences Teacher*



## Year 9 Health Studies – Mental Health Day, 10<sup>th</sup> October 2025

For one of their most recent projects, our Year 9 Health Studies students chose to research a number of topics relating to mental health, in order to raise awareness for Mental Health World Day in October, and then displayed their findings outside of their classroom pod. They all participated in selling 'green mental health ribbons' around the school for 2 days and, including other donations, raised £300 for the Elliott Holmes Memorial Fund. It was lovely to see so many staff and students wearing their green ribbons on the day itself.



Mrs J. Gallard, *Director of Vocational Studies*



(Daria)

### Christmas Card Competition.

Congratulations to Bryony (Year 10) for winning the KCSP "Design a Christmas Card Competition" and to Daria (Year 11) who was runner up. Bryony's beautiful design will be sent out to all thirty schools in the academy trust.

Also congratulations to Jessie (Year 7), Ruby and Ishmeet (Year 10), Gursharan and Madeline (Year 11) for designing our annual "act of kindness" Christmas postcards.



(Bryony)

All students across the school will be given a card for them to write a Christmas message of thanks to a student or adult in the school who has made a positive difference to them this term. These cards will be posted in our Christmas post box on our Heartspace stage, and will then be delivered by the school council on the last day of term.

Mrs D. Lal, *Art and Design Department*

### Anti-bullying Week

Thank you to all parents and Carers who contributed to our own clothes day charity appeal for 'Anti-bullying Week'. You managed to raise £1,050 and this was split between three charities:

**MIND** – A local charity that supports the mental health of young people

The **Elliott Holmes Memorial Fund** – Who offer free counselling to any young person from the ages of 13 to 18 who attend a Gravesham school.



The **Anti-Bullying Alliance** – who support and provide resources on Anti-Bullying.



Thank you also to all the pupils who came into school wearing odd socks – this is to highlight that we are all different and unique and we should celebrate those differences.



### Year 9 Geography Students Explore Ecosystems at Wingham Wildlife Park

Our Year 9 Geographers recently visited Wingham Wildlife Park to deepen their understanding of ecosystems, a key part of their GCSE curriculum. Having studied tropical rainforests and hot deserts in school, the trip gave them the chance to see real examples of species adaptations and biodiversity. Students engaged excellently with a talk about why the world's rainforests need protecting, and were able to demonstrate their classroom learning to the staff/keepers. This hands-on experience brought classroom learning to life and highlighted the importance of conservation in protecting these unique ecosystems.



Miss R. Mair. *Geography Teacher.*

### A Christmas Carol

Our Year 10 students recently enjoyed an inspiring visit to Woodville Halls to watch a live performance of *A Christmas Carol*. As they prepare for their English Literature GCSE this spring, the experience was invaluable, bringing their 19th-century text vividly to life. The production offered a fresh perspective on Dickens' classic, deepening students' understanding of its themes, characters, and historical context. It was a fantastic day that combined learning with enjoyment, and the students returned full of enthusiasm and insight.

Miss L. Harwood, *English Teacher*



## Gymnastics Regional Finals.

On Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> November, our St John's Gymnastics Squad participated in the Regional Finals of the Milano Team Trio competition. For many gymnasts, this was their first competition; all gymnasts performed exceptionally well and we achieved some fantastic outcomes:

Under 13 Mixed A – 1<sup>st</sup>  
Under 13 Mixed B – 2<sup>nd</sup>  
Under 13 Girls A – 5<sup>th</sup>  
Under 13 Girls B – 8<sup>th</sup>  
Under 16 Mixed – 1<sup>st</sup>  
Under 16 Girls – 6<sup>th</sup>  
Under 19 Mixed – 1<sup>st</sup>



We are absolutely delighted that the Under 13 A, Under 16 and Under 19 Mixed teams have gained a place to represent the South East Region at the National Finals held in Stoke-on-Trent in March 2026.

All gymnasts are currently training for the Team Floor and Vault regional finals which will be taking place in Surrey in the New Year.

Mrs L. Weller, *Assistant Headteacher (i/c Teaching and Learning)*.

### Fast Track Programme Launches for Year 7 Innovators

This term, we are excited to announce the launch of our brand-new Fast Track programme, created for 14 specially selected Year 7 pupils who have shown outstanding enthusiasm and potential in STEM subjects. The programme gives students a unique opportunity to work in partnership with Skanska, the construction company currently involved in the Thames Valley Crossing project.

The pupils took part in their first meeting with the Skanska team earlier this term, held here in school. During this introductory session, students learned about the aims of the Fast Track programme and were given an overview of the real-world engineering challenges connected to the Thames Valley Crossing.



Since then, pupils have been meeting weekly to explore the social value element of the project, learning how major construction works can positively impact local communities, create opportunities, and support sustainable development. Their engagement, thoughtful discussions, and creative ideas have already impressed staff and visiting professionals alike. Looking ahead, excitement is building for next term, when members of Skanska's commercial team will visit the school. They will be bringing along interactive simulators, giving our Fast Track pupils the chance to experience first-hand what it is like to work on a major infrastructure project.

We are incredibly proud of the pupils taking part and look forward to seeing how their skills and confidence grow as the programme continues.

Mrs C. Heap, *Science Teacher.*

### John Downton Awards.



Nandini D (Yr 13)

The Art & Photography department are delighted to share the shortlisted works of art that have been selected to be exhibited at County Hall, Maidstone in the New Year.

This year's exhibition will take place in the County Gallery, County Hall, Maidstone from 26th January - March 2026, with an awards ceremony on 11th February 2026.

We wish all nominees the very best of luck.



Rose B (Yr 13)



Daniella N (Yr 8)



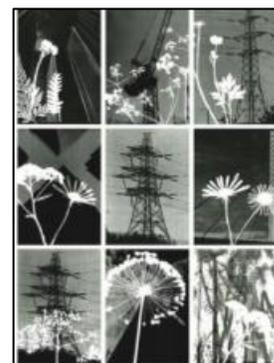
Finn O'S (Yr 10)



Torran P (Yr 11)



Rebecca S (Yr 13)



Miya G (Yr 12)

Mrs D. Lal, *Art and Design Department*

### Safeguarding

Dear Parents and Carers,

The Kent Resilience Hub is a place where resources are shared to help young people, parents and carers to further understand emotional wellbeing and resilience.

If you would like to access their resources, the link is: <https://kentresiliencehub.org.uk>

Please see below some online support that you might find useful: -

- Online scams like trust trades and fake giveaways can cause harm and upset to all children, but neurodivergent children are at greater risk of falling victim to such scams.
- Internet Matters have worked with Roblox and Ambitious about Autism to create new resources to support neurodivergent children who like playing games online, to help recognise and deal with scams.
- There is a guide for parents, a video for children and young people, plus stories for families to read and discuss together to explore the risks, with practical actions for children to take to help stay protected. Find all the resources [HERE](#).

## For Parents - Sharenting

For a multitude of different reasons, the advice we give to children and young people is to be careful with what they are sharing online, including images. This can be anything from protecting your privacy to very serious harms such as blackmail, including sextortion. For example, a recent article in the Guardian refers to a report from the NSPCC where nearly 1 in 10 parents say their child has been blackmailed online and the National Crime Agency are receiving around 110 reports of sextortion each month. The education given to children and young people extends to parents, caregivers, schools and anyone else that may share data, such as images of children. We must be mindful of the potential uses of that data. The Irish Data Commission has recently released a short (40 seconds) light-hearted but serious video about the risks of sharenting along with some useful advice. You can see the video and advice [HERE](#) and you can read the Guardian article [HERE](#).

## For Parents - Shopping Scams

Every year, hundreds of thousands of people here in the UK fall victim to fraud when buying something online. With Christmas and Christmas sales rapidly approaching, fraud and scams will be significantly on the increase. GetSafeOnline has a plethora of information to help with this such as:

- Information on purchase scams [HERE](#).
- Online buying tips [HERE](#).
- Scam website checker [HERE](#).

One piece of advice relates to the legitimacy of the company. Particularly on social media sites such as Instagram you will often see ads for things like clothing and gifts which look interesting and unique. When you click on the ad to take a closer look, you should always tap on the 3 dots on the top right and tap on "open in external browser." The reason for this is that if it is a company you are not aware of, you will want to know the details of the company before you purchase. Often if you go onto the website and there are no company details, no contact details (apart from a web form), and either no reviews or perfect reviews, these are all red flags and you should be wary about making a purchase from such a site.

## For Parents - Discord Family Center

Discord, the app, is still very popular, particularly with gamers; and like many apps it has safety features, including features for parents/carers. The Discord Family Center is 'a tool built to help parents and carers stay informed and involved in your teen's Discord experience while respecting their privacy and autonomy'. The safety features have recently been updated and now include:

- Ability to view the activity feed.
- Get weekly email summaries,
- Manage safety and privacy settings.

There is also a parent hub which has lots of information and resources for parents such as user controls, moderation, reporting and more. You can find the parent hub [HERE](#).

Mrs O. Kelham, Senior Assistant Headteacher (DSL, Safeguarding & Mental Health Lead)



## Chaplain's Corner

You all know Christmas is creeping closer when the TV ads ramp up. TV Land Christmas has it all. Beautifully decorated homes, picture perfect families grinning like the Cheshire Cat, and gifts wrapped so neatly they look ironed. Recipients of the 'text book' wrapped presents are beside themselves with joy and gratitude; it even snows at Christmas in TV Land!

And then there's the Christmas onslaught of experts in all things shiny, tasty and perfect. When I do catch This Morning, I feel like launching my coffee cup at the TV. Cat Deeley, and Ben Shepherd (who I am sure are just lovely), and their glamorous team explain how to cook the perfect turkey, decorate your house like a design magazine and generally sparkle your way through the festive season.

Marvellous! But I am convinced they don't live in the same world as the rest of us.

The Christmas of the real world looks a little, or let's face it a lot, different.

For some of us, it brings stress, sadness, or loneliness. For others, family tensions stifle the house more than overcooked soggy brussels sprouts. Teenagers refuse to leave their bedrooms, or in-laws insist on doing everything their own way. Then we move on to the Christmas dinner, rarely does it turn out as Jamie Oliver intended.

Behind the scenes, many carry the heavy burdens of illness, grief, financial pressures, fractured relationships or worries about the future. Our young people face their own burdens. Social media seems to have a case to answer in 2025. Young people are trying to navigate growing up with the expectations that the small device they carry in their pockets dictates. Many are also dealing with exam stress and are making decisions about their future that seem far too big for their young shoulders to carry.

In the middle of all this noise and expectation, I was struck by the words of The Princess of Wales earlier this month. She reminded us that in a world which often feels "fragmented or uncertain" it is the quiet, unspoken acts of kindness that matter the most.

Isn't that the heart of Christmas? Not perfection. Not performance, Not the turkey and tinsel or the pressure to get it right, but a simple sacred kindness. The serenity we find in the purity and calm of the Nativity.

When we look to the first Christmas, we see that Jesus Christ did not enter a perfect and peaceful world. The world He was born into was ruled by fear of the Romans. Mary and Joseph vulnerable, homeless, exhausted and afraid; faced that night with little more than faith and the kindness of strangers. They had complete trust in God's promise, God's promise and, of course, His impeccable timing.

In the humble stable, something extraordinary happened. In the stillness on the night, amid fear and exhaustion, they opened their hearts to God's promise. They trusted.

They allowed the Light of The World to brighten their hearts and extinguish their fear. They experienced a perfectly imperfect peace. Hope had entered our world.



So, this year, when the storms of consumer pressure hits, when you are faced with the turkey that never cooks, the sulky teen, the family member testing your patience or the house that looks nothing like the adverts, take a breath.

Pause. Remember this.

Christmas is not ruined; Christmas is not defined by chaos; Christmas is Christ coming into our perfectly imperfect lives.

So, as you prepare for Christmas 2025, I encourage you to think about the space you are making for peace. Let kindness, quiet, simple everyday kindness, shape your Christmas. Allow Jesus to steady your heart when the waves rise.

You may discover, even if only briefly, the quiet beauty of the first Holy Night. A peace that settles your heart, a light that breaks through the dark, and a hope that does not depend on circumstance, perfectly cooked turkey or a designer handbag.

May I wish you all a Happy and Holy Christmas. And please, no throwing coffee cups at the TV when faced with smug, shiny presenters!

God Bless.

Susanne Gibbons, Chaplain