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# St Helen's Church

Ashby-de-la-Zouch

FAITH — LOVE — COMMUNITY



# Parish Magazine

February 2026

# PARISH DIRECTORY

**General inquiries: in the first instance, please contact the parish office.**

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St Helen's Church is part of the **Ashby Churches**

Alliance Church	07753 679147
Ashby Baptist Church	01530 413721
Ashby Congregational	01530 563301
Ashby Methodist Church	01530 412298
Holy Trinity	01530 412339
Our Lady of Lourdes	01530 412237

Donations can be left in the boxes at the back of St Helen's Church, in the porch of Holy Trinity or the Congregational Church, or at any of Ashby's Co-ops. Thank you to everyone for the continued support.



## FROM THE MINISTRY TEAM

Dear Friends, well, here we are in February. Really? Already? Yes, sorry. Once again, “We don’t know where the time goes”!

Actually, in my case, February comes with a sense of relief. January is always a manic month in our household. In addition to external factors [yes, I do know that I could have done my tax return any time from April onwards, but somehow I never do; also my car insurance falls due], January is a month with family birthdays which need celebrating and there were theatre trips bought as both Christmas and birthday presents. I won’t inflict everything on you, and much of it was good and enjoyable, but it has been undeniably hectic – and December, inevitably, was much the same. So I am looking forward to some breathing space in a quieter February.

And, hopefully, to catching up a bit more with God. So often, despite my good intentions, time with God gets squeezed out amid all the busyness. Which is, really, exactly when I most need to prioritise that part of my life, to remind myself of what and who is really important and to keep all the rest of the stuff in perspective. I notice the difference when I do. Not just rushing through a short daily reading and a few quick prayers for the day, but setting aside some time properly. I’d like to share with you some of the reflections which have come to me in recent months when I have made the time.

I’ve been experimenting over the past few months with the when and where and how of what works for me. The “when” involves identifying a time of day when I know there isn’t pressure to do something else, and allocating a fixed amount of time, so that I don’t give up after 2 minutes because “actually I don’t feel like it today”. Oddly, given the time of year, the “where” is a quiet spot in the garden – this may involve me being wrapped up in several warm layers and with a waterproof poncho! And yet, away from distractions, other than those I bring in my own head, this works for me. I’m very much at the early stages of learning how to discipline the



noise in my head, but I'm persevering. There has been something special for me about being out there in all weathers, watching the changes from late autumn into winter. Watching the wind blowing through branches and reflecting on how the Holy Spirit blows through and among us. Seeing the last leaves gradually fall from the branches, and reflecting on how everything has its time in God's economy – that things we are used to, that familiar and even much-loved aspects of our life do come to a natural conclusion, even when God has used and blessed them in the past, and that unless those leaves fall, the new, fresh embodiment of life cannot come into being in the spring. And that those old leaves, falling on the ground, are not wasted, instead they quietly turn into mulch, continuing over the years to nourish the tree through its roots.

There are days where I sit in my little space and my thoughts refuse to be quiet. There are days where not much seems to happen – although I almost always go back into the house feeling that I have benefited from the quiet. And now and again there is a sense of something special having happened.

We are all different. I promise you I am not advocating that everyone should be going outside in all weathers! But I am in the process of learning that, however busy I am, prioritising a time and place of quietness with God away from distractions makes a difference. It's more than a little disturbing to reflect on how many times I have found myself having to re-learn this after over 50 years as a Christian – but better to keep relearning than to give up.

We probably all know this – and yet we allow other things to get in the way. Perhaps we feel uncomfortable on our own with no distractions. We might be tempted to think of all the other things we "should" be doing. We feel self-conscious explaining to the people we live with what we are doing. We try it once and "nothing happens".

Maybe you are more sorted out with spending time with God than I usually am. But if not, I would encourage you to consider spending time in the quiet with him, in a place [probably inside!] free from distractions and interruptions, allowing him to use that time as he wants. The approach of Lent in a couple of weeks may be an added incentive. There are any

number of resources available on line and in print suggesting ways of being still with God if you're not sure where to start. And you don't have to start with anything too ambitious – maybe ten minutes, or even five, if ten is too much to begin with. A candle or a cross or something else to focus your eyes on can be useful if you are prone to falling asleep with your eyes closed. Or a holding cross or similar can be helpful. Or some music, at least at the start, to help switch off your thoughts. You may already know what works for you. There will be days which feel special, and days when you wonder why you are bothering. But, speaking as someone who far too often allows God to get squeezed out of my life and who then notices the difference, I would really encourage you, as I am encouraging myself, to find a time and a place to regularly meet with him in the quiet.

I'll close with some well-known words from Psalm 46 – a psalm that starts with a reminder that whatever state of chaos and turmoil may be going on around us, we are told to "be still" and in that stillness to know and recognise God: our refuge, our strength, the Lord of hosts who is always with us.

**Judith Lewis**

## **PRIEST ROOM GANG**

At the end of January, several of our young people hosted their second 'Thanksgiving' dinner for members of their families and some of the congregation who have supported the group during the last year.

Lasagnes and various desserts were served in the heritage centre as the guests and young people enjoyed a time of fellowship, before a game of bingo was enjoyed by all.



## FROM THE ALBUMS



At the end of January, Ashby's loyal team of Street Pastors and Prayer Pastors were recommissioned in a service at St Helen's.

The Street Pastors take to the high street in teams every Saturday night to assist and minister to those enjoying the night time economy. Please do keep them in your prayers.



There was a full house for the annual Burns Night supper—complete with some birthday celebrations for our dear friend Liz.



## PATHWAYS CAFÉ

Pathway, which took over from a redundant job club, is a Community Cafe for everyone, run by Christian volunteers since September 2018. We are based at Holy Trinity Church, Ashby, and are open every Thursday from 10am-12noon. Although based in Ashby, we also support individuals from the surrounding villages.

The reason Pathway is so vital to our community is that we provide a safe space for those in need. Our members experience the company of others, are able to chat with each other, and also with a range of professional support agencies.

On average we support 20-30 members with differing needs, examples of which are mental health and well-being, physical health, emotional support and financial (strictly through the advice and guidance of local agencies).

The local agencies providing guidance are:

- CAB - Citizens Advice, fortnightly
- The Local Links Coordinator from the library
- CAP—Christians Against Poverty
- "Signposts"
- Fresh Start - an 8 week course for any kind of dependency - drugs, shopping, eating, company - needs shared by meeting and chatting.
- A new group meets monthly to share with and support sufferers experiencing severe pain - but not a medical solution.
- Activities such as painting/drawing, board games and gardening are also on offer.

Refreshments are provided free of charge - but the Cafe is not funded. However, small gifts are given out at Christmas and Easter to remind us all of the message of Jesus.

A warm welcome awaits....

# ASHBY YOUTH FOR CHRIST

If you would like to sign up for regular updates either follow this link <http://eepurl.com/dvVqrj> or email [helen.davis@yfc.co.uk](mailto:helen.davis@yfc.co.uk). Alternatively you can scan the QR code. Thank you for all your prayers and support.



## Musings from Football:

Last week before our game we thought about hands and hearts. I mentioned Pharaoh of the Exodus who hardened his heart and so missed out on God being able to bless him and his people. I suggested that a hard heart is like a fist - that is unable to receive gifts. I confessed that I sometimes missed out on God's kindness because of my defensive closed-ness.

*Father forgive us for, in our anxiety and defensiveness, closing our hearts to you. Please convict these lads of the sense of being open hearted / open-handed before you. Displace the fear of loss in their hearts with your love, that they might courageously and desperately open themselves to you and receive an abundance of your grace. In Jesus' name, Amen*

## A request for help from Ashby Youth For Christ Trustees:

A heartfelt thank you to those of you who donate to AYFC on a regular basis. Without your support, our work serving young people would not be possible, and it would be difficult for us to plan for the future. But we need your help. From the end of February, Lloyds bank will be closing our original bank account due to new government legislation; any donations to this account will not be received and we would hate to lose your generous support. As donations cannot be moved across to our business account automatically, please could you take the time to update your standing order to the following bank account details?

**Account Name:** Ashby de la Zouch Youth For Christ

**Sort Code:** 30-90-89

**Number:** 36821260

If you have any questions or concerns about this, please contact our Treasurer, Ed Holbrook- [treasurer.ayfc@gmail.com](mailto:treasurer.ayfc@gmail.com)

## ASHBY JOY

A heartfelt thanks to everyone who came to support our prayer evening last month for the week of prayer for Christian Unity. On the evening, we made space for people to write a prayer for their church. Here is some of what was written on the prayer board:

- Give us the peace of unity to live out your Kingdom here on Earth
- Lord, let us pray for our churches. May they stand tall and may we be a strong presence in our community. Amen.
- (Ashby Baptist) For the continued growth of our church and humility in rejoicing in our new growth.
- To reach the 30-50 year olds in our town.
- Growing in discipleship through courses and encouragement to each other.
- Lots of people at Messy Church! Praise God.
- We will have ears and eyes to respond to all in our church family.
- ‘Witnesses to passion’ Good Friday play in town.
- Outreach– renew wellbeing. Explore– for those unable to attend Sunday morning for families.
- Holiday Bible Club– that people will come forward and help Ali to run the event.
- St Helens– Discerning how we can best serve our communities in Ashby and see growth.
- Peace and cooperation between different religions- faith should not be a source of violence.

Our next event that we would like to invite you all to will be a **coffee and cake morning on Saturday 14th February, from 10am until 12 noon**. This will be held in the coffee lounge of Ashby Baptist Church and all proceeds will be going to Open Doors’ ‘Africa Arise Project’ which is supporting persecuted Christians in Nigeria at this time. Please do come along for refreshments and fellowship, and bring a friend!

# CANDLEMAS: LIGHT AT THE THRESHOLD OF LENT

*A reflection for Candlemas, exploring how the light of Christ leads us from Christmas toward Lent.*

Candlemas, celebrated on 2 February, marked the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple. Falling forty days after Christmas, it is a hinge point in the Church's year: a moment when the joy and light of the Nativity are gathered up and carried forward, even as our gaze begins to turn toward the searching journey of Lent. Traditionally associated with candles and light, Candlemas reminds us that Christ is revealed not only as comfort, but as truth — a light that both consoles and challenges. The reflection that follows was offered at Choral Evensong and is shared here in the hope that it might help us navigate the transition from Christmas to Lent with attentiveness, honesty, and hope.

Candlemas finds us standing on a threshold. The warm glow of Christmas lies just behind us, while ahead stretches the quieter, more demanding path of Lent. It is a moment to pause — to look once more at the light before we decide how we will walk by it.

In the Temple, Luke introduces us to Simeon and Anna, two figures who can easily fade into the background of the story. Yet they are anything but incidental. They are people who have lived long lives shaped by waiting — waiting under political tension, uncertainty, and disappointment. And yet they have not grown bitter. Their waiting has made them attentive. Their faith has sharpened their sight.

So, when Mary and Joseph arrive with the infant Jesus — an ordinary young couple doing what the Law requires — Simeon and Anna recognise what others miss. They see light. Not a cosy glow, not a fragrant herbal spa candle, but the clear, searching light of God at work in the world.

It is worth pausing to think about what light actually does. Light does not struggle with darkness; it simply enters it. Darkness has no substance of its own — it is only the absence of light. Even a small flame changes the character of a room. Light reveals what is already there. It brings warmth

and reassurance, but it also casts shadows. The brighter the light, the sharper those shadows become.

That is the paradox at the heart of Candlemas. Simeon rejoices that Jesus is “a light to lighten the Gentiles,” yet in the same breath he warns Mary that a sword will pierce her own soul. The light that brings hope will also uncover hard truths. It will comfort and confront, heal and expose, all at once.

The letter to the Hebrews helps us understand why this matters. Christ shares our flesh and blood not to avoid suffering, but to enter it fully — to break the power of fear from the inside. God’s light does not hover safely above human pain; it steps directly into it.

That speaks powerfully into our own moment. We live under the long shadows of conflict and violence, political division, economic pressure, and quiet anxiety about the future. Like Simeon and Anna, we may sometimes wonder whether God is still at work at all.

Candlemas invites us to look again. Simeon and Anna show us that faithful waiting is not passive. It is a discipline of attention. They teach us that God’s light often arrives without spectacle, and that recognising it requires hearts trained in hope.

Their encounter with Christ is a turning point. Simeon can let go in peace. Anna begins to speak to others about what she has seen. Candlemas is not simply a celebration; it is a sending-out.

As we turn toward Lent, Candlemas asks us to carry the light we have glimpsed into the season ahead. Lent is not meant to be a time of gloom, but of clarity — a season in which our vision is refined, our trust deepened, and our lives gently reoriented toward what truly matters.

The paradox of Candlemas is that it sends us into the shadows so that we may learn to see more truthfully. And it invites us to walk the Lenten path with the quiet confidence of Simeon and Anna — people who knew the darkness well, yet recognised the dawn when it came.

Andy Smith

## GARDENING TIPS FOR FEBRUARY

It can still be a very cold, Wintery month but you can see definite signs of life in the garden as the days become warmer, lighter and longer. A wet and cold end to January will certainly influence the outside jobs for February. However, don't forget that January Gardening Tips will continue into February with some new additions.

The sunny days will bring Narcissus, Cyclamen and Crocus into flower to join the Snowdrops. Also, Daffodil leaves are starting to emerge. If you grow perennial, ornamental grasses you have probably left them with their stems and other growth through the Winter. Providing it's not too cold, this is the time to cut them down to the ground to ensure healthy new growth. Also, prune hardy hedges such as Laurels and Leylandii before the bird-nesting season. Finish off the dead-heading and light pruning for the year.

There are some jobs that can be done as the days become lighter and longer. Think about sowing early seeds under glass but with some heat and light. It is essential to create a warm environment for germination and for the early stages of the seedling's growth.

Aubergines, Beetroot, Chillies, Lettuce, Rocket, Herbs and Tomatoes can be started early. Popular garden plants such as Antirrhinum, Calendula, Cornflower, French Marigolds, Nigella, Rudbeckia, Salvia, Scabious, Sweet Peas and Zinnia can also be started early. Leave more tender vegetable plants such as Courgette and Cucumber until later. You can start chitting early Potatoes as well.

Strawberries are hardy Perennials so they will look a bit tired at this time of year. This is a good time to remove the old brown foliage to encourage fresh growth and let in more light. For an early crop put them under a cloche in late February, but don't forget to water.

Don't forget to feed your birds! Put out feeders and nest boxes ready for Spring and keep plenty of fresh water available. Remember to remove any old nests from bird-boxes as our birds prefer to build new nests. Also, as you may have noticed in our National News, our British Hedgehogs are very much in decline. We leave a feeding bowl of food out all Winter and we do check to see if any food has been eaten and top it up, or clean it out, if we need to.

Winter digging of new plots and empty beds needs to be completed

from your list of jobs. However, this is very much weather dependent. However, you can still blitz Perennial weeds before the weather warms up. February is a good month to remove algae from paths and patios, especially if they start to become slippery. Also, garden contractors are likely to be less busy before March and may therefore be available for other jobs such as paving, fence building and pond digging.

Order flower bulbs for Summer-colour such as Lily-of-the-Valley and Gladioli in preparation for Spring planting. There is still time to prune your Rhododendron whilst they are in their dormant stage. Also Group 2 Clematis may need pruning before the end of the month.

Now is a good time to start a garden journal to keep tabs on how your garden is performing each season. Write down everything you can think of, both positive and negative. Take photographs if you can as this is great way to monitor your garden's progress throughout the year. Remember to wrap up well and keep warm when out in your garden. Be sure to wear suitable footwear at all times - Be Safe!



Alan and Alison Cross

## MESSY CHURCH



With the onset of the snowy weather, we postponed Messy Church and instead received some superb entries for our '**Three Wise Snowmen**' competition - some impressive efforts included appropriate gifts and even a camel (albeit seated!!). The session was postponed until the following week when those attending thought about what gifts they could offer to God.



# OUR WORSHIP IN FEBRUARY

	am	pm	Wednesday
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Sunday</b> 1st February		<b>6pm</b> Evensong	
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday</b> 8th February	<b>10.30am</b> Holy Communion		2nd Wednesday– 11th Holy Communion 10.30am At Prior Park
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday</b> 15th February	<b>10.30 am</b> Morning Worship		3rd Wednesday– 18th Holy Communion 10.30am & 7:30pm In Church
<b>4<sup>th</sup> Sunday</b> 22nd February	<b>10.30 am</b> Holy Communion		4th Wednesday– 25th Holy Communion 10.30am In church

## Regular activities:

Monday mornings	- Little Fishes 9.30 - 11.30am during term time
Mondays	- Pilgrim group
1 <sup>st</sup> & 3rd Wednesday	- We're in stitches – 2 till 4pm
Thursdays	- Choir practice – 6.30 till 8.30pm
Fridays	- Heart- warming Space 2-4pm
Saturdays	- Parish Prayers – 9.30am in the Hastings chapel
1st Saturday	- Pause for Paws– see poster

## **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

**Friday 6th February– Messy Church– 4.15pm– St Helen’s Heritage Centre**

**Saturday 14th February- Coffee Morning for Open Doors– 10am-12pm,  
Ashby Baptist Church**

Ashby's Young Adults group are hosting a coffee and cake morning in aid of Open Doors to support their work with persecuted Christians in Nigeria. All welcome– bring a friend!

**Wednesday 18th February– Service for Ash Wednesday –7.30pm**

**Tuesday 24th February– Heritage Talk– 7.30pm– Heritage Centre**

This will be given by Peter Liddle. He will be talking about ‘The Archaeology of Bradgate Park (and was it really Lady Jane Grey’s house?)’

Tickets are £4 on the door, including light refreshments.

**Lentwise Lent Course 2026**

This will run on Wednesday evenings from 25th February to 25th March inclusive. The sessions will be in the heritage centre, starting at 7.30pm and will be finished by 9pm. The sessions will be led by various combinations of Sue Field, Liz Smith and Andy Smith. The course is based on the book ‘Lent Wise– Spiritual Essentials for Real Life’ by Paula Gooder, and having a personal copy, or one between couples will help you get the most out of the course. Please let Andy Smith know if you would like to attend the course.

# A LIGHT IN THE WORLD: COMMUNITY

This is the third sermon from a series which expand upon our new church vision statement. The reading for this service was Matthew 5:13-16.

"St. Helen's is a community that is deeply rooted in God and faithful to Christ.

We are called to welcome everybody with open arms, offering a safe and nurturing environment where each person can explore the Christian faith at their own pace.

Our mission is to grow together in God's love and to share that love and the gospel of hope through our words, our actions, and by building strong, connected relationships within Ashby and the surrounding villages."

Expectations ... we all have them – of ourselves, of others, and especially of those in the public eye.

People have expectations of the church, too. Some of them are hopelessly unrealistic and therefore a recipe for disappointment. How many times have I heard that offered as an excuse for not joining a local church fellowship!

I want to suggest that at its best, a local church is a community within a community. We are, in the well-known description, 'in the world, but not of it'. That is to say, we are a community that is thoroughly involved in society around us, and yet we are, or are meant to be, distinct from it: a distinct community within, and serving, the wider community of Ashby de la Zouch and its surrounding villages. The expectation is, to use the words of the apostle Paul, that 'we will live lives worthy of our calling' (Ephesians 4:1). Similarly, the apostle Peter reminds the Christians to whom he is writing that they are 'a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people' (1 Pet 2:9) and he continues 'in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.' As 'God's own people' we are meant to be distinctive, with a distinctive and God-given responsibility to the community around us which we serve.

God called Abraham and promised that his descendants, the Old Testament people of God, would be His community within the wider community of nations. As we read the Old Testament we realise that Israel had a chequered history, until finally God sent his Son to fulfil their calling to be 'a light to the nations' (Isaiah 49ff) – the Servant of whom the prophet Isaiah speaks.

Our Vision Statement embraces both communities, and implies two movements, as it were: a movement *towards the church building on which the worship of the church community centres, to which all are welcome and in which we offer 'a safe and nurturing environment where each person can explore the Christian faith at their own pace'*. Secondly, there's a movement *outwards to share the love of Christ and His gospel of hope through our relationships in the wider community where we live, have neighbours, work and do our shopping*. (We could, I suppose, add a third movement: *upwards, since everything we are and do is meant to be to the glory of God*.)

We belong, then, to both communities - we are 'in the world but not of it'. The church community is distinct, but not separate, from the community around us. That's why I have taken the gospel reading from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:13-26) where Jesus describes the church community as 'salt' and 'light': salt to add flavour and prevent decay and light to dispel the darkness of the world.

I don't pretend that it's easy to be a church community in our highly individualistic society in which most of us are also very busy people. Often we are more at home with a computer screen or a mobile phone than we are with a face-to-face encounter. And yet, as John Stott wisely observed, deep down, 'Everybody is searching for genuine community and authentic relationships of love'. (*The Contemporary Christian, IVP, page 235*). He poses this challenge: *Can 'the church be so radically renewed by the Spirit and the Word of God that it offers an experience of transcendence through its worship, of significance through its teaching, and of community through its fellowship.'*

(*ibid p.237*)

To fulfil our calling to be salt and light we have to be involved. We cannot

simply stand on the sidelines and criticise. But neither can we be so involved that we become indistinguishable from those around us. Historically, I guess the church has fallen into one or other of these positions: separated, for fear of contamination; or so immersed in our culture that we are no longer ‘a city set on a hill’ lighting up the darkness. How do we maintain our distinctiveness while being involved in wider society?

Most naturally, I suppose, we think of things we are already doing: Ashby Street Pastors, the Foodbank, Little Fishes, Warm-hearted Space, Teatime and ministry to Prior Park residents, Prison Ministry ... The challenge is to do each of these things intentionally – ‘to share the love of Christ and the gospel of hope’. There are also parachurch organisations which set out to serve the wider community, too. Two come immediately to mind: the ‘Transforming Communities’ programme of Tearfund ([www.tearfund.org.uk](http://www.tearfund.org.uk)) and the ministry of Care UK ([www.care.org.uk](http://www.care.org.uk)). Have a look at their websites if you can.

But does the wider community know what we stand for? Are we a distinctive community? Not for nothing does Jesus begin His sermon by addressing the question of Christian character – in the Beatitudes. Here He defines the marks of Christian character, and we are startled because they are so different from the characteristics that the world values. Yet the peacemakers, the poor in spirit, the meek are the people Christ calls ‘happy’ or ‘blessed’. Do these characteristics describe us? They should. We are able to love one another because of our common identity, as ‘sinners saved by grace’. We are a redeemed community.

So our identity as forgiven people shows in Christian character, and that in turn leads to Christ-honouring words and actions that act as salt and light – the Christian community’s influence for good in society. The challenge then, is to be involved in the world but as those who are mindful of belonging to a distinctive Christian community with deep roots in God and faithful to Christ, glorifying Him in our service of the wider communities in which He has set us.



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## **THE CHILDREN'S SOCIETY SHOP**

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THE CHILDREN'S SOCIETY

# ANYONE FOR SCOTLAND?

Scotland's one of my favourite holiday destinations, partly because on every visit it's been sunny. And there's another good reason to like Scotland. It has a rich Christian heritage, and the Celtic connections are fascinating.

The Celtic influence can be seen in the prayers and poetry of the Western Highlands in particular, and we're fortunate that Dr Alexander Carmichael (1832-1912) was able to meet the people and write down their prayers.

They're in a collection called *Carmina Gadelica*, and here are some of them.

## Power of Raven

Power of raven black be thine,  
Power of eagle's back be thine,  
Hound-chase power.

Power of stormy wrack be thine,  
Power of moonbeam track be thine,  
Sun's face power.

Power of ocean tack be thine,  
Power of land attack be thine,  
Heav'n grace power.

Good of ocean space be thine,  
Good of land and place be thine,  
Of heav'n's city.

Every day joy's trace be thine,  
No day sorrow's case be thine,  
Honour, pity.

Love of every face be thine,  
Pillow-dying grace be thine,  
Saviour, with thee.

The original was spoken in Gaelic, although this translation seems to keep a

lot of the rhythm and meaning. The raven reminds us of the one Noah released to see if the flood was subsiding. And after Noah and his family were back on dry land, God says that the rainbow represents his covenant with humans and every living creature. The ‘every living creature’ is repeated five times in the passage in Genesis chapter 9. Similarly we see in Celtic Christianity, both in prayers and poetry, a strong connection with nature and all living things.

Each of these prayers has a history attached. We have one called St Columba's Thursday. This feast day was a lucky day for many things - for warping thread, for beginning a pilgrimage, and many more. On Thursday eve the mother of a family made an oaten cake into which she put a small silver coin. The cake was toasted before a fire of rowan, yew, oak, or other sacred wood. On the morning of Thursday the father cut the cake into as many sections as there were children in the family. All the pieces were then placed in a basket and each child blindfold drew a piece of cake from the basket in name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The child who had the coin got the crop of lambs for the year!

### **St Columba's Thursday**

Thursday of Columba benign,  
Day to send sheep on prosperity,  
Day to send cow on calf,  
Day to put the web in the warp.

Day to put coracle on the brine,  
Day to place the staff to the flag,  
Day to bear, day to die,  
Day to hunt the heights.

Day to put horses in harness,  
Day to send herds to pasture,  
Day to make prayer efficacious,  
Day of my beloved, the Thursday,  
Day of my beloved, the Thursday.

The spiritual life of the highlanders was so interwoven with their working life that the prayers are often framed as poems, as here.

To conclude, here's a prayer to the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will soon see it's not quite in the style of our church prayers today, though refreshingly different.

### **The Lightener of the Stars**

Behold the Lightener of the stars  
On the crests of the clouds,  
And the choristers of the sky  
Lauding Him.

Coming down with acclaim  
From the Father above,  
Harp and lyre of song  
Sounding to Him.

Christ, Thou refuge of my love,  
Why should not I raise Thy fame!  
Angels and saints melodious  
Singing to Thee.

Thou Son of the Mary of graces,  
Of exceeding white purity of beauty,  
Joy were it to me to be in the fields  
Of Thy riches.

O Christ my beloved,  
O Christ of the Holy Blood,  
By day and by night  
I praise Thee.

Finally, there are hundreds of Carmina Gadelica prayers and poems, all available on the internet.

**Richard Vann**

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