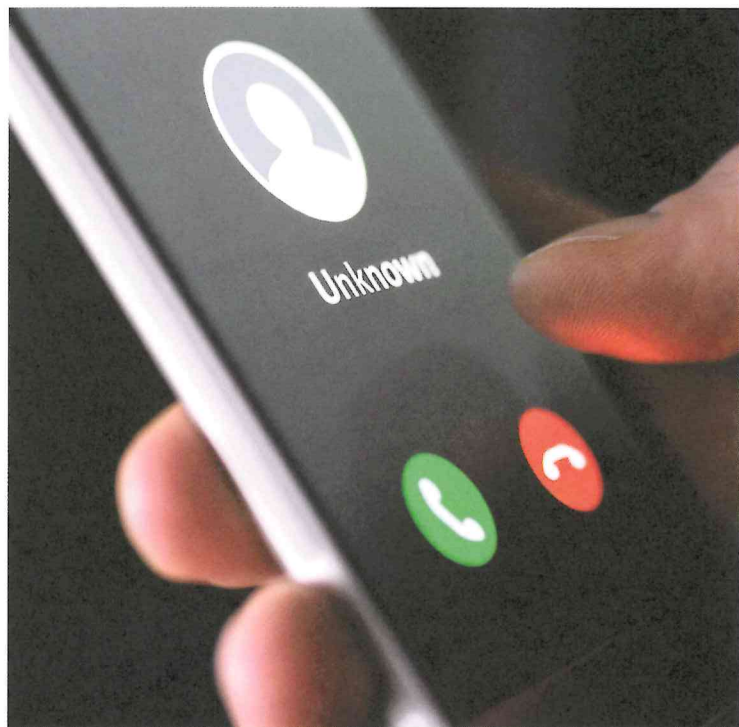


Don't be fooled



Heather Smith *reflects on* Matthew 2:1-12

In the bewildering, largely unfamiliar territory of cyberspace it's easy to be duped by unscrupulous fraudsters. Cunning and sophisticated cyber scams trick victims into revealing personal data and handing over funds, draining bank accounts and stealing identities, leaving victims devastated and highlighting the need for cybersecurity awareness and vigilance.

In a foreign land the magi came close to falling for Herod's scam. It may not have hurt them, but it would certainly have hurt the baby they had come to worship. What saved the situation was their close attention to what God had to say. Having been attentive to the star leading them, they were also alert to God's warning not to return to Herod.

Most of us don't have dreams in which God tells us what to do, or what not to do, but by building up a close relationship with God we become better and better at knowing the right direction in which to travel, and which choices to make. It might be relatively easy to spot a scam which relies on our greed and is obviously too good to be true. But sometimes we're vulnerable to scams when it comes to knowing right from wrong. But if we always stay close to God we will find it easier to make the right decision. ☺

Lord, draw us closer to you. Help us to recognise when we have a choice to make and to hear your guidance. Be as close to us as our own breath, gently directing us in the ways of righteousness. Amen.

World Braille Day

by Lee Tulfer

Today is the anniversary of the birth of Louis Braille, who was born in France in 1809. Blinded by a childhood accident, by the age of fifteen he had created a reading and writing system based on a military night-writing system. The code that bears his name is made up of "cells" of raised dots, in a two-by-three configuration, and can be used in any language, both to read and (with special equipment) to write.

The UN declared World Braille Day to celebrate the role of Braille in giving independence to people who are visually impaired, and also to encourage greater use of Braille worldwide. There is a world shortage of Braille teachers. Braille writers are expensive. Sadly, public buildings and business do not often use Braille to make it possible for blind and visually impaired people to access their premises and services independently.

This might be an appropriate time to ask how Braille-friendly your church is. ☺

“Darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you. Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.”

Isaiah 60:2-3

Purposeful prayer for the new year

Part 1 – intentional prayer

by Caroline Hodgson

Caroline looks at how we can refresh our prayer life as we move into 2026.

Purposeful prayer starts with intention. It's easy to let prayer become routine, but approaching God with a clear heart and mind brings a deeper connection. Setting aside a quiet moment, taking a breath and focusing on God's presence can shift the experience, as can speaking honestly, whether in gratitude, confession, or seeking guidance. It's not about saying

the right words, but opening our heart to God and being fully present.

St Ignatius Brianchaninov, a nineteenth-century Russian Orthodox bishop and theologian, said: "He who is careless about prayer is careless about his salvation." As you begin the new year, consider setting a daily reminder to pause and pray with purpose, even if it's just for a moment. Over time, these intentional moments build a rhythm of prayer, creating a deeper awareness of God's presence in everyday life. ☺