

up in a Pentecostal Baptist church and relocated to the UK because of her husband's job.

"I was inspired by my grandmother, who was the most devoted person I've met," she said. "And I found myself at St John's, Locks Heath, after watching the livestreamed services. I do feel as though my faith has grown stronger, and I'm closer to God than I've ever been.

"Rachael's confirmation classes answered a lot of my questions, some of which I'd been asking for a long time. It was good to receive Communion after my confirmation. It wasn't the first time I'd received it, but it somehow felt more solid and real."

Among the other confirmation services taking place this Autumn was a baptism and confirmation at **Portsmouth Cathedral** on November 15.

Among the confirmation candidates were worshippers from Portsdown and Purbrook, All Saints Gurnard, St Mary's Cowes, Church of the Good Shepherd Crookhorn, St Mary's Portchester; and Hook with Warsash - as well as two baptisms.

And on November 23, the bishop led two confirmation services on one day. In the morning, he visited St James Church to confirm nine adults and some young people from the parish of **Warblington-with-Emsworth**.

In the evening, Bishop Jonathan was at **St Peter's Church, Petersfield**, for a confirmation service for the deanery of Petersfield.

Among those being confirmed that day were Amber Clarke and Jack Doe (pictured, right, with Finlay, 16, and baby Penelope). They were expecting their baby in January 2025, and Jack was keen to have her christened. He was also feeling a draw towards church, but wasn't sure if he could just turn up for a service. Amber was less keen.

# 'My mini-stroke was the shock I needed to get me back to church'

**LYNNE** Ferguson is grateful for the mini-stroke she suffered from three years ago - because it made her think about God.

Her brush with mortality made her re-evaluate her life. Within a few months she'd started attending St Mary's Church, Brading. And she has now publicly declared her faith in God by being confirmed there.

She was one of 22 people from across the Isle of Wight who was confirmed by Bishop Jonathan at St Mary's, Brading, in October - as well as two more who reaffirmed their faith.

Each candidate confirmed the vows made on their behalf at their baptisms. Then the bishop laid his hands on each of them and prayed for God's Spirit to strengthen them.

And for Lynne, the service was especially significant. The bishop's words about being called to serve God as a Christian minister resonated so much that she was left in tears.

"I'd always had some kind of faith and attended Sunday School as a child," said Lynne. "I've always had a Bible and sat down to try and read it and to pray, but never quite engaged with God properly. Then three years ago I had a mini-stroke.

"It's quite a frightening thing, especially as I needed speech

therapy for a while afterwards, and you wonder what the future holds.

"But I'm actually glad it happened. It made me re-evaluate my life. I'd often gone past St Mary's Church as I live in Brading. But one Sunday morning, I decided to go in.

"I was greeted with open arms. From the first moment I sat down, I felt at home.

I started going regularly. I was baptised there, I found myself joining the PCC and the social committee, and even becoming a churchwarden. I'm now going through the process and hope to become a lay minister.

"I have this sense of purpose now that I didn't have before, and also a sense of belonging. There was something missing from my life beforehand, and I didn't know what it was. Now I feel I'm part of something bigger and I have this real happiness in my life.

"It also shows God does work in mysterious ways, as I never would have dreamt of being in the situation a few years ago.



"The confirmation service was beautiful, but by the end I was a huge blubbing mess! What the bishop was saying about feeling called to ministry - it felt like he was talking to me personally, and the tears kept coming. It reaffirmed my sense of calling.

"It was also special because my partner - Sharron Jones - was also being confirmed at the same service. I work as her full-time carer, as she is disabled.

"I wondered what the future held for us both when I had that mini-stroke, but there is clearly someone who did know all about our future."

and love," said Amber. "From that time on, I have felt drawn to the church. I loved the sense of community that comes with attending, but couldn't help but feel like an imposter, as I was not baptised."

Amber was baptised herself at St James in September, and their new baby, Penelope, was also baptised in October. Jack and Amber attended the Exploring Faith course that led to



Left: Bishop Jonathan signs the cross on Lynne Ferguson's forehead as part of the confirmation service; above: Jeremy Palconit-Baker is confirmed during the service;

Among the others who were confirmed were candidates from churches in St Helens, Seaview, Yaverland, Ryde, Bembridge,

Ventnor, Gurnard, Cowes, Northwood, Newport and Shalfleet. India Luter, from St John's Church, Northwood, said: "It was confirming my faith, as I'd got reconnected with God. I felt a calling a few months ago to go to church, and they have been really supportive.

"We've had some teaching once a week for six weeks with the Rev Chris Nicol, and it's been good to make new friends along the way."

Jeremy Palconit-Baker, who is also from St John's Church, Northwood, said: "Two years ago, I didn't even entertain an idea of going to church, but someone pulled me in and suggested that I explore

it. The congregation is lovely and the services are amazing.

"Confirmation is the next step on my journey of faith. The service was amazing, and it was very powerful. It was so good to be part of it."

And 16-year-old Lola Squires, from All Saints, Gurnard, said: "I wanted to be confirmed to show how my faith had grown and that I was closer to Jesus. I grew up going to church, but we stopped going for a while and re-started last year. We've had confirmation lessons with the Rev Emma Taylor, and have really enjoyed them."

And Joan Wolton, from St Catherine's, Ventnor, said: "I had done an Alpha Course with Adrian Pinnock and it sparked something in me again. I was thinking about confirmation and the opportunity came up. It was a beautiful service and very emotional."

Jack's sister Jess had her baby christened at St James Church, Emsworth, in May, and Amber's reluctance to get involved lessened.

They started attending St James Church, Emsworth, regularly themselves and during a Pentecost service they were anointed with oil.

"While I was being anointed, I felt an amazing sense of peace

