

THE *Beckoner*

The Magazine
For Beckminster
Methodist Church

DECEMBER 2016 - JANUARY 2017

PRICELESS!



Photo by Gordon Nicklin

*Christmas time, mistletoe and wine
Children singing Christian rhyme.
With logs on the fire and gifts on the tree
It's time to rejoice in the good that we see.*

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DRIVING HOME FOR CHRISTMAS

When we are going to Devon for Christmas, we usually play 'Driving Home for Christmas', a nineties popular track. It's nostalgic and evocative, an American song about someone driving home for Christmas. He's been away a long time and looks forward to the snow, the roaring fires, the family gathered and all sorts of memories of celebrating Christmas with the family again.

It takes me back to childhood Christmases, the fevered excitement of stockings on Christmas morning, church carol singers singing outside whilst we were in bed and Christmas dawned. There then was the going out to the family gathering and of presents, games, warmth, singing carols and both my father and sister singing *Good King Wenceslas*.

Then the times when everyone came to us when there were feverish preparations, cooking for everyone (with their help of course) and then the privilege of Midnight Communion. We would then light the candles at midnight, go home, the sorting of presents, bed, and Christmas morning family service with excited children bringing their gifts. It was then home for lunch, the exhaustion and the joy of being all together.

Now others do the work and I sit back and enjoy. It changes but it's the same – family, children, feasting, gifts, carols and remembrance of the stable, the Christ child, the incarnation with all its mystery and celebration. Christmas, with its many layers – commercial, family, gifts, worship, celebration, concerns for the needy – all woven together which makes us wonder "Where is its centre?"

It is messy. Often we rail at its over-commercialisation. We are concerned that it can become a selfish, exclusive celebration. We feel concerned that so many cannot see the Christ child at its centre. We are aware that we don't care enough about vulnerable people, the old, the stranger, the hungry and homeless.

Yet isn't that what the incarnation is? It is messy. There is a young girl, pregnant, bringing shame to her family. The political situation of living in an occupied country, travelling miles for

the census in her husband's family town having to give birth in a stable full of dangers to mother and baby. There was then having to go to Egypt as a refugee because His life was in danger.

How far away it is from a pretty Christmas card with glitter and snow, angels and adoring bystanders. The incarnation is messy and dangerous. It speaks of a God who cared so much for humanity, you and me, that He humbled himself and came into the world as a vulnerable baby to a vulnerable mother in a dangerous situation. He was at the mercy of an army of occupation, cruel leaders concerned about their own hold on power. He grew up to be a village carpenter, a travelling rabbi, teaching, telling wonderful stories, making enemies of the establishment and being crucified. That is a messy life but we believe it showed God's love in a unique way. And then, after the resurrection, He is present in our world for ever in all its mess! He is with us his needy disciples, with the needy and vulnerable, in the seats of power and industry, in places of war, hunger and poverty. He calls us to find our home with Him, sharing His ministry of love and salvation. In that we rejoice and celebrate Christmas with all and any. For Christ is in our messy world always.

Rev Glennys Bamford



STEWARDS' MUSTINGS

My wife reads more than I do. Occasionally she recommends a book she is reading to me, and sometimes it is appreciated.

One such recommendation recently was a book by John Bell: ***Ten things they never told me about Jesus***. I think that it is both an enjoyable read and an illuminating look at some of the events of Jesus' life. It certainly approaches these events from a very different perspective from that which we have been accustomed to. Take the birth, for example:

Although many of us have been brought up to know the "Nativity Play", portrayed by schoolchildren, as a young person's experience, John Bell reminds us that the Christmas story involves lots of older people. The shepherds, Wise Men, Augustus Caesar, who ordered the census, Herod the old and threatened king of Judea, Elizabeth and Zechariah, Simeon and Anna are all elderly or even ancient. The Gospel Truth is that Christmas is about old people. It is consonant

with the story at the very beginning of Hebrew scripture when a retired couple, Abraham and Sarah, were called by God to be the progenitors of the Hebrew race.

John Bell himself describes how he once produced an Advent play with the help of older members of his congregation. How about trying it with Luncheon Club, Tess? We don't need the innkeeper, his wife or even a donkey, but auditions for the rôle of the angel Gabriel would be fun! Then let the children come and watch at Messy Church.

Seriously, John Bell's major point is that God's vocation for the elderly is that they should be the midwives of the new thing that God is doing—an expectation avoided in many churches in favour of labelling older people as resistant and reactionary.

We aren't, are we?

Merry Christmas to young and old!

John Ashwood



NEWS FROM CHURCH COUNCIL AND CIRCUIT

The October Council concentrated on Finance and Property and also resolved to address matters of security. This was in the light of increased risks to people meeting in public groups at the present time. It was decided that among improvements planned are:

To take appropriate measures to improve our audio visual system at the rear of the church. This is due to the sound, amplification and screen images having been of poor quality over recent times.

To make progress on the provision of an effective notice board on the corner of Birches Barn Road and St Philips Avenue.

To increase Tess Davies' hours from twelve to fifteen hours per week in the light of the excellent work she has done so far and the ever-increasing need for pastoral care.

Those churchgoers who show an interest in financial matters will know that Beckminster has a six-figure legacy fund. This is very comforting, in one sense, but each year we have to dip into our reserves to cover annual deficit. However, so long as we maintain our personal giving and room lettings remain high, we are a church without short-term financial concerns. Moreover, our financial situation has recently been given a boost in the form of a £45,000 bequest, for which we are most grateful.

Prior to our meeting we had received a general communication from Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, which encourages churches to find appropriate uses for legacy funds to enhance our work and witness. Clearly, the money should not be spent imprudently but should be put to active and creative use. In the light of this we discussed whether we might use approximately 4% of our legacy fund to assist the work of those in our city who welcome and integrate migrant families into our community. Phil Shuttleworth had spoken recently to some of those people who work with the City of Sanctuary and the Refugee & Migrant Centre. Further exploration is needed: we need to find the areas of real, immediate need but agreed to

make £5,000 available to use as appropriate during coming months.

Personally, I was delighted the Church Council was able to unanimously make this decision. I feel the decision shows that, as a worshipping community as well as individually, we stand alongside the poor and weak of our city. In closing, always feel free to speak to any member of Church Council should you wish to discuss further about any of these matters.

John Ashwood

The Circuit Leadership Team reluctantly agreed to Rev. Linda Bishop curtailing her appointment in August 2017. In the meanwhile, she will also have charge of Fordhouses Methodist Church as well as Beckminster until her departure.

Three new ministers will therefore be required in the Circuit. It is hoped to appoint a probationer for Springdale and Wombourne (to replace Rev. Chris Collins, who will move to Darlington Street and continue with East Park); a minister for Coven, Brewood and Codsall (to replace Rev. Ian Heath); and a new minister for Beckminster and Fordhouses. The Rev. Ruth Reynolds-Tyson also reported that due to the small and ageing congregation and the inability to find key post holders, Wednesfield Methodist Church would be seeking permission to close at the end of this connexional year.

There were nine circuit stewards when the new Wolverhampton circuit was created. It is now felt that six are sufficient in practice. However, all the current stewards are either coming to the end of their terms or have already served for extra years. If anyone would be willing to take on this role, they should contact one of the existing stewards as replacements are urgently required. (Pete Prescott at Beckminster would be happy to discuss this with anyone who might be interested!)

Phil Shuttleworth

Camilla - A Profile

When it was suggested that we included in The Beckoner a profile of Camilla, our lay worker with young people, I little realised how much she has packed into her relatively short life. She has now been with us for almost 12 months and in that time has made a distinct impact on our work.

She grew up in Wolverhampton, attended St Peters School but is the first to confess that when she left she had still to find her Christian faith. In fact she admits that in her teens she felt her life lacked purpose and as result became quite depressed. Her life changed when she picked up a circular pushed through her door announcing the formation of an Alpha Course to be held at the former Compton university campus by the King's Community Church.

After completing the course she gave up her job as an apprentice nursery nurse (where she claims she changed more nappies than most mothers) and began a seven month course on youth work with the Message Trust, including helping in soup kitchens and with RE lessons in local schools.

Following this she set up a project "Love4Life" for an organisation, Lifespring, where she worked for three years with young people in schools and elsewhere trying to raise their confidence and self-esteem, but also in the process teaching them social skills, citizenship, health education and lifestyle relationships. During this time she became an Associate Education Person, engaging particularly with children who had been excluded from school and encouraging them to resume their education.

The next three years were spent in a government sponsored family support scheme in Blakenhall where she co-operated with social workers struggling to prevent family break-ups by early intervention in their situations. This was extremely challenging work, not without personal danger. First visits were always made in the company of another colleague, HQ had always to be notified of staff movements and



personal attack alarms carried at all times. She was then persuaded by her faith to take a course in theology and religious education at Redding Bible College in California run by the Bethel Church. Part of the course was carrying out mission work in Cambodia, Malaysia and China, where she worked with the underground church in a country generally hostile to the Christian faith. We may well see an article by her on this work in a future issue. She thoroughly enjoyed her work in America but after two years thought it was time to return to her roots in Wolverhampton.

Now Camilla is happy spending 20 hours each week supporting our work amongst young people, helping with the toddler group (where amongst other activities she has taught mothers the art of baby massage!) and the budding youth group who meet on Wednesday evenings who have chosen for themselves the name "Soaring Spirits".

During the rest of her week she can be found working with the Sophie Hayes Foundation working with women who have been trafficked in the sex trade. The founder was herself trafficked but managed to escape and set up this organisation to help others in the same predicament. She is however still connected to the King's Community Church, who first changed her life, at their new premises in Clifton Street, Chapel Ash.

Alan Causer

MEETING LESLEY GARRETT!

A few weeks ago I had the great fortune to be introduced to singer, Lesley Garrett, after she had appeared at the Dudley Concert Hall with the Gentlemen Songsters, a local male voice choir. It helped that both she and I had a few things in common which made things a little easier. It was a wonderful concert, attended by a few of us from Beckminster, and last week she also appeared at the Grand Theatre in Wolverhampton on her UK tour, followed by a Question & Answer session with theatre goers. I am much indebted to Lesley for the time she gave to me to conduct this interview and hope this article may give others some insight into the background and personality of this much-loved performer. She is often billed as 'Britain's best loved soprano' and I think there is much truth in this.

Like myself, Lesley was brought up in South Yorkshire, she from the small market town of Thorne near Doncaster, whereas I was born in Sheffield, a city with which she had much to do with as she grew into womanhood. She came from quite humble working class surroundings but with good family support from her parents and two sisters, Helen and Kay. Music for the family was always part of their life and often they would gather around the piano to sing a whole range of songs from ballads to operatic arias. As a teenager, Lesley appeared in school performances as Eliza in *My Fair Lady* at Thorne Grammar School, where she was outstanding and stayed on to get her 'A' levels. During that time, she was spotted and invited to join the renowned Sheffield Girls Choir, which used to take part in various music festivals. The choir was run by a lady named Vivien Pike, with whom I'd had some dealings in the past. Vivien was employed as a music advisor by the city's Education Department and it was really she who plucked Lesley from obscurity to point her in the right direction. Initially, she arranged for her to attend an annual music summer school in



Berkshire. She was just seventeen and undoubtedly it gave her much encouragement in her desire to become a professional musician.

Always an enthusiastic performer, extrovert and eager to please with an outstanding voice even at that age, her ambitions began to widen. Lesley was later taken to London by two relatives, where they took her to see a performance of *Madam Butterfly* at the London Coliseum by the English Opera. She was smitten and later auditioned for the Royal Academy of Music and was successful in being offered a place. Lesley was so thrilled and excited and, in total, spent five years there, studying hard in most branches of music, especially in singing, ranging from oratorio and lieder to grand opera. She was fortunate to meet Joy Mammen, an Australian soprano, who taught at the Academy and schooled her in developing her voice and breathing for all types of singing. (Joy still remains her singing teacher even after 35 years.) As her time at the Academy drew to a close she was successful in winning the Booker prize of the Kathleen

Ferrier Award. This led to her successful application to the National Opera Studio as opera was her ultimate goal. Her first professional opera job was near Aberdeen, to take a small part in the opera *Merry Wives of Windsor*. Her first oratorio engagement was the soprano soloist in Handel's *Messiah* in Belfast with the Ulster Orchestra.

The Opera Studio was a great 'shop window' for her talents, where she was seen by influential people from places such as Covent Garden and English National Opera. After this training she was fully qualified as a professional opera singer and offered a place with Welsh National Opera, based in Cardiff to perform in a new opera *The Journey* by John Metcalfe. She was at last on her way! From there on she performed in many operas and recitals across the world. For more than thirty years she has enjoyed one of the most successful careers of any modern-day, classically trained soprano, winning both critical acclaim and the affection of thousands of fans and music lovers. Internationally Lesley has performed throughout Europe, the USA, Australia, Russia, Brazil, Japan, Malaysia, Taiwan and South Korea. In addition she has starred in a number of her own series on television, singing a range of solos from aria to popular songs in her repertoire. As Lesley said "I don't believe I was born as a singer but born to perform, to communicate and to strut my stuff!"

After an earlier broken marriage, she met and fell in love with her husband Peter who is a GP in Muswell Hill, London, where they have their main base. The couple have two children, Jeremy 23 and Chloe 22, both at present studying at Sheffield University. Their second home is in the small town of Epworth, near Doncaster, not far from her closest relatives. As I have a number of connections in the town involved with Methodism (birthplace of the Wesleys) I asked her about one or two folk known to us both. Not long ago, Lesley kindly gave a free performance at St Andrew's parish church in Epworth in aid of their restoration fund.

After her recording debut in 1991, she has released more than fifteen albums and her 1995 album *Soprano in Red* received the Gramophone Award for Best-selling Classical Artiste of the Year. Branching out even further

in her career, she was a contestant in the first series of *Strictly Come Dancing* and partnered by Anton du Beke. She has also appeared in *Countdown* and *Loose Women*.

She especially enjoys appearing at open air events and said they are a marvellous way of singing to large audiences such as at Wembley Stadium or Cardiff Arms Park. She was once asked to sing at the Hollywood Bowl in a series of concerts about film music. She was asked to sing songs from *My Fair Lady* along with actor Jonathan Pryce, who sang the role of Professor Higgins. She stated she had sung in some very stunning locations such as the grounds of Roundhay Park in Leeds, Cardiff Castle and Hampton Court. In addition she has sung a few times in *Last Night of the Proms* from the Royal Albert Hall and, last September, to a huge crowd at the *Proms* relay in Hyde Park.

Lesley has regularly appeared in *Songs of Praise* on BBC Television and, having watched this programme on many occasions, I have sometimes wondered just how devout are some of the artistes who sing or play religious music or how meaningful they are to them? Lesley said "I've always had a keen sense of spirituality especially when I sing. All religions use it to inspire the sacred experience. Music is the most powerful vehicle for this. When I sing, it is not for the greater glory of Handel or myself but for the people who choose to listen. If just one of those people finds pleasure, inspiration or comfort in that music, then I have done a good day's work!" She is also a very community-minded person and always tries to find the time to talk with members of the public who follow her career.

Over recent years she has also entered the realms of musical theatre and appeared in the West End in both *The Sound of Music* in the role of Mother Abbess and in *Carousel* as Nettie, where she had the solo *You'll Never Walk Alone*. In 2002, Lesley was appointed a CBE for her services to music, an award richly deserved by one who has both entertained and inspired so many people. Underneath all that glitz and stardom, Lesley still remains a 'true Yorkshire lass' with her feet firmly on the ground! Long may she keep up the good work!

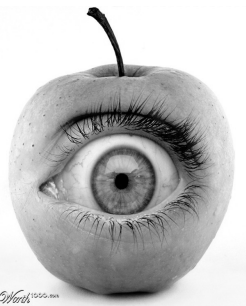
Keith Cheetham

Learn and Inwardly Digest!!

The English language.....a hybrid of many other languages and yet it causes a lot of confusion to other nations with its various spellings of like sounding words and our everyday sayings.

We all use words and phrases such as 'by the skin of your teeth' and 'red letter day' but most of us are unaware of their origins. However, it is interesting to know how many of them have a biblical or Church connection.

The Apple Of One's Eye – this is somebody, usually a child, who is regarded as precious and irreplaceable. Over a thousand years ago the pupil of the eye was once known as the apple and sight was considered the most precious of the senses. The first recorded reference is in The Song of Moses, Deuteronomy 32:10 'He kept him as the apple of His eye' suggesting that God watched over Jacob to ensure his safety.



At The Eleventh Hour – this indicates something has happened at the very last minute. First used in Matthew 20:9, the parable of the labourers tells of the practice of a twelve hour day. In the vineyards the last of the labourers would be taken on during the eleventh hour (5pm) in an effort to finish the day's scheduled work on time.

By The Skin Of your Teeth – this expression means you achieved something by the narrowest of margins. The Book of Job, 19:20, reads: 'My bone cleaveth to my skin and to my flesh and I am escaped with the skin of my teeth.' What this means is that all Job had left was the skin of his teeth; everything else had been taken from him, including his possessions,



health, family and friends. Many believe the quotation has been misunderstood in translation and it just simply means that Job escaped with his life.

A Red Letter Day – a special day to which one looks forward to and remembers with happy memories. In the old almanacs and ecclesiastical calendars, saint days and Christian festivals were printed in red ink and all others were written in black ink. The 'red' days were the ones religious folk looked forward to as it meant a great feast and a party!!

red letter
DAYS

The Weak Go To The Wall – there are various origins for this one but a strong contender stems from when Church congregations used to stand throughout the services (think yourself lucky sitting on upholstered chairs!!). Stone benches were stood around the edges or set in to the walls so the old and infirm could sit down if they so wished. Also, anyone who felt faint or ill from standing too long could 'go to the wall.'

Feet Of Clay – this suggests a weakness in someone usually considered strong and infallible. In the Book of Daniel 2:31-5 the author describes 'a great statue' in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, which had a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, stomach and thighs of brass, legs of iron and feet made of iron and clay. However, iron and clay do not mix well, thereby leaving a weakness in an otherwise mighty monument.

To Take Someone Under Your Wing – is to provide them with encouragement, advice and protection. In Matthew 23:37, Jesus expresses his sorrow at what has become of Jerusalem and declares his wish to protect his people, like

a hen would protect her chicks by spreading her wings over them, providing safety and shelter. "Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee! How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen would gather



her chicks under her wings, and ye would not."

A Wolf In Sheep's Clothing – this is someone who, in the first instance, appears to be genuine and friendly but then seems to be the opposite. This expression can be found in one of Aesop's familiar fables, dating back 1,400 years, where a wolf wraps a sheep's fleece around himself and is able to deceive the shepherd in order to access the sheep pen and devour the lambs. The origin can be found further back in Matthew 7:15 which states 'Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing. Inwardly



they are ravening wolves.'

Black Sheep Of The Family – that one member of the family who is regarded as a disgrace, different from the rest and often with a roguish element!! For thousands of years, a black lamb in a flock was considered unpopular as the black wool couldn't be dyed and therefore was less valuable. Some poems refer to 'black sheep' but the expression can be traced back to the shepherds of the Bible who considered them an unlucky omen, disturbing the rest of the flock.

Fly In The Ointment – a tiny thing that is hindering the outcome of something altogether much larger or important! Before the advent of doctors, apothecaries dealt with all things medical and their sought-after potions and ointments were dispensed from large vats. If a fly, or any other insects, landed in the vat, the whole quantity was deemed unusable. In the Bible, Ecclesiastes 10:1 includes the phrase 'Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour.'



Learn And Inwardly Digest -- is a phrase we use to suggest contemplation of a subject in order to learn from it. This expression is found in a prayer for the second Sunday in Advent, in The Book of Common Prayer: 'Blessed Lord, who has caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark learn and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen

Hazel Graham

R.I.P A DIVA AND A PRIME MINISTER!

Browsing around a churchyard may not be high on the list of holiday activities, but whilst I was on holiday in the Scilly Isles recently I chanced across the lovely old church of St Mary's in Old Town on the island of St Mary's, and found myself being drawn in by the tranquil atmosphere.

Wandering amongst the headstones however, I was struck by some of the epitaphs inscribed on the stones and realised that this beautiful little churchyard harboured a more sinister side to these islands, for this is the final resting place not just of parishioners of the islands, but also the victims of the many shipwrecks that have taken place in the waters around the islands.

The islands of Scilly, just 20 miles off the coast of Cornwall, are known for their unspoilt beauty and golden beaches, but the waters are feared by sailors. Busy fishing channels, poor visibility and covered rocks at high tide make for treacherous territory when trying to navigate fishing vessels, and over the centuries the waters have claimed around 900 ships.

There are many touching inscriptions on the headstones, such as the one for the actress Ann Cargill and her 'husband' Captain John Huldine, buried there along with their 'son' who was just 18 months old. Their lives were lost in the wreck of the packet ship *Nancy* on February 24th 1784. The inscription goes on to say that of the 45 others who were also taken 34 were buried of Rosevear Island, and the others were never found – a sad thought.

A little bit of investigation threw up more fascinating details about Miss Cargill. Apparently she was one of the most famous and highest paid opera singers of the time and whose numerous affairs and elopements had scandalised London.

She was born Ann Brown and could be called the Britney Spears of her day. The daughter of a London coal merchant she made her debut at the age of 11 singing the role of Titania in Thomas Arne's *The Fairy Prince* at Covent Garden in 1771.



She soon became a star and was taking leading roles in musicals, comic operas, and comedies at Covent Garden until she ran off with the playwright and gunpowder maker Miles Peter Andrews making her the subject of much gossip in the London papers.

Her father then won a court order over her, which she defied and ran off again to the theatre where in 1776 she was cast as the lead



role in John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*. Her father attempted to recapture her as she made her way to the theatre, but he was thwarted by the audience and members of the theatre staff.

Three years later she broke her contract and eloped again to Edinburgh with a Mr Cargill who was using the name Doyle to evade his many creditors. They married and she returned to London to be cast in *MacHeath* where the male roles were played by women and the female ones by men.

In both 1779 and 1780 she was the world's highest-paid actress and during the height of her fame she set off for India to join her latest

lover, although it was rumoured that she soon transferred her affections to the ship's captain, John Haldane, known as the unluckiest commander in the British East India Company.

In India her performances went down a storm and she commanded the highest fee's making her rich beyond her wildest dreams, she was also showered with gifts by rich admirers.

She was forced to leave India after the British Prime Minister, William Pitt the Younger, told Parliament that "an actress should not be defiling the pure shores of India".

She left for London on December 1783 on the East India packet ship *The Nancy*, captained by Haldane. Three months into the journey the ship ran into fierce storms off the Isles of Scilly. It was a hopeless situation and there was no lighthouse to guide them and the ship was wrecked on treacherous rocks west of the Scillies.

The press reported that her body was found naked with an infant clasped in her arms, later that the child was not her own, and then that her body was with the captain's in his cabin. The inscription on their headstone has glossed over the more torrid nature of their relationship and the mysterious presence of the child!

In a newer section of the churchyard can be found the final resting place of Harold Wilson, Lord Wilson of Rievaulx KG OBE FRS PC, who served as Prime Minister of the UK from 1964 to 1970, and again from 1974 to 1976. Mr Wilson regarded himself as a 'man of the people', and loved the Scilly Islands so much that instead of spending his summer holidays on the Continent, he went to the Scillies year after year and he was buried in the churchyard after his death in May 1995. His widow, Mary, still regularly visits the islands.

On a lighter note I was lucky enough to be able to return to St Mary's one evening for a concert by local musicians, Duo Prospero, who played a range of music from classical to modern on various instruments including violin and bagpipes. As I listened I found myself reflecting that perhaps the incumbents of the graveyard might have their troubled souls soothed by the excellent repertoire played by these two musicians!

Jean Gilbride

BECKMINSTERAMA

Open Way

Alternate Tuesdays at 8pm



Dates and venues to be advised in Church Notices.

Contact Hilda Evans Tel: 421777

Jan10 Engelberg 7.00 pm
24 17 Richmond Road 7.30pm

Monday Focus

Everyone is welcome to join us at Monday Focus at 8pm on Mondays in the Beckminster Coffee Bar.

Dec 11(Sun) 4.00pm Service at Engelberg

Jan 9 Gambia Update
(WYCE Team)
23 Hospitalers of St John
of Jerusalem
Gordon Nicklin

Contacts: Ann Holt Tel: 650812

Emmaus Group

Meet Thursdays at 7.45 pm. All welcome
Contact: Janet Anderson Tel: 337404

Dec 15 32 Church Hill
See church notices for January meetings

MESSY CHURCH (I)

Monthly — Fridays
3.30 - 5.45 pm. Fun for all the family
Contact Wendy Ashwood Tel: 831637

This is a typical week in the life of Beckminster Methodist Church.

- All groups meet at the church unless otherwise stated
- New members are always welcome at any group

Sunday

10.30am Crèche and Junior Church
10.30am Morning Worship
6.30pm Evening Worship

Monday

9.30 - 12.30pm Art Group
10.30am Prayer Meeting
2.00 - 4.00pm Art Group
6.15pm Brownies
8.00pm Monday Focus

Tuesday

9.45am The Toddler Group
3.00pm Art Group
4.15pm Dinky Divas 'N' Dudes
6.15pm Brownies
8.00pm Open Way

Wednesday

11.00am Luncheon Club
5.45pm Rainbows
6.30pm 'Soaring Spirits'
7.30pm Horticultural Society
7.30pm Happy Feet Dance Group

Thursday

9.45am The Toddler Group
2.00 - 4.00pm Take a Break
5.00 - 6.00pm Tai Chi
7.45pm Emmaus Group
7.00 - 9.00pm St. John's Ambulance

Friday

3.30pm Monthly Messy Church
7.00-9.00pm Gateway Group (weekly)

Saturday

Communion Services

The sharing of bread and wine takes place on four Sundays a month, either during the morning or evening worship or as an early Sunday morning service at 8.00am or 9.15am. Everyone is welcome.

BECKMINSTERAMA

Girls Uniformed Organisations

Rainbows 5 – 7 yrs

Wednesdays 5.45pm

Brownies 7-10 yrs

Mondays & Tuesdays 6.15pm

Various activities according to age – include crafts, cooking, badge work, swimming, service to others, pack holidays, hikes and camps.

Contact: Julie Tonks

Tel: 01952 461006



Take a Break

Thursdays weekly during term times
2.00 – 4.00pm

Indoor bowling craft work and other activities. For people wanting to meet new friends and try something different. All welcome.

Contact: David Jones



Crèche and Sunday Club

Whilst the crèche allows parents of very young children to worship together, the five departments of Sunday Club explore the Christian faith in exciting ways appropriate to their age.

Toddlers

Tuesdays and Thursdays,
9.45 – 11.15 am.

Approx. 40 Toddlers with Mums, Dads, carers or grandparents meet for mutual support whilst toddlers play.

Contacts:

Barbara Bennett Tel: 341877 (Tuesdays)

Jennifer Cromie Tel: 338320 (Thursdays)



Special Events

Saturday, 3 December 2016

Christmas Meal and entertainment by Marilyn Bose and company.

£10 Adults/ £5 Children. 6.00pm onwards.

Luncheon Club

Wednesdays 11.00am – 3.00pm

25 housebound people and helpers meet for coffee, lunch and tea. A short entertainment and epilogue. An opportunity to meet people, chat etc to relieve loneliness. A caring service provided by volunteers (who are always needed)

Contact: Tess Davies Tel: 07789 260953

Boys Uniformed Organisations

Beavers 6 – 8 years Thursday 6.15 – 7.15 pm

Cubs 8 – 10 years Monday 6.15 – 7.45 pm

Scouts 10 – 14 years Wednesday 7.00 – 9.00 pm

All groups meet at Scout HQ in Skidmore Avenue, for badge work, crafts, games, various activities and service. Camps.

Contact: Sheila White Tel: 332134

Please hand articles, news and views to:

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Christmas Parables

Making Sense out of Christmas

A certain man, so the story told by Paul Harvey goes, was by no means a Scrooge. In fact, he was just the opposite. He was generous, responsible, kind and caring. But he couldn't believe the account the churches told about Christmas—the bit about Jesus being God-man who came to earth to save people from their sins. To him, Jesus was undoubtedly a great religious leader, but as for the rest of the story, he just couldn't buy that. It didn't make sense to him and he was too honest to deny it.

"I don't want to disappoint you," he said to his wife, "but I just can't go to church with you this Christmas. I would feel too much like a hypocrite."

It was a bleak, heavily overcast night when the rest of the family went to church to commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ. After they left it began to rain lightly. Soon the sky blackened even more. The drizzle changed to a downpour. Lightning crackled. Thunder roared. The man watched from the kitchen window for awhile, but returned to his favourite seat in the family room to relax for the evening and read.

Later, he heard a strange noise that seemed to come from his living room. It sounded like the dull thud of snow balls against the window. He heard it again and again. When he went outside to investigate, he found a flock of birds huddled against his house. Apparently, they had been lost in the storm and, in a desperate search for shelter, flew into the large landscape window. They were attracted by the light which they could see clearly.

He couldn't let the birds lie there in the storm, so what could he do? He couldn't allow them into his house, so he went to his large barn, opened the door wide and turned on the lights, hoping to attract the birds into the barn until the storm passed. But the birds didn't understand. He turned out the lights in his house, but they still didn't budge. He tried to shoo them into the lighted barn, but to no avail. They just became confused and frightened and scattered in every direction.

He pondered: "To them, I am a strange and terrifying creature. If only I could think of some way to let them know that they can trust me, that I'm not trying to hurt but help them. But how?"

"If only I could be a bird and mingle with them and speak their language. Then I could tell them not to be afraid. Then I could show them the way to safety. But I would have to be one of them so they could see and hear and understand."

Just then he heard the church bells ring and toll out the good news of Jesus' birth. Suddenly, the Christmas story made sense to him. Now he could understand why God sent his Son to earth as a man—to identify with mankind and show them the way to safety; that is, to God and eternal life.

No Room in the Inn

The story, now a legend, is told how Wallace Purling added a new touch to the Christmas play in a small town in the Midwest. Wallace was a large nine year old with learning difficulties.

According to the legend, Wallace fancied being a shepherd with a flute in the Christmas pageant that year, but the director, Miss Lombard, thought he might better fit the role of the innkeeper. After all, he wouldn't have too many lines to remember and, because of his size, he would be able to present a more forceful refusal to the much smaller Joseph.

So the big night came. Behind stage, Wallace was so totally engrossed in the play that Miss Lombard had to make sure he didn't wander on stage before his cue.

Then came Wallace's part.

Looking exhausted from the long journey, Joseph and Mary slowly approached the entrance to the inn. Joseph knocked. The door opened immediately, and with Wallace putting on his gruffest voice declared, "What do you want?"

"We seek lodging," Joseph replied.

"Seek it elsewhere," Wallace barked. "This inn is filled."

"Sir, we have asked everywhere in vain. We have travelled far and are very weary."

"There's no room in this inn for you," Wallace stated strongly.

"Please, good innkeeper, this is my wife, Mary. She is heavy with child and needs a place to rest. Surely you must have some small corner for her. She is so tired," Joseph pleaded.

For the first time, the innkeeper began to let down his guard and relax a little. There was a long pause ... and silence. Now the audience was beginning to feel tense.

"No! Begone!" whispered the prompter from the wings.

"No!" Wallace repeated automatically. "Begone!"

Joseph looked at Mary, put his arm around her, and with heads bowed in sadness, they slowly walked away.

But the innkeeper didn't close the door and go inside. He stood there with mouth open watching the forlorn couple leaving his inn. He was genuinely upset. His eyes unmistakably filled with tears.

Then totally unexpected, Wallace departed from his memorized script ...

"Don't go, Joseph," Wallace called out. "Bring Mary back."

And then with a broad grin lighting up his whole face he spoke out loudly and clearly, "You can have my room."

Some in the audience felt Wallace had ruined the pageant. Others, however, felt it was the best Christmas pageant they had ever seen

Down From His Glory

Henry Carter was working feverishly trying to prepare something fresh for his Christmas sermon when he was disturbed by a knock on his study door. It was the dorm mother of the church's home for disadvantaged children. There was a crisis upstairs with one of the boys. Most of the boys go home for Christmas and only a few were left behind and were feeling very much abandoned and unloved.

Henry reluctantly followed the dorm mother up the

stairs to the small dormitory seething inwardly at yet another interruption. This time it was Tommy. He had crawled under his bed and refused to come out. The woman pointed to one of the beds. Not even a toe showed so Henry addressed the cowboys and bucking broncos on the bedspread. He told them of the beautifully decorated Christmas tree with all the presents in the church next door ... and how there was a special present for Tommy. Tommy was not impressed and continued to "play dead."

Henry's frustration increased as he knelt down on all fours and lifted the bedspread. As he peered under the bed his eyes met two enormous blue eyes—expressing the fear and pain Tommy was experiencing. Henry could have easily pulled little eight-year-old-looking-like-a-five-year-old child from under the bed, but he knew that this wouldn't help. It was trust, not coercion, that Tommy needed—plus he needed to make the decision to come out by himself. So Henry tried as best he could to get Tommy excited about the special Christmas supper to be offered after the service, the wonderful presents, and the stocking filled with magnificent Christmas gifts with Tommy's name on it. All to no avail.

So...what else could Henry do? He got down on his stomach and wriggled himself under the bed to lay with his cheek pressed into the floor beside Tommy. Not a word he said seemed to have any effect. Not being able to think of anything else to say Henry just laid there in silence beside Tommy. It seemed like such a long time but as Henry patiently waited, in time a small, cold hand crept into his.

After a while Henry said, "You know, Tommy, it's pretty uncomfortable under here. Why don't you and I go somewhere where we can stand up." Ever so slowly they did and Henry had no more worries about finding a Christmas message.

Rev Jill Flowers



TURN AGAIN, WHITTINGTON!

As we move towards pre-Christmas celebrations and the annual pantomime season we see the usual cluster of forthcoming shows being advertised in the local media. *Cinderella* seems to top the bill, followed by others such as *Peter Pan*, *Aladdin*, *Mother Goose*, *Snow White* and *Jack and the Beanstalk*. One which is just as popular and often performed these days is *Dick Whittington and his Cat!* (It's being presented at Birmingham Hippodrome this Christmas!)

Unlike others which are based mainly on fairy tales or myth, *Dick Whittington* does in fact have an original basis, though greatly fantasised as the years have progressed. Perhaps even more surprising is that there are one or two local sites which relate to the story. I thought I would delve into the background to see what I could discover.

Sir Richard (Dick) Whittington was a real man who did become Lord Mayor of London on four occasions and his wife was formerly called Alice Fitzwarren. However, to start at the beginning and according to local legend, the Whittington Inn (recently re-named as the Manor House at Whittington and located by the A449 between Kinver and Kidderminster) was built in 1310 by Sir William de Whittington, a knight at arms and grandfather to Richard (Dick) on whose life the pantomime is based. It was only after William de Whittington's marriage to Matilda de Solers in 1311 (heiress of Pauntley Court in Gloucestershire) that the family moved south to that county.

Richard (Dick) himself was born at Pauntley Court (a former farmhouse but now a luxury hotel within easy reach of the market towns of Newent and Ledbury, just north of the Forest of Dean). The house itself has beautiful formal gardens and is situated in private grounds. There is little doubt that young Richard was born during the 1350s and that he was baptised at the church of St. John the Evangelist in Pauntley, adjacent to the manor house which was his birthplace. Richard's father represented the County of Gloucestershire in Parliament in 1348 but his fortunes later took a turn for the worse. In 1352 he married the widow of Sir



Thomas de Berkeley and it was said he was outlawed for marrying without Royal sanction. He still remained outlawed when he died on 17 March 1368. Five days prior to that, his estate at Pauntley was confiscated by the Crown in payment of debt.

Richard (Dick) had an older brother, also named William, who inherited what was left over after the Crown had claimed the greater part of the estate. This would probably have been the turning point for young Richard when he decided to go to London to be received into a merchant's household. By 1379 and still in his early 20s, he had become of sufficiently independent standing to be able to contribute five marks to a city loan. He was also the mercer who supplied the Earl of Derby, later Henry IV, with velvet and damasks and was on the Common Council of the City in 1385 and 1387.

Six years later he was made an Alderman and became Lord Mayor of the City of London in 1397 and the following year. He had obviously become a wealthy man through his business as he was known to have supplied 'cloth of gold' and other materials for the wedding of Henry IV's daughters and the extent of his royal esteem from the fact that he was present at one Privy Council meeting at least. His royal favour extended into four, if not five reigns, and Henry V was also much indebted to him. Richard Whittington (Dick) was Lord Mayor not 'thrice' but four times, if we count his first two successive years as separate offices, and was Lord Mayor again in 1406/7 and finally in

1419/20.

He married Alice Fitzwarren, daughter of a country gentleman and owner of large estates in the South West. She died before him and they had no children. Richard died in March 1423, three years after his last mayoralty and was buried in the Church of St. Michael-de-Paternoster. Sadly this church was destroyed in the Great Fire of London in 1666 (the quarter-centenary of which has just been commemorated). The bulk of his wealth had been used to found a hospital and collegiate for this parish church. The college was suppressed by Henry VIII in 1548 under the Dissolution, but College Street still remains as a reminder.

Turning back to the pantomime, the story goes that Dick was a poor orphan country lad who, hearing the streets of London were paved with gold, bravely made his way there to seek his fortune (possibly true!).

Life was hard but he managed to find employment in the kitchens of a rich merchant's house (partly true), where he was cruelly treated by the cook! In this harsh existence his only friend was his cat, which was later to lead him to good fortune. Having become dismayed and disillusioned, Dick decides to leave London and sets off from the city. However, when he reaches Highgate Hill, he heard the bells of Bow, which seemed to chime the words '*Turn again Whittington, thrice worthy citizen, turn again Whittington, Lord Mayor of London!*' Believing this message, he turned about and returned to the City with his cat. The animal brings him good luck when it gets rid of the rats plaguing the palace of a king of the Barbary Coast, with whom London ships were trading.

The story goes that the rewards of this initiative made him so wealthy that he was able to set himself up in business and become a merchant of such importance that he became one of the most important men of his generation in the City of London. He married the daughter of his former employer, prospered greatly, and became a kind, thoughtful and generous Lord Mayor – as the Bow bells had foretold. Whatever the truth between fact and fiction, it is a nice story which has continued to fascinate and entertain both children and adults of all ages down the years and, of course, when the show ends - everyone lives 'happily ever after!'

Keith Cheetham



Carol Singing

Churches Together in Graiseley & Penn Fields will be singing Christmas Carols in Waitrose on **Saturday, 17 December** from 10.30am – 12noon.

Money raised will be in aid of the Good Shepherd Ministries.

Beckminster will be singing Christmas Carols at Waitrose on

Thursday, 15 December

from 10.45 – 11.45am

and at the Oddfellows Pub in Compton on **Monday, 19 December**

from 7.00 – 8.00pm.

Money raised will be in aid of Action for Children.

Everyone is welcome to join us on these occasions

Want a piano?

(or know someone who does)

Marion Paley has a modern low profile Welmar light wood upright piano complete with bench seat (storage within).

Available free of charge, or donation to church funds. It is in need of tuning and interested person must arrange for its collection and delivery.

For more information contact her daughter, Gillian, on 01785 660707.

Don't forget!
copy deadline for
Feb - March Issue
Jan 1st 2017

CHRISTIAN AID THIS CHRISTMAS LIGHT THE WAY

Where will you be this Christmas?

We have all experienced times when our planned journeys have been interrupted; from the trivial but irritating rail replacement bus service—to uncertain and worrying periods of darkness that life can take us through. Sometimes these changes of plan can be a real pain, while at other times they can bring unexpected blessings, or take us in a new direction that god has in mind for us.

We have become used to hearing about our loves and experienced as 'journeys' and we talk of being in good or bad 'places' as we describe our state of mind. For 65 million people across the world this Christmas however, their 'journeys' and 'places' have practical implications and profound dimensions which we struggle to comprehend or appreciate. Forced out by the darkness of violence and fear, they simply can't be at home and they are searching for safety and refuge.

Mary and Joseph set off on a journey 2,000 years ago, only to find that there was no safe place to make a temporary home on arrival. Their journey had been a long one, taking place as people from all over travelled to their ancestral home towns. And now Bethlehem was full. There was no place for them.

They could have had no idea how the events at the end of their journey would unfold or that the world

would be forever changed because God had been born, as a human, to live among us. The light of the world had been born into the darkness.

Celebrating this amazing truth, many of us fill our homes at Christmas with light and laughter, family and friends—but for these millions who are fleeing from conflict, a joyful home is a distant memory at best. So we must ask ourselves how should we celebrate when so many are surrounded by darkness. How can we be a beacon of hope? How can we light the way?

Despite our compassion fatigue, our feelings of guilty impotence and our exasperation with a world that seems in such a hopeless mess, we can still feel the resolve and promise given to us by the assurances of our faith.

The light shines through the spirit of Christmas—alive and working across the world. Christian Aid joins with many other organisations to bring some measure of order out of so much chaos and some measure of hope to those who seemingly have none. The world continues sometimes with small steps working with local partner initiatives—and sometimes with powerful campaigns for justice at national levels. We can support this. We can be part of this.

We remain mindful, at this season of hope and love, of Christian Aid's request to Give, Act and Pray—and in our Methodist tradition to make sure that we do @All we Can! to 'Light the Way' for our sisters and brothers around the world.



Two weeks after Joudy and Mhealdon were married in war-torn Syria, they were forced to take to the road. They eventually reached the Serbia-Macedonia border, where Christian Aid is supporting refugees with hot food to sustain them, clothes and shoes to replace worn-out ones, and hygiene kits to help them keep healthy and clean.



On the Serbia-Macedonia border, our partner welcomes refugees and provides things they need for the journey.

Christian Aid has been supporting refugees from Myanmar's civil conflict in camps on the Thailand-Myanmar border for more than 30 years. Now, as the political situation shifts and the possibility of returning home becomes more realistic, we're helping refugees to prepare for their return.

One teacher in Nu Po camp says: 'The light will come after the dark. I want my people to see the light.'

When Celestin heard God's call upon his life, it was to be a priest. Living in Bakuvu in the Democratic Republic of Congo, he served faithfully, and was soon to be ordained a bishop when his life journey changed dramatically. His bishop was killed by an armed group, and Celestin had to flee to another part of the country, walking for three weeks to reach safety.

Now he lives in another area where his ministry brings the light of Christ to others who've been forced to escape from horrific violence. The community in which he works as a priest is relatively safe compared to areas around it, so it's become a sanctuary to many traumatised survivors of violence.

Local host families show extraordinary generosity and kindness to newcomers, but their few resources are often already stretched.

Working with Celestin and others in the community, Christian Aid is helping those fleeing violence to rebuild their lives.

Its work ranges from providing agricultural training and food, plates and bowls to those that need them, to offering counselling and support to people who have witnessed and survived traumatic violence.

The experiences of Celestin and his community might seem worlds away from the life we've known ourselves. And we may never be touched by the same fear of violence. But the same sun warms us, the same stars guide us and the same light can bring each of us out of darkness.



#LightTheWay

Pray with us

Almighty and merciful God,
 Whose son became a refugee
 And had no place to call his own.
 Look with mercy on those who today
 Are fleeing from danger,
 Homeless and hungry.
 Bless those who work to bring them relief;
 Inspire generosity and compassion in all our hearts,
 And guide the nations of the world towards that day when all will rejoice in your Kingdom of justice and of peace;
 Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
 (Minnesota Council of Churches)



Celestin heard God's call upon his life and now his ministry brings the light of Christ to others.

From darkness...

This Christmas, 65 million people simply can't be at home. Forced out by the darkness of violence and fear, they're searching for safety and refuge.

...to light

This Christmas, join us to light the way out of poverty and into safety for thousands of people.

God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, provide for all seeking refuge from famine.
 God of Hagar, Joseph and Moses, liberate all seeking refuge from slavery.
 God of Esther, Naomi and Ruth, strengthen all seeking refuge as families.
 God of David, Elijah, and Jeremiah, protect all seeking refuge from conflict.
 God of Ezekiel, Ezra and Nehemiah, comfort all who are longing for home.
 God of Jesus, Mary and Joseph journey with all seeking refuge today.
 In the name of the One who was both refuge and refugee.

Amen.
 (Christian Aid, 2016)

John and Wendy Bate

PUBLIC SPEAKING

Ever since I was a lad I've had what might be termed as 'gift of the gab' and always found it easy to talk to others. Yet for years that was where it started and finished. Even into my 30s, whenever called upon to make a speech in public, I would freeze or meticulously write out every word. I never had confidence to make an impromptu speech even though I'd done plenty of stage work in amateur drama and operatics.

This suddenly changed one evening when, as a member of Sheffield Publicity department, I was asked to show a cine film about our city to a ladies group. Try as I could, I just could not get the darned projector to work. I could see the audience getting restless and, in the end, just had to abandon the idea of showing the film. I thought, "Now what can I do to fill in the time?" The only thing that sprang to mind was if I could perhaps tell them something about the work I'd started recently in our Town Hall department? I began rather slowly and gradually started to relate about some of the projects we were working on to market our city. After about ten minutes I began to relax. Eventually when I'd finished, I realised I must have spoken for at least half an hour. I again apologised profusely to the ladies (it turned out the church's electrics had been at fault!). "Ee, we've enjoyed your talk a lot better than if you'd showed us the film, luv!" shouted one lady from the back. After that evening's escapade I began to gain more confidence and eventually got into my stride as a public speaker. God moves in a mysterious way!

As I now look back over the years, I must have addressed well over a thousand audiences of all kinds, large and small, in a great variety of venues. They have ranged from professional bodies, sports clubs, church groups, senior citizens, students, youth groups, trade unions and political organisations to national and international conferences. (I once had to speak to six hundred morris dancers after a day of dancing around our city.) The largest audience I ever had to address was in Berlin. The British Tourist Authority had asked me to go there to give a presentation to four thousand international lawyers, mostly from America, to



invite them to come to Britain for their next convention. I marched to the podium to the music of William Walton's *Orb and Sceptre* and started my presentation by reciting John O'Gaunt's speech from Shakespeare's *Richard II* ("This royal throne of kings" etc.). The Americans love that sort of thing!

This work has taken me far and wide around the UK as well as to a number of overseas countries such as Canada and USA, Vancouver Island, Sweden, Germany and other European countries. In addition, of interest may be some of the famous venues where I've spoken. I am never over-confident and, prior to starting every talk, always say a little prayer that God will give me the strength and capability to carry out the task ahead of me.

Perhaps the most important place I've spoken in the UK was at the seat of Government in the historic setting of Westminster Hall, where I addressed an assortment of MPs and Members of the House of Lords about the Black Country. Another historical venue for an after-dinner speech was the Dining Hall at Brighton's Royal Pavilion, originally built by the Prince Regent, later George IV. It was in that room where, according to tradition, the composer, Ivor Novello, decided to go ahead with writing his musical play *Perchance to Dream* after seeing such wonderful Regency splendour. I've also spoken at events in a few castles such as Lincoln, Tutbury, Castle Rushen in the Isle of Man, Castle Cornet in Guernsey and, nearer to home, to the Friends of Dudley Castle within its

precincts. Later, I also did a presentation underground in nearby Dudley Canal's 'Singing Cavern'.

On one occasion I was invited by members of the North West Tourist Board to give a paper on tourism in the ornate Gothic Manchester Town Hall. Other town halls or civic buildings have included Glasgow City Hall, Inverness Council House, Caird Hall in Dundee, Aberdeen, Bridlington & Scarborough town halls, Lichfield Guildhall and St Mary's Hall in Coventry. Perhaps one of the most exclusive gatherings was the Spalding Gentlemen's Club, a long-standing group which boasted as having had the poet, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and Sir Isaac Newton as former speakers.

Having also written books about various historical characters, this entailed my giving a series of book launches around the UK, mainly the Edinburgh Festival and both the Buxton and South Shropshire Festivals. Some were held in interesting buildings including John Knox's House on Edinburgh's Royal Mile, Pitlochry Town Hall, the Old Hall in Buxton, Fotheringhay Church, Boston Guildhall, Plymouth Dome, Epworth Old Rectory and the Darby Hand Chapel at the Black Country Museum at the Tercentenary of the birth of John Wesley in 2003.

I am sometimes intrigued by the variety of organisations where I've been invited. For instance, I had to address the national conference of Lady Licensed Victuallers in Plymouth Guildhall – quite a colourful body, some with language to match - but three weeks later, by contrast, I gave a presentation to the Women's World Temperance & Christian Alliance at Nottingham University! For obvious reasons I did not use the same speech for both audiences!

It is not often I get interruptions when speaking but occasionally it has been necessary to try and silence one or two people who start up a conversation of their own. I usually wait a second or two and look directly at them until they realise I'm trying to gain their attention. This usually works. However, on one occasion two very loud-speaking ladies on the back row, despite earlier attempts to silence them, persisted in their animated conversation. I stopped what I was saying and said "Ladies, if

you have something more interesting to say than I – do come out here and let's all hear it!" After that, you could have heard a pin drop! Rude? Perhaps, but I reckon if you are invited somewhere to speak, possibly having travelled a long distance to get there, the audience should at least give you a fair hearing for a few minutes.

I do have one or two 'golden rules' I apply when going out to speak: Always try and be in good time (in case there are any prior problems); be smartly dressed – in most cases image is important; give a short introduction as to who you are and what you are about to speak on; speak clearly and sometime slowly in case any persons are hard of hearing; and try to introduce a little humour. Furthermore, always look for signs of fidgeting as this can mean some of the audience are getting restless. That's my clue to wind down and finish (another sign is when a couple of ladies depart for the kitchen to put the kettle on for their obligatory tea and biscuits afterwards!)

However, sometimes I've found it hard not to smile when hearing amusing comments, usually from a secretary of an organisation reading aloud the 'minutes of the last meeting'. One I always remember took place at a ladies meeting near Wolverhampton when the secretary read a letter from their national body. It invited any of their members to enter a competition for the *Bathing Belle of Yesteryear!* Well folks, as I looked around the room that evening, my imagination went into overdrive! I tried not to laugh but smiled to myself as I left the building.

So why am I writing all this? It's just to prove that sometimes, when we think we can't do something and are put on the spot, God gives us the ability and confidence to do what's asked of us. As I look back, I've had a ball and met some wonderful people travelling around to so many varied and interesting places. I always thank God for having given me the ability to stand up and speak all those years ago in Sheffield when I was unable to show the film. He really did me a good turn!

Keith Cheetham

The gift of Christmas

Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

2 Corinthians 9:15 (NRSV)



God's gifts put man's best dreams to shame.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861)



God never gives someone a gift they are not capable of receiving. If he gives us the gift of Christmas, it is because we all have the ability to understand and receive it.

Pope Francis (born 1936)



All the Christmas presents in the world are worth nothing without the presence of Christ.

David Jeremiah (born 1941)



Joy to the world

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
let earth receive her King;
let every heart prepare Him room,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

*Isaac Watts (1674-1748)
Singing the Faith 330 v.1*



Some businessmen are saying this could be the greatest Christmas ever. I always thought that the first one was.

Art Fetting (born 1929) © Used by permission.

The first nativity play

Nativity plays are a much loved feature of Christmas. As children many of us take part in them. As adults we enjoy watching children performing in them. But back in the early thirteenth century they didn't exist. It is widely believed the tradition began with St Francis of Assisi in 1223. Following a visit to Bethlehem, St Francis was inspired to stage the first nativity play in a cave in Greccio, Italy. Using humans and animals to play the key roles, he aimed to bring the Christmas story to life in a powerful new way. Word quickly spread and local people arrived with torches and candles to join him in celebrating Christ's birth. His idea proved popular and soon communities across Italy and beyond were creating similar events.



Greetings from around the world

The Methodist Church in Britain is part of a worldwide movement with a total membership of over 80 million. In some of our many languages, we wish you...

Happy Christmas

Wesołych Świąt Bożego Narodzenia!

恭祝聖誕
新年蒙恩

Jwaye Nowè!

Krismas Njema Na Heri
Za Mwaka Mpya

Prettige Kerstdagen

Nollaig Chridheil dhuibh

Feliz Natal

Wadho Diyan Mubbarik

Bara Dinn Mubarik Ho

Ashamsakal

Nollaig Shona Duit



Joyeux Noël

Feliz Navidad

Afi nhyia pa

শুভ বর্জদিন

Nadolig Llawen

Fröhliche Weihnachten

E ku odun o, emi a so po e

Barka da Kirsimatikuma

Nimalaj Quicotemal
ri Alaxbal

Vasel Koleda

World Owl Trust

Mr Alan Peace, Chairman of the World Owl Trust, came to talk to Monday Focus recently. He brought with him 'Barney' the barn owl, who enjoyed his time in the coffee bar, eyeing the rafters longingly!

The World Owl Trust was based in Cumbria but is in the process of moving to the walled garden at Himley Hall. The owls are currently housed at Rodbaston Agricultural College but will be rehomed once the Himley Park site is opened. At the moment the land is being cleared but eventually it will be a very important and interesting local attraction. The trust have a comprehensive breeding programme and release birds into the wild whenever possible.

'Barney' was found abandoned near Sedgley, hungry and dehydrated (he's been hand-reared) but is now fit and well and a great ambassador for the Trust. It was a privilege to see such a beautiful bird at close quarters.



Jane Fuell



ADVENT STUDIES

There will be a series of Advent studies beginning Wednesday 30 November for four weeks.

Holy Habits is a book by Rev Andrew Roberts which has been explored at café worship and at the Worship & Discipleship group. Three of those habits are biblical teaching, sharing food and fellowship. With this in mind we begin with sharing food together at 6.30 pm followed by biblical teaching and exploring what Advent means for us in our lives. We aim to finish by 8.30 pm and all are welcome.

(For catering purposes, please let Sue Lorimer in the Church Office know if you intend coming prior to the Monday of that week! Tel: 344910)

CHURCHES TOGETHER IN GRAISLEY AND PENN FIELDS

Please come and join us on Saturday 10 December, when we will be distributing mince pies and a Christmas blessing around shops at Bradmore and the petrol station on Lea Road. We meet at Beckminster Methodist Church at 10.30 am and leave in two's. Your presence is much needed for this outreach and a sharing of the Christmas spirit!

Christmas Services at Beckminster

Sunday, 4 December

9.00am Holy Communion
10.30am Toy Service with Parade
6.30pm Evening Worship

Sunday, 11 December

10.30am Morning Worship
6.30pm Holy Communion

Sunday, 18 December

9.00am Holy Communion
10.30am Nativity Service
6.30pm Carol Service

Saturday, 24 December – Christmas Eve

4.00pm Christingle Service
11.30pm Midnight Communion

Sunday, 25 December – Christmas Day

10.00am All Age Worship
No Evening Service

Sunday, 1 January

10.30am Morning Worship
No Evening Service



OUR THANKS

Now we have almost come to the end of another year, the Editorial Team would like to take this opportunity of thanking everyone who has contributed articles, photographs, other information and items for publication in *The Beckoner* over the past twelve months. These have included our Minister,

Supernumeraries (especially Glennys for her regular columns), Stewards, Leaders, Secretarial and other staff, not forgetting members of our congregation and other outside contributors. Without your assistance it would have been impossible to publish such a varied range of material to appeal to as wide a readership as possible regarding our church, people, activities, faith and mission in this area of Wolverhampton. We are especially, once again, indebted to our two excellent photographers, John Holt and Gordon Nicklin, who never fail to produce highly professional photographs, especially for our front covers and other contributions. Their standard is always of the highest quality. Finally, we should also like to thank Richard Graham, our proof reader who works as part of our team along with printers, Messrs. Genie Printing and Mailing, Birmingham.

May we take this opportunity to wish these people and all our readers a very happy Christmas and a bright, healthy and peaceful New Year.

Any views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the editorial team, Beckminster or the Methodist Church. All details published in this newsletter were accurate at the time of going to press.