

Methodist Church Thames Valley Circuit

Smaller Churches Newsletter

December 2017 – February 2018

Not just a baby...

So here we are, in Advent once more, with Christmas just around the corner. Advent is known as a time of waiting, a time of preparation – preparation for the coming of Christ as a baby and for his coming again in glory. We live in the in-between time between those two events. About the second coming we can know little, and about the first we have differing stories in the Bible – stories which must contain, I think, some grains of truth, even if they were embellished in the telling.



However it came to pass, the fact that God became human in Jesus is beyond all doubt for Christians. Yet what always amazes me is the way God became human, not only by being born in humble circumstances, but by continuing, as an adult, to identify himself with the poor and the marginalised. And he identified with them not just by walking alongside them, but also by becoming one of them – becoming someone who was despised, misunderstood, dependent on others for food and for friendship, and paradoxically someone who was so threatening that he had to be got rid of.

Very often Christmas carols don't really show us this reality. We hear about baby Jesus 'asleep on the hay', but this baby became, in his adulthood, someone who was very much awake to the pain and brokenness of this world. There is one carol, however, which I believe to be Moravian in origin, which does seem to embody this truth. It goes like this:

*Where have they hidden you, Child of the manger,
Child of my childhood and seal of my soul?*

*They have carved me in stone, O child of my passion,
bound me in dogma and trammelled my will.
They have wrapped me in tinsel and sold me at counters,
tuning my song to the ring of their till.*

*Where can I find you, O child of the manger,
Child of my childhood and seal of my soul?*

*You can find me as ever with blind and with beggar,
the lame and the prisoner, the broken in heart.
But finding's not keeping, and keeping's not following.
Follow me home to the end of my road.*

*At home with the homeless I dine with the outcast;
and if you receive them then there shall I be.*

So Advent is, for me, not only a time to celebrate Christ's birth, but also to celebrate the person he became, the example which he set, the truth which he embodied that we are also called to follow. This Advent and Christmas, let us celebrate the birth of Christ with joy, knowing that God loved us so much that he gave us the gift of himself in human form. But let us also keep in our hearts and minds the example that Jesus gave us, particularly in his love for others, so that we may be people who, in the words of Jeremiah, "do what is right and just in the land."

And may I wish you and your families a peaceful and blessed Christmas, filled with joy.

Connie Jeffery, Editor

News from Burnham

Your correspondent has been on the bus to visit a new shopping complex. Have to say that, as shopping complexes go (and I don't mind if they do), this one was quite pleasant. You can guess what comes next – yes, that's right – full of fun and jollity – but where was Christmas? I feel sure that some retail outlet – somewhere – was raising the flag for the Nativity - we just didn't spot it.

We in Burnham will try hard to get things back on the right track. On Thursday 7th December, we have our High Street Christmas jollifications – parade, shops open, stalls, etc. For the first time in living memory (that means whatever you want it to mean) Churches Together in Burnham (CTIB)) will be out in full force, taking 2 stalls to offer free refreshments and leaflets giving details of all Christmas activities. Not only – but also – the CTIB will form an *ad hoc* choir, singing carols between 7 and 8 p.m. Closer to home, on Wednesday 20th December, Burnham Methodist Church and The Well @ Lent Rise will join together for Carols in the Carpark. Which will be ... just that. It's many years since we have been out and about in Lent Rise, singing carols -- so we thought – let's give it a go even if we don't stir further than the Church car park! Refreshments in the Church will follow. We should be so grateful if you would remember these activities in prayer.



We are delighted to have received a new member into our fellowship. He has been attending worship for some time, always eager to help out. What a pleasure it is to have him as a full 'family member'.

The Autumn Alpha course is nearly at a conclusion, having brought blessings and benefits to new attendees and refreshment to those who have been before. The Cameo lunch club is under new leadership and all is going well and much appreciated. The Toddler Group is its usual amazing self, and as I write, is looking forward to the Christmas party and the appearance of Father Christmas. The organisers are looking forward to a rest! Many thanks to them for all they do.

Sunday morning attendance, sadly, often barely reaches double figures. We are, we know, not alone in the Circuit in being in this situation. We are so grateful to the Revd. Sonia for her positive attitude and encouragement as we carry on as best we can.

Love and blessings for the Christmas season.

Hilary Evans

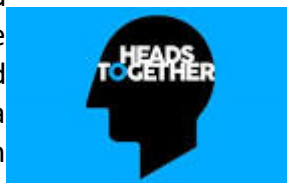
P.S. Approx 150 grams of mini cheddars and 2 cups of tea were consumed during the writing of these notes.

P.P.S. This Newsletter can in no way be held responsible for the less-than-healthy eating habits of its contributors! Ed.

News from Cookham Rise

Things seem to have taken a while at Cookham Rise to get going in the new Connexional year, but now we are back on track with a vengeance! A new exercise class for Mums called 'These Mums Can' has begun on a Wednesday morning at 10.00 a.m., and a team from the church is looking after the babies and small children while the Mums are exercising. In addition, we are now offering a Soup & Sandwich lunch on Wednesdays between 11.30 and 1.30. Quite a few of the Mums and children stay on for lunch and we are also welcoming church members and friends, friends from other churches and other members of the community into the Wesley Hall to enjoy a fresh homemade lunch and have a chat with friends old and new. All the soups are home-made – sometimes there are as many as five different flavours on offer! Plus the sandwiches are made to order. We would be delighted to see anyone from around the Circuit as well. We are hoping that this Wednesday lunchtime (which we have called The Meeting Place) might be the first step towards our vision of a community cafe.

We also have a few new faces in worship on a Sunday morning, which is always welcome. Our monthly Sunday lunches and Saturday coffee mornings continue to be popular – you would be welcome at our Christmas Coffee Morning on 9 December. This year we have chosen for our charity 'Heads Together' – a mental health initiative spearheaded by The Duke and Duchess of Cambridge and Prince Harry, which combines a campaign to tackle stigma and change the conversation on mental health with fundraising for a series of innovative new mental health services. This is their website: <https://www.headstogether.org.uk/>



We have had fewer than usual Bible study courses this year (partly because Circuit business has taken me away from Cookham), but for Advent this year we are again using a York Course, this time entitled 'So what are you waiting for...?' It has been put together by Lucy Winkett, who is the Rector of St James's, Piccadilly and usually good value.

The allotment continues to draw a good crowd and Open the Book continues at Cookham Rise School, although the team only go in once a month now rather than once a week.

Everyone at Cookham Rise sends best wishes for Christmas and the New Year to the other smaller churches.

Connie Jeffery

News from Eton Wick

The season of Advent and Christmas is fast approaching and arrangements within the church organisations are taking shape and some should already have taken place by the time you read this.



The Monday Club meet on 20th November to fill “shoe boxes” with useful Christmas goodies and with a Christmas message for the elderly of the village, The parcels should be delivered around 23rd December.

Community Care meet monthly on the last Saturday in the month at 10.30 am but this month are having a party instead on Saturday November 25th at 3.00 pm.

The Ladies Club meet on Tuesday 28th November at 7.30 pm and would welcome ladies from other local churches.

The Lunch Club will hold its Christmas Lunch on Wednesday 6th December at 12.30pm. Admission by ticket only, purchased in advance, at £6.00 each.

Members at Eton Wick Methodist Chapel invite all to come and join us in our traditional Carol and Mince Pie Evening on Tuesday 12th December starting at 7.15pm. Tickets can be bought in advance from Daphne Hogg or Peter Morris or on the door, for £2. Money raised, including donations, will be sent to “Action For Children”.



Carols around the village Christmas tree will take place on Saturday 16th December at 11.00am and will include children from the local school and members from the two other village churches. All Welcome.

Our annual Carol Service will be held on Sunday 17th December at 3.00pm followed by tea. The service will be led by Rev. Sonia Hicks and this year it will be a joint service of celebration with our friends from Burnham. All welcome.

The Christmas Day service will be held at 9.00am led by Rev. Margaret Dudley and all are welcome to share this service with us celebrating the birth of Christ.

We also remember that many are going through difficult times and read below what one community is doing in response:

C.A.P (Christians Against Poverty)

An hour from London, with a population of 278,000, lies the seaside city of Brighton. But for many, life there is no holiday. Fifteen food banks operate across the area, and in one constituency, nearly a third of children are in poverty.

A few streets from the seafront bandstand is Holland Road Baptist Church which for six years has run the Brighton and Hove CAP Debt Centre. Recently, it's also trained to deliver the CAP life-skills course to give people vital skills to live well on a low budget...

Pastoral Elder Sean Avard described their debt centre Manager, Sue Stone: “She’s phenomenal, making links with agencies, charities and churches across the area.”



... Sean recalls seeing a memorial in Sheffield Cathedral describing someone's "unfailing love to the poor" and feeling God say their church needed to do more of that.

... "We're inspired by what Isaiah 58 says to do: spend yourself on behalf of the poor."

The church now operates a café for homeless people, a winter shelter and a detox project. There's even a group doing odd jobs who have completed numerous decorating projects for people in need.

The work hasn't gone unnoticed, attracting visits from local MPs and a recent sizeable donation from the local council.

... Professionals and retirees rub shoulders with those on a low income. It's also brought together Christians across the city with the same desire to play their part. Many give and pray regularly, while others get to know clients who are signposted to congregations around the city.

... God can use a partnership with CAP to take your church into places you never thought possible.

Find out more at www.capuk.org/partnership

(Abridged version of an article in "Lifted" written by Marianne Clough)

Phil Clack

News from Old Windsor

We did go into the village centre at harvest, and stand around, offering pieces of fruit to passers-by. There were some interesting reactions!

- Some people accepted the offer with a smile, others were a little embarrassed.
- Some people wanted to pay us – the church always wants money!
- Some people tried to pretend we weren't there and walked by (on the other side?)
- Some people were unwilling to accept anything – on the grounds they had plenty and to spare on their allotments!
- Some people refused outright– mainly men of working age.



There were very few children, and we only offered fruit to them with an adult's permission, and even then there was a certain amount of reluctance.

However, all the fruit went – and so did the notice slips we gave out as well. In fact, we ran out of the slips before we ran out of fruit! And it was pleasing to realise that people took the slips home, rather than just throwing them away.

Just before Christmas, we shall again be distributing a small gift from the churches – yes, our ecumenical colleagues are interested in joining us! This time a gift of chocolate!

As last year, we shall go into the Day Centre to hold a short service with those who attend. Again, our ecumenical friends will join us. The December service at the Manor will be a Carol service.

Our Carols by Candlelight is by tradition always on Christmas Eve, and always at 7 pm (even though this year Christmas Eve falls on a Sunday). We are always glad to welcome back those who have been

associated with Old Windsor in the past, but who have moved away, and catch up over coffee and mince pies afterwards.

We have another Traveller's Tale arranged for 15th February, when Mary Sibley will be talking about the canals of Birmingham.

Anne Haggarty



Books for Advent & Christmas

Responding to the Light : reflections on Advent, Christmas and Epiphany

by Michael Mayne, Joel W. Huffstetler and Mark Oakley. Canterbury Press, £12.99

Responding to the Light draws together a collection of profound and beautiful seasonal reflections from the beginning of Advent to the end of Epiphany, by one of the finest voices in Anglican spirituality.

Michael Mayne was one of Anglicanism's most compelling and attractive voices, a gifted preacher and writer whose works have remained popular. These unpublished writings come from a large archive and are offered as an inspirational resource for preaching at a time of the year when many preachers seek fresh ways of opening up familiar texts. They are also suitable for individual devotional reading. Mark Oakley provides a forward to the collection.

Unearthly Beauty: through Advent with the Saints

by Magdalen Smith. SPCK, £8.99

Advent is about arrival – the arrival of Jesus into our world in poverty and vulnerability amidst unusual circumstances. For the world then, as now, Christ's coming generated a mixed response from a variety of people – anxiety, threat, expectation and hope. For Christians, entering Advent calls for fresh reflection on our faith, and this book aims to provide stimulating material for the journey up to (and including) Christmas. It is inspired by well-known, as well as more obscure, holy people from the past whom the church calls saints – people of unearthly beauty who reveal to us a deeper understanding of the fluid nature of divine grace.

Some Small Heaven: seeking Light in Winter: Advent, Christmas and Epiphany

by Ian Adams. Canterbury Press, £8.99

Winter tests our hope and resolve. In the Northern hemisphere the temperature drops. Storms disturb. Light fades. But this time of year also sees the festivals of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany. Each in some way is a reminder that light is never totally absent. Exploring a path through these festivals, *Some Small Heaven* seeks to discover the light within the darkness of winter – and within all our winters – to find some small heaven each day, even when life comes at us tough, hard and bleak.

Whether we are waiting for a darkness to pass or yearning for a light to come, these daily reflections and images enable us give our care and attention to both the waiting and the yearning and to recognise the gifts that such times may bring.

Advent for Everyone: a Journey with the Apostles

by Tom Wright. SPCK, £8.99

Join Tom Wright on a journey with the apostles, as he explores the New Testament themes of thankfulness, patience, humility and joy. Within each of these themes, Wright offers daily readings and meditations for a week, beginning with the Sunday reading in the Revised Common Lectionary, and ending with stimulating questions for personal reflection or group discussion. Distilled from selected passages in his popular For Everyone commentaries, these sparkling reflections take you on a journey of spiritual enlightenment, guiding you towards the wonder and joy of Christmas.

Soup...soup...beautiful soup...!

As I have noted elsewhere in this Newsletter, Cookham Rise is now offering a soup and sandwich lunch every Wednesday. The soups have been many and varied: here are a couple of mine for you to try. I give the instructions as per the recipe book – but in fact I have a soup-maker, so just throw all the ingredients in there, and hey presto! Twenty minutes later there's soup!

Spicy parsnip soup

Serves: 4

- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 large parsnips, peeled and chopped into 1 cm cubes
- 1 clove garlic, finely chopped
- 750ml boiling water
- 1 stock cube
- 2 teaspoons curry powder
- 100ml double cream
- Salt and pepper
- Dried chilli pepper flakes or paprika to garnish

Prep: 10 min | Cook: 25 min

Melt the butter in a large saucepan over medium heat. Fry the onion in butter until soft, about 5 minutes. Add the parsnips, garlic and curry powder, and fry for a couple of minutes to release the flavours. Boil the water in the kettle and mix with stock cube in a separate jug. Add to pan and stir well. Simmer for 15 mins until parsnips are soft and easy to break with a wooden spoon. Take off the heat and blend with stick blender or food processor. Stir in the cream and warm through. Season to taste and garnish with the chilli flakes or paprika.

Beetroot and ginger soup

Serves: 4

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 large onion, diced
- 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped

- 1 tablespoon finely chopped ginger root
- 3 large cooked beetroot, peeled and cut into 1/4-inch pieces
- 5 cups vegetable stock
- 1 can (14.5 ounces) low-fat coconut milk

In a large saucepan, heat the oil over medium heat. Sauté onion for 5 minutes. Add garlic and ginger; cook, stirring often, for 5 minutes. Add the beetroot and 4 cups stock; bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for 10 more minutes. With a stick blender, puree soup, adding remaining 1 cup stock as needed to reach desired consistency. Stir in milk, and season to taste.

Christmas Carol Quiz

If you find yourself with a few minutes to spare between now and Christmas, try your hand at this quiz (answers next issue):

1. Which Christmas carol contains the following line "O come thou rod of Jesse, free thine own from Satan's tyranny"?
2. The carol "Joy to the World" is based on which Psalm?
3. Holst wrote a well known tune to which Christmas Carol?
4. Which Christmas carol contains the line "Brightly shone the moon that night"?
5. "O Little Town of Bethlehem" was written in which US city?
6. Which Christmas carol contains the line "E'en so here below, below, Let steeple bells be swungen"?
7. The carol "Away in a Manger" was written in which country?
8. Which Christmas carol contains the line "From angels bending near the Earth, to touch their harps of gold"?
9. What is the literal translation of "In Dulci Jubilo"?
10. In "The First Noel" to whom did the angel speak?
11. The carol "In the Bleak Midwinter" is based on a poem by which writer?
12. Which Christmas carol contains the following "Above thy deep and dreamless sleep"?
13. Father Joseph Mohr wrote the carol "Silent Night" to be accompanied by which instrument?
14. In the Christmas carol, how many ships came "sailing in"?
15. Which Christmas carol contains the words "Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room, And Heaven and nature sing"?
16. The carol "While Shepherds Watched" was written in which century?
17. Which Christmas carol contains the words "Come and behold him, born the King of angels"?
18. Which Poet Laureate wrote the words to "While Shepherds Watched"?

Dates for diaries:

Sun 3 December Circuit Healing Service Windsor 6.30 p.m.

Sat 16 December Blue Christmas. Burnham 6.00 p.m.

Tues 19 December Carols for Christmas led by Thames Valley Voices. St Mark's 7.30 p.m.

Copy for the March - May edition of the Smaller Churches Newsletter should be with Connie Jeffery by 13 February at the latest.

**To see an earlier edition of the *Smaller Churches Newsletter*,
select the relevant link from the following list which gives the date and
something included!**

September – November 2017	Confessions of a Conference junkie
June – August 2017	Visit to Guildford Cathedral
March – May 2017	Weak tea, Book review
December 2016 – February 2017	Prayer Safari, Singing the Faith, Thames Valley Voices
September – November 2016	Allotment Service
June 2015 – August 2016	“Swift” work and Tardis!
March 2016 – May 2016	Smaller Churches Away Day with Claire Potter
December 2015 – February 2016	Pictures from the Circuit Mission weekend
September – November 2015	Looking to the future
July – August 2015	Magna Carta Celebrations
May – June 2015	Easter information
March – April 2015	Easter information
January – February 2015	A visit to a brothel ...
November – December 2014	Smaller Churches’ items for the Prayer Safari
September – October 2014	Thames Path sponsored walk
	Meeting old friends
July – August 2014	Rev Margaret Dudley’s Ordination
May – June 2014	Singer Franz Hepburn at Colnbrook and Poyle.
March – April 2014	Including new chairs!
January – February 2014	<i>Hanging the Greens</i> and <i>Throwing Santa down the Chimney!</i>
November – December 2013	Including Gary’s Gift
	Burnham’s visit from the Chair of the District
	Pictures from the <i>24 Hours of Prayer</i> exhibition.
September – October 2013	Glue, Pews, and <i>Singing the Faith</i> .
July – August 2013	Burnham’s <i>The Well @ Lent Rise</i>
	Cookham Rise’s (literally) <i>Singing the Faith</i> .
May – June 2013	Cookham Rise’s <i>Treasure Seekers</i>
	Reference to Mrs Meg Few’s 100 th birthday.
March – April 2013	Burnham’s new member (!)
	Woodland Park’s Christmas Community event.
January – February 2013	Gary’s New Year resolutions
	A cautionary tale about Gift Aid.
November – December 2012	Sonia’s experience in a small church which grew.
September – October 2012	Cookham Rise’s new venture – Summer teas.
June – August 2012	Barbara’s farewell letter
	Woodland Park’s <i>Fun Day</i> .
April – May 2012	Burnham’s <i>The Well @ Lent Rise</i>
	Eton Wick’s celebrations for the Diamond Jubilee.
February – March 2012	<i>Bright Lights of Bethlehem</i> .
January 2012	Old Windsor’s <i>Open the Book</i>
December 2011	<i>Singing the Faith</i>
	The birth of Maisy
November 2011	Cookham Rise’s <i>Messy Church</i> .
October 2011	Old Windsor’s first <i>Open the Book</i> .

