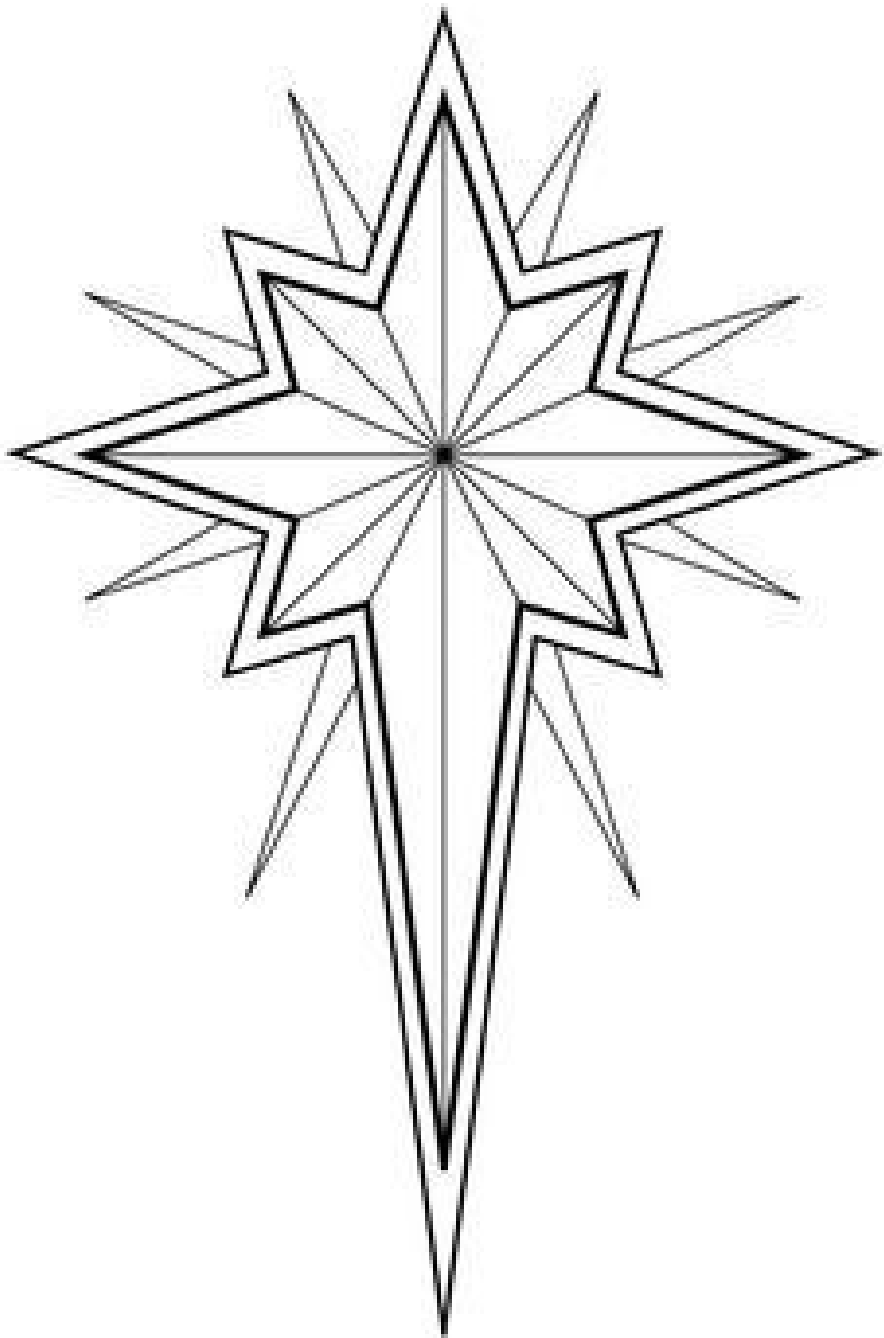


Leeds North and East
Methodist Circuit



Advent 2020



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Introduction

The Christmas rush to get everything organized is on – whatever it may look like this year! On the first Sunday in Advent, we know that in just over 4 weeks it will be all over; in just over 5, we will be making New Year resolutions. And in 6 weeks the decorations will be back in the loft. We will move the furniture back to where it where it used to be and life will go back to how it was before. Or will it? Will we be changed?

If we take Advent seriously, hopefully we will be changed, because we will have opportunity again to reflect upon what it means to say God came into the world, into the poverty and powerlessness of the birth at Bethlehem. And God still comes into the world in all its mess and pain and longing and joy, and God longs for us to recognise the work of Jesus in our lives.

We all know that Advent and Christmas will be very different this year, and so, in the season of waiting and preparing, the Methodist circuit offers you a gift: an Advent booklet, with daily reflections and activities, written by the Local preachers, worship leaders and staff. Although we may be apart, we can journey together, waiting and preparing together, getting ready to celebrate the birth of Christ. May you rejoice in the gift and promise of Christmas – Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Every blessing
Tanya & George

You can access more resources, which will be updated throughout Advent and Christmas, by going to the [Advent@Home](#) page on the circuit website. This will include videos of some of the crafts and recipes included in the booklet as well as links to online versions of the reflections that you can share with friends and family.

A Prayer for Advent

Jesus, my Lord, my Life, my Friend;
When I feel threatened by an uncertain future,
Strengthen me with your hope.
Help me greet each day with a smile, secure in the knowledge
that you are always at my side to guide and watch over me.

When I lose confidence in myself and you,
Reassure me with your faithfulness.
Help me dispel my doubts, regain my trust
and welcome you into my life.

When I run out of energy and my life seems to be going nowhere,
Restore me with your joy.
Help me feel the warmth of your presence enliven me
and may the light of your presence brighten my day.

When my mind is in a whirl, worrying about things I should be doing,
whilst not actually knowing what they are,
Calm me with your peace.
Help me focus on the present, help me focus on you
and put you at the centre of all I do.

Loving Jesus;
For coming into this world,
For sharing your life with us,
For your presence in my life,
Thank you.

Amen

Karen Illingworth
Winter 2020

Family Seasonal Activities For Advent

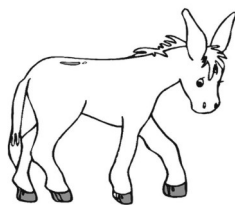
By Naomi Polson

We can get so caught up in the hustle and bustle of the holiday season. It's so busy with outings, shopping and Santa. None of which are inherently bad and should or should not be done, but we can struggle to find some peace and quiet in the midst of it and time to focus on the spiritual elements of the season.

I thought I would share some activities that can be done with families. These are primarily aimed at younger families, as I have a four year old, Esther, but could be adapted for older families too. I hope these may help inspire ideas for you to evolve for your own families, over the holiday season

Travelling Nativity (Advent)

This is an interactive advent calendar with a twist. You and your family can help Mary and Joseph to move to Bethlehem. You can make this as simple or fancy as you wish.



Above is my version – I made the “stable” out of lollipop sticks, but you can do this however you wish. I also used our wooden wedding cake stand and some faux moss to stand the stable on. Then use 24 stones, pebbles or an alternative to countdown. At the end of the stones place Mary and Joseph – this can be from a nativity set or even simple peg people. I added an angel on the stable and some sheep in the moss too. Each day you take away a stone and move Mary and Joseph closer to the stable. On Christmas Eve night or Christmas Day morning you can add the baby Jesus with Mary and Joseph in the stable.

Advent wreath

Many of us are familiar with the advent wreath in church over the four Sundays leading up to Christmas Day. These comprise of five candles and there is no set colour they must be, but usually a white one stands out in the middle to light on Christmas Eve night and/or Christmas Day to represent Jesus Christ birth – the light of the world.

The other four candles represent the four Sundays in the lead up to Christmas. These can be associated with the words Hope – Peace – Joy – Love. We choose to use these and talk about how they associate to Jesus, as we “light” the candle. This can be done the liturgy included in each section of this booklet.

1. *Cut out a circle on the green card/*
2. *On your choice of coloured card, cut out eight rectangles for candles.*
3. *On your white card cut out two rectangles for the Christ candle.*
4. *If you want to add words to your candles, write them on Hope – Peace – Joy – Love and Christ on the white candle. Remembering to do two of each.*
5. *Glue the candles on, with the white in the middle and ensure they are on each side.*
6. *Cut seven “wicks” from the pipe cleaner – glue to the candles, with the white candle and top two coloured candles having one between them, attaching both sides of together.*
7. *Cut ten mini flames out of the yellow card and draw orange middle flames on them – these can then be blu-tack on, on the relevant Sunday.*

WINDOW WREATH

What you need:

1. Green card
2. Coloured card
3. White card
4. Pipe cleaner
5. Orange pen or paint
6. Pen
7. Blu tak



Baking with Becki

STENNETT COOKBOOK- SIMMER AND SPARKLE PUNCH

During the Advent and Christmas period, we might usually be rather over-exposed to a vast array of different occasions and recipes to cook.

This year, maybe things are different, but for some of us, preparing recipes for ourselves or others is an opportunity to take time to relax and unwind, and ultimately enjoy our creations!

For each week in Advent, you will find a recipe to accompany the theme, which you might make for yourself or to share with others.

Here's a simple one to get us started! This simmer and sparkle punch is easy to make and should leave you feeling warm, cosy and pleased as, well, punch!

The punch is great for one, and easy to scale up for a family or more. You could add other spices or fruit juices to, making the drink your own.

I suppose that's how we want you to enjoy this booklet: make it your own, use what works for you and enjoy a moment in your day to meet with God, over words, food, activities, as we prepare our hearts and lives for a new encounter with God incarnate.

Simmer & Sparkle Punch

makes: 1 Christmassy mug full

Ingredients: 1 orange
a few cloves
fresh root ginger
apple juice
cranberry juice
ginger ale



Method: Cut the orange in half. Squeeze the juice from one half of the orange into your favourite mug. Add the same quantity of apple juice, and the same again of Cranberry juice, leaving room in the mug to add ginger ale later. Tip the contents of your mug into a small saucepan. Cut the remaining orange half into 4 slices. Eat or freeze 3 slices, and stud the fourth with cloves. Add the studded slice, and a slice of fresh root ginger to the saucepan. Simmer the contents for 3-4 minutes, until steaming hot, then return it to your mug.

Top your mug up with a good gully of ginger ale and enjoy!

29th November

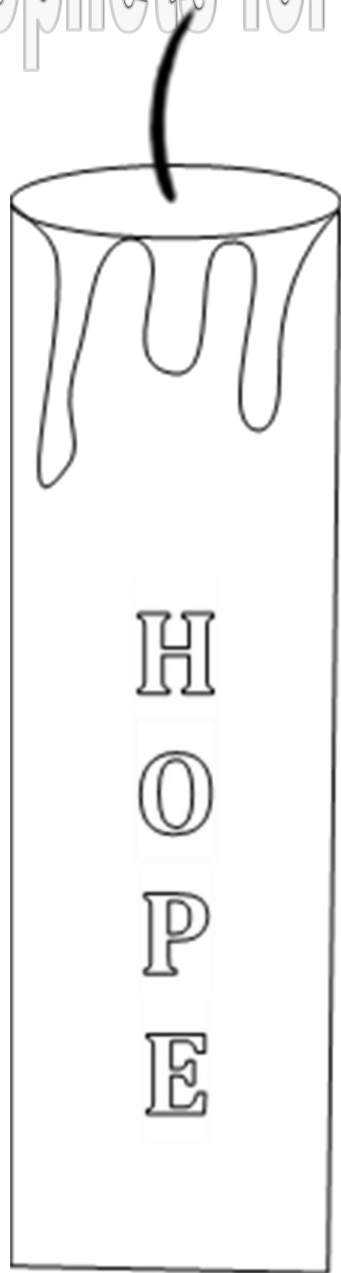
Candle of the Prophets for


Isaiah 42:1-4 (NLT)

“Look at my servant, whom I strengthen. He is my chosen one, who pleases me. I have put my Spirit upon him. He will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or raise his voice in public. He will not crush the weakest reed or put out a flickering candle. He will bring justice to all who have been wronged. He will not falter or lose heart until justice prevails throughout the earth.

Isaiah 7:14 (NRSV)

Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel.





light this candle to remember the prophets' words of hope to the people of Israel, words of hope we still hear today.

Prayer

God of hope, we cling to you, for you renew the face of the earth. Through the gift of your Son, our Lord Jesus, we follow you on the path of dawn. Enlightened by your love and wisdom, help us to lead each other and all creatures back to your open arms.

Amen.

Sing/read

He came down that we may have hope (x3)

Alleluia for evermore

What is a Prophet?

Reflection by Stanley Pearson

I guess that most people's understanding of a prophet is of someone who sees the future, a sort of soothsayer or fortune teller. However, in the Bible a prophet is one who draws attention to the present state of things. They drew attention to where their society was falling short of the love and justice of God.



The whole life of Jesus was a prophetic revelation of the nature and love of God and throughout Advent we have the rather forbidding and somber theme that Christ is not only our help but also our judge. The judgement of Christ, like the Kingdom of God, was something that began with Christ and his entry into human history. It was not just something reserved for some distant time, but something that affects each of us now. The Kingdom of God is wherever the rule of God is acknowledged and wherever those words and deeds of Jesus are re-enacted by each of us is where the Kingdom of God is in our world today. Judgement is not about condemnation and punishment, it is about righting wrongs, about giving every individual his or her due, and it is a part of the reliability and trustworthiness of God. In Advent we are asked to examine our lives honestly in the light of the life of Jesus.

But the prophets also brought a message of hope, that the ultimate will of God is that his kingdom of love and justice will be restored. And in our own lives we are also called to be prophets. By listening to the word of God and by allowing the Holy Spirit into our lives we can hope to live the sort of lives that God would have us live and in so doing we can call our fellow human beings to account by our example. Our lives can become the message of hope to those around us.

Why are we waiting?

Reflection by Susan Howdle

I was leading worship once at a church three weeks before Christmas. The children came in towards the end to share what they'd been doing: rehearsing their Nativity play. "I'm Joseph", announced a little boy, "and she's Mary". "And what about baby Jesus?", I asked. He gave a withering look at this daft woman: "Well, he's not born yet, is he?"! He knew about Advent waiting. About patience – something we've all had to learn this year.



So, why are we waiting? Advent is more than just waiting around. It's about watching. Watching for what? At the time of Jesus's birth many devout people were watching; they'd clung to hope, amidst afflictions and oppression, that salvation would come, through God's anointed Messiah. Many looking for the mighty saviour – but in the wrong place: in a palace or descending in clouds of glory. My favourite Advent people are the old couple who appear a little later: Simeon and Anna, faithfully at worship in the temple through long years of watching, and having the insight to see in the ordinary routine, in a tiny baby in the arms of an ill-assorted couple, God's salvation for the whole world. Are we looking in the right place to see that salvation today?

But why are we still waiting in Advent? We know what's coming. To me, it's like this. I love to go to a live performance of Handel's Messiah (sadly not this year). The opening overture moves steadily forward to that thrilling moment when the tenor voice emerges from the surrounding music: "Comfort ye". If you've heard it before, you know what's coming, but there's still that exciting expectation that the glory of the Lord will indeed be revealed. Yes, we have seen it in the birth, life, death and resurrection and final triumph of Jesus Christ. But we're also called to live in the Advent Hope, the 'now and not yet' – that there will be a time when the glory of the Lord will be revealed to all people. We don't know how or when, and sometimes it's hard to be patient, but we are called to wait, to watch, to hope – and to work for that day.

Hope.

Hope is the horizon of the curved world,
where seen and unseen are joined
and divided,
and suggested hidden lands invite
the soul to boundless journeying,
of finding and being lost from sight.

Hope is the seed born in darkness,
fragile and unconquerable,
whose urge toward the unknown light
will shatter stones and move the earth,
for an inherited promise of green.

Hope is the distant call of horns,
the hint of a scent
blown on a wind not of this world,
the memory of a summer dream
caught in some corner of the heart.

Hope's a graffiti defiance of grey,
unsilenced rumour of another way.
It is the fidget child, the student rage,
the troubled soul, the eccentric old,
the ill-at-ease here.

Hope is faith's refusal to believe,
gazing beyond vision, beyond presence,
always asking the strange question,
imagining and shaping a world
invented and discovered alike.

Revd Dr Tony McClelland

Autumn 2020

3rd December

Into ...

Into the darkness
Into hopelessness
Into confusion

Into...

+

Into bleakness

Into certainty

where certainty is in question,

Into...

+

into my words,

your words,

silence,

questions,

doubts, discernment,

into....

+

into the light

hope breaks

dawn breaks...

+

NEW LIFE BEGINS IN THE DARK



Revd Sally Coleman

December 2019

'Because it's Christmas'

Reflection by Revd Mark Stennett

When it comes to Christmas, there are usually some things we look forward to, some things we would prefer to avoid, and some things that, whilst we might not normally like them, we make an exception for 'because it's Christmas'. I'm a big fan of sprouts, but they tend to be a Christmas staple that, whether you love them or hate them, they are given this exceptional status.

The exception for these little brassicas may be all to do with their undeniable association with Christmas, that at a deep level, soggy or crunchy, loved or hated, they can help us feel 'more Christmassy' than if we went without, but I wonder what other elements of Christmas fit this 'because it's Christmas' theme?

It may be a difference in routine or habits, it might be an effort in getting in touch with wider family or old friends, or it may just simply be other foods that just help our festive nostalgia.

Today I encourage us to reflect on our own traditions and family festive customs and simply give ourselves permission to reflect on our festive hopes for this year: to ask the questions of what will we do differently this year? What will we keep the same? What will we be forced to do differently? (because of Covid) or what will we strive to re-invent in order to hold onto something familiar-ish?



During these strange times, I encourage us to recognise these mixed or extreme feelings before God and simply give them over to him. Please be encouraged to openly speak to family and friends about them, to help us find support in our love, care or, even loathing of those little green cabbages.

Active Advent: Week One

The preparations we make for Christmas during the Advent period remind us that waiting can be active: we don't have to simply sit still!

This week, as we consider the Prophets and the theme of hope, why not explore one of the activities below to bring a little more hope into the world:

•**Reverse advent calendar.** You may be familiar with the idea of a reverse advent calendar, the act of putting aside a basic food stuff or other household necessity each day of advent so that as you receive a treat from your advent calendar, you can contribute to a hamper of hope for local foodbanks or similar. Why not consider going beyond the usual pasta and rice, to include some little Christmas luxury to bring hope and happiness to someone who may have little else this year?

•**Words of hope.** Take time to find a card and envelope and write to a resident of a care home or hostel. You could share with them the things that you have experienced this year, or all you hope for next year. You could share with them some words of care and love, even though they will remain unknown to you.



Baking with Becki

STENNETT COOKBOOK- APPLE AND CRANBERRY
CHUTNEY

The task of a prophet must so often have seemed a little thankless! I think of poor Jonah who was disappointed in the outcome for Nineveh, and, of course, at this time of year, we recall the prophets who foretold the birth of Christ generations before his arrival. They never saw their prophecies fulfilled, but rather offered the messages of hope God gave them to carry, believing fulfilment would come and the longed for Saviour would one day come.

Thinking about the prophets and the theme of hope, my mind quickly raced ahead to those cold cuts and cheese kind of meals we have following Christmas day, and the chutneys we enjoy with them.

Chutney is best enjoyed after a wait. So, as you make this recipe, you commit to a future moment when you'll enjoy the fruit of your labour and look back gratefully at all that God has been doing in the time between creating and consumption.

Why not pray as you create, giving thanks that God is always ahead, and behind, before and alongside. In God, our hope is rewarded with certainty.

Apple & Cranberry Chutney

makes: a lot! 4x 500g jars
(you could halve the recipe to make less!)

Ingredients: 1kg cooking apples
500g eating apples
450g red onions
50g root ginger
250g granulated sugar
250g light brown sugar
250ml cider vinegar
500g cranberries*



Method: Peel & chop the cooking apples into small chunks. Peel & chop the eating apples into large chunks. Peel & slice the red onions. Peel & finely chop the root ginger. Add all of these ingredients into a large saucepan, with the sugar and cider vinegar. Bring the pan to the boil, then allow to simmer (uncovered) for 50-60 minutes. Add your cranberries to the pan and simmer for another 10 minutes, before transferring the hot chutney to sterilised jars & sealing well. Leave the chutney for at least a couple of weeks before enjoying - it will keep for 6 months or so very well.

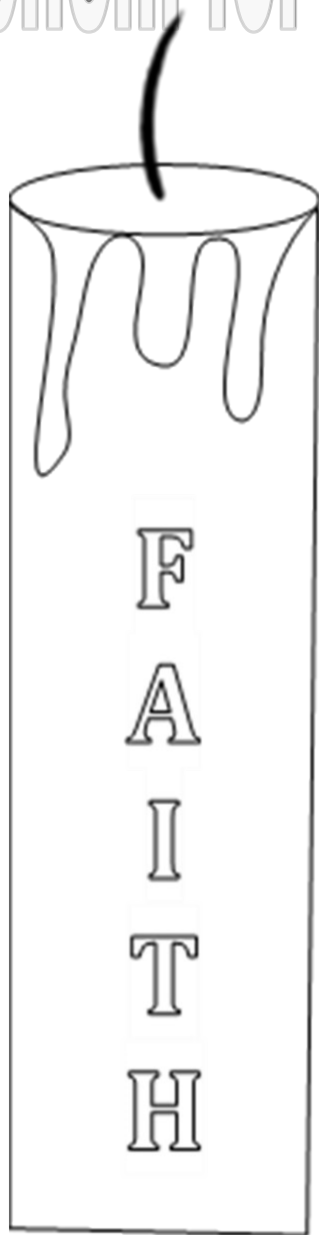
*fresh, defrosted, or dried cranberries which have been plumped by soaking in 50% apple juice, 50% water.


6th December

Candle of Bethlehem for

Micah 5:2-5a (NRSV)

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
who are one of the little clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to rule in Israel,
whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.
Therefore, he shall give them up
until the time when she who is in labour
has brought forth;
then the rest of his kindred
shall return to the people of Israel.
And he shall stand and feed his flock
in the strength of the Lord,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.
And they shall live secure,
for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth;
and he shall be the one of peace.





light this candle as we remember Bethlehem and the part that city played in the journey of faith.

Prayer

Heavenly Father,
We are so busy at this time of year.
With all that we feel we have to do,
it's difficult for us to focus on what You are doing
and what You want to accomplish.
Help us not to get so distracted by our
preparations for Christmas,
that we miss the whole point of the season.
Help us to focus on You and on Your Son,
whom You gave to us because You love us.
Amen.

Sing/read

He came down that we may have faith (x3)
Alleluia for evermore

7th December

Bethlehem, Cradle of our Faith.

Reflection by Erica Moores.

Bethlehem, cradle of our Faith and in whose streets, there was a humble stable in which the Saviour of the world was born, we light a candle to mark the birth of God's own Son Jesus Christ.

It was with Faith and acceptance that Mary and Joseph travelled to Bethlehem. Mary had willingly accepted the gift of the Christ Child and Joseph had kept faith with her. Their way was uncertain and unclear, but they knew that the Lord was with them and that Micah's prophecy about Bethlehem bringing forth a ruler over Israel was about to be fulfilled.

It was with Faith that the shepherds received the word of the angels and left their charges to hasten to Bethlehem to be the first to acknowledge and worship the Infant Redeemer: a symbol that God's call is to the humble and the outcast.

It was with Faith that Magi from the East followed the star to Bethlehem, undertaking an arduous and dangerous journey, symbolising that the coming of the Messiah is for the salvation of the world.

It is with Faith that we light the Advent candle so that we too might witness to the birth of the child who was himself the Light of the World. May our light shine bright in the darkest of nights.



The Mustard Seed and the Leaven.

Reflection by Jennie Firth.

On my walk to work across Scott Hall fields recently, I was plugged into my earphones listening to the passage above on the 'Pray as you go' App; a short daily meditation which uplifted me as the sun rose, it's light emblazing the autumnal trees.

I was first introduced to these meditations by a Catholic member of Churches Together in Chapel Allerton and Meanwood before the Lock-down sent us all zooming! Even in the most prolonged, difficult times in my life, God always seems to provide me with a new source of refreshment along the way. These meditations are one such example and have accompanied me throughout the pandemic.

Here, we meet Jesus sharing what God's Kingdom is like, through simple everyday examples: the mustard seed and the yeast. Can you walk with Jesus now, in your mind's eye, and feel the miniscule seeds in your fingertips? Can you observe the fresh yeasty bread rise?

We may feel our faith is small and weak, but it's not the size, rather *Who* we have our faith in, that counts! Can you see God's Kingdom growing around you? Faith growing in you? Even in these difficult times? Is your God-given faith enabling you to shelter others in your branches?

All our small acts of faith are building God's Kingdom. Lockdown is no barrier to what God can do through our faith in Him. Talk to God now, as one friend talks to another, about what you want to see happen, on this, your journey of faith.



A Visit to Bethlehem.

Reflection by Richard Vautrey.

I've been fortunate enough to visit Bethlehem on a couple of occasions. The first was as a tourist, or some might say a pilgrim. We were on the standard route, travelling with ease from Jerusalem, just a few miles to the north and after visiting all the sights heading off to the Dead Sea, and up the Jordan valley to Nazareth and Galilee. We visited the Church of Nativity in Manger Square, which looks more like a fortress than a church, and entered through the small doorway to join the crowds looking for the traditional site of that stable behind the inn. To be honest, it didn't feel that spiritual and was more like being a tourist than a pilgrim.

15 years later I returned, but this time it was very different. The crowds of tourists were nowhere to be seen. The souvenir shops, packed with wooden carvings, pots and decorated plates were empty of people other than the shopkeeper, keen for me to buy something that was "authentically made in Bethlehem" and "not from China", as the loss of trade was devastating for his business. The Church of Nativity was as solid-looking as it has been for centuries but this time there were no crowds milling around inside, and it was easier to have time to look in to the place said to be the stable that was the first resting place for a baby.

And then there was the wall. The tall concrete slabs erected around this small town cutting it off from the area around it, zig-zagging like a giant snake strangling its prey, blocking the route towards Jerusalem and providing a visible statement on a daily basis that those on the wrong side were feared by those on the other side. I watched as those lucky enough to have a job in Jerusalem gathered earlier

in the morning to go through the daily indignity of passing through the checkpoint in the separation barrier on the way to work.



This is an ancient town that has lived through centuries of challenge, hardship, conflict, oppression and injustice. And yet throughout it all, and perhaps because of this, the prophets

10th December

Resident of Bethlehem

Reflection by Revd Helen White

It's hard to believe the prophecy of Micah here in this city.
We're surrounded by a wall.
We can't go out, though the world can come in,
(unless they are Israeli Jews).

But do they want to?

Pilgrims come - briefly. But they don't stay.
Violence, and the fear of it, keeps folk away.
Even our own young people - they leave.
Any chance they get ... and they take it.
Who would want to stay?
No work... no future... no room.

I wrote this after spending a month living on the Jerusalem side of the wall. I was able to visit Bethlehem frequently, usually on foot. I listened to the people, both Muslim and Christian, and I was humbled at their faith.

A ruler from Bethlehem? Not today.
Passes and paperwork then no guarantee of entry to Israel.
In this day and age, when rulers travel the world,
anyone from Bethlehem wouldn't get far.

And yet... And yet I think of our mayor.
She's been a few places, met the Pope,
spoken to prime ministers and presidents,
stood up for us in Israeli courts.

The world comes here, because a ruler came out of this city.
If only the world did not forget us.
If only the world remembered we are here... and our situation.
If only the violence would end ... and we could live secure.
Yes I know we are not without blame.
Our young people throw stones,
some turn to the gun and the bomb for answers.

This little city, surrounded by a wall.
How can we move forward? Build bridges not walls.
Then we can meet ... and talk,
and who knows ... one day
we shall live secure ... and the One who is Prince of Peace will rule.

11th December

What if?

Reflection by Paul Coleman

Have you ever looked back on a day and asked yourself ‘what if?’ What if I’d made a different decision? What if I’d done this or that differently? As a historian, counterfactuals are one of my favourite tools. They let you examine, not only how things might have happened differently, but also what might have motivated people to make the decisions that they did.

The story of Jesus’ birth is full of opportunities to ask this question. What if Joseph had not believed Mary? What if the Shepherds had not left their flocks? What if there had been room in the inn? Or how about the biggest ‘what if’ of all ... What if Mary had said no? Would God have simply found another way? One thing that we can be certain of is that God would not have forced or tricked her into saying yes. Freedom of choice is evident in all of God’s interactions with humanity from the beginning. Could it be that God’s plan for salvation rested on the obedience and faith of one young girl?

How easy would it have been for Mary to simply say ‘NO’? After all she would have known how her friends and family would likely react to her pregnancy. If Joseph did not believe her, she would probably be stoned to death. Even with the threat of death hanging over her, Mary simply says ‘YES’. She heard God’s call on her life, responded in faith and the whole of history was changed.

What is God calling you to today? What if you said no? What if you said yes?

Active Advent: Week Two

My Home Town. Jesus moved into our neighbourhood when he was born on earth. Not just the global neighbourhood, or just the neighbourhood of Bethlehem, but the day to day comings and goings of humanity. We may not be changing all of human living in our own lives, but we have a neighbourhood in which we can make a change, and a neighbourhood God calls us to love. If you're well and able, why not take a camera or smart phone around your local area, taking snaps of the place God has called you to be, even if you've been here forever! Look back over those photos, praying for the people and place around you, and asking God to give you faith that his light will be seen by all those who so dearly need His love.



A home for the humble. When we think of Jesus making earth His home, perhaps we can take a moment to be grateful for our own home, and think of those without a home. You might consider donating to a charity supporting the homeless, or even get outside and make a home for creatures. You could check out the Wildlife Trusts website (www.wildlifetrusts.org) for some ideas to make and create in your garden, remembering that Jesus made all of Creation possible and came out of love for all the world. As you enjoy providing shelter for another living creature, reflect on the privilege of caring for the world.

Baking with Becki

STENNETT COOKBOOK - YORKSHIRE PUDDINGS

Ok, ok, I know that the theme of Bethlehem doesn't scream Yorkshire Pudding, but stick with me!

I remember holding the town of Bethlehem in deep reverence when I was younger. I remember thinking it must be this very special place. But of course, it's not! Not aside from the very important fact that it's where Jesus was born. Bethlehem was nothing particularly important.

What is important is that when God came, it was to a particular place, in a particular time. Bethlehem at the time of Jesus' birth would have been a place of particular dialect, a certain way of preparing local recipes, but nothing grand or wonderful.

We have things which make us think of our own locality, and Yorkshire puddings is one of those for me! As I reflect on the theme of Bethlehem, I give thanks that God chose a particular place, a humble place, entering the world in the humdrum, everyday mess we as humans live with. God loves our everyday, loves our homes, and we can know that God has plans for our county, town and village.

Yorkies are not just a great recipe rooting us to home- they require a great deal of faith! Once they're in the oven, there's no opening the door to have a check, a quick stir, or a little prod to see how it's going.

In this recipe, you'll just have to have faith that it'll work! So, shut that oven door, walk away, and know that God delights with you in such a simple home comfort!



Yorkshire Puddings

makes: 6 yorkshire puddings

Ingredients: 55g Plain flour
small pinch of salt
1 egg
150ml milk
vegetable oil.

Method: Preheat the oven to

fan 210°C, conventional 230°C or gas 8.

Mix flour and salt in a bowl. Make a hollow in the middle of the mixture, and crack in the egg. Stir together using a wooden spoon, adding some of the milk until all of the flour is worked in. Slowly add the remaining milk, beating well with a whisk. Heat vegetable oil in 6 wells in a cupcake tin. Remove the tin from the oven when the oil is very hot, and a haze is visible. Carefully divide the batter across the six wells. Bake for 20 minutes, until golden brown, resisting the temptation to open the door!

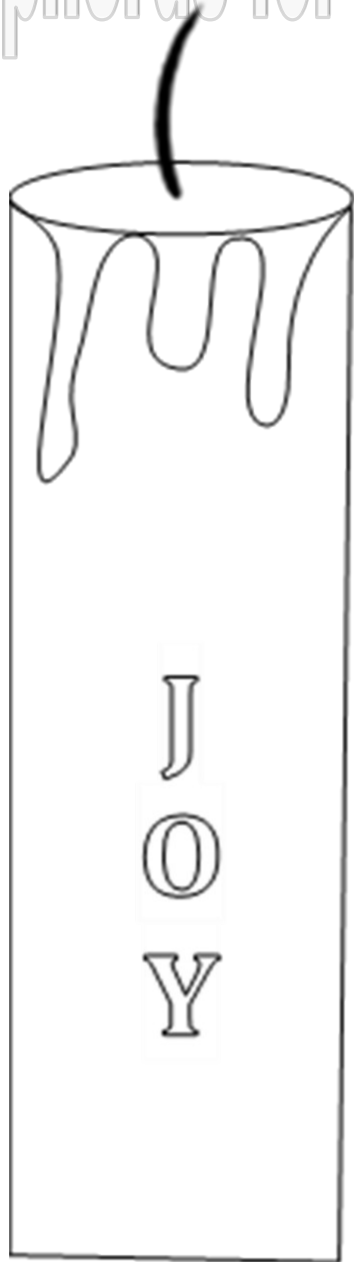
Enjoy your yorkshire puddings with a roast dinner, just with gravy, or with a drizzle of golden syrup as a cheeky pud!


13th December

Candle of the shepherds for

Luke 2:8-11 (NRSV)

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord.'





light this candle as we remember the Shepherds and the joy they experienced when they went to see Jesus.

Prayer

Father, you offer that same joy to us now.
You gave us a reason to celebrate
when you gave us the amazing gift of Jesus Christ.
You came to dwell among us.
You went to Calvary's cross for us.
You overcame death and rose again for us.
You forgive our sins and give us eternal life.
Our joy doesn't come from our jobs,
our family, our relationships,
our finances, or our success.
Our joy doesn't come from what we have
or who we are.
Our joy is a gift.
It is the gift that you gave us that first Christmas
in Jesus Christ.
Our joy is encompassed in our Saviour, Jesus.
Flood our hearts with joy this Advent season
as we reflect on the good news of Jesus' birth.
In Jesus' precious name we pray.
Amen

Sing/read

He came down that we may have joy (x3)
Alleluia for evermore.

Fear and Joy.

Reflection by Erica Moores.

The Shepherds are on watch during the night, fearful of predators which might sneak in and steal a sheep. Alert to the danger, they are alarmed as they are blinded by the light of the glory of the Lord which shines around them and as the angel of the Lord appears before them. It is beyond their understanding and perhaps they huddle together as this mystery unfolds before their eyes.

Perhaps they relax a little as the Angel speaks those words of reassurance and continues '...to you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour who is the Messiah.' Yet the shepherds must be confused: Why are the angels bringing this message to them, humble shepherds who live on the fringe of society? They might question, 'The Messiah born to us?' As the message unfolds, they receive even more baffling instructions: they are to hasten to Bethlehem and they will find a child lying in the manger and he is the Saviour, the Messiah. They will have heard stories about what the Messiah will be like and this certainly doesn't sound like the Messiah they expect.

In spite of their confusion, the shepherds hasten to Bethlehem and what they see confirms the message of the Angels. They spread the news to all who listen and return to their sheep glorifying God and praising Him for all they have heard and seen. There appears to be no doubt in their hearts. They believe and are full of joy.

Perhaps in these difficult times, we can put ourselves in the place of the shepherds: watchful; fearful of the dangers that surround us. May we this Christmas let the light and glory of the Lord into our lives and spread to all those we meet.

So, when we light the candle let us celebrate with joy and without fear, the birth of the Saviour, the Messiah, who was born, lived and died for us all.



15th December

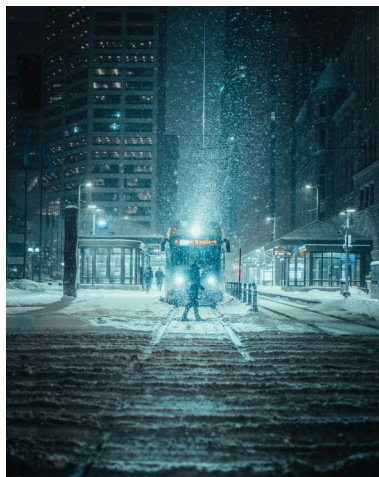
Joy to the World.

Reflection by Susan Howdle.

It was Christmas Eve 1984. We were spending a memorable year in Boston (USA).

We decided to go into the city from the suburb where we lived, for a Carol Service. We would travel in on the 'T' – a bit like the sort of tram that we keep being promised in Leeds! As we got on, it was pretty full, and it got fuller at every stop.

Crammed with people of all ages, nationalities, cultures, going into town for Christmas Eve.



Suddenly in one corner of the carriage somebody started singing softly, 'Joy to the World, the Lord is come'. Then somebody else joined in, 'Let earth receive her king'. And gradually one by one everybody started joining in until the whole carriage-full of people was singing. As we stopped at each stop and the doors opened, the people waiting looked baffled: 'What's going on in there?', then a smile would come over their faces and they would get in and join us. And we didn't stop at 'Joy to the World' – we went on singing other carols, and ended up with the Hallelujah Chorus! Of course it had to end when we all got off in town, and went our separate ways but all with joy and peace in our hearts that we could then spread to those around us. And all because one person dared to start singing, and another joined in.

And to me it was as if I was hearing the song the angels sang to the shepherds, echoing right down the years to that night in Boston. If I closed my eyes I could almost imagine that the people I was crammed into that carriage with were the angels singing glory to God and peace on earth. Heaven and earth were touching each other.

We won't be shepherds on hillsides, and we won't even – I trust – be crammed onto buses this Christmas. But may you and I, at some perhaps unexpected moment, hear that echo of angels and join in – or even start the singing, at least in our heart.

Shepherds

Reflection by Revd Helen White

Shepherds – I wonder what comes to mind when you think about shepherds. We might think of shepherds on quad bikes, accompanied by collies. Or perhaps Amanda and Clive and their large family, seen on Our Yorkshire Farm. There are the images from nursery rhymes (Little Bo Peep for example). We might think too of Jesus and his story of the lost sheep, or in John's Gospel where he says, I am the Good Shepherd.



Go back into the Old Testament, and the most famous shepherd is probably David – the shepherd boy who became king. He was also known for his harp playing and his psalms (as well as his adultery, many wives and sons). His harp playing was able to bring ease to King Saul, perhaps even joy? And what of his psalms? This week we lit the candle the shepherds for joy. Is that what we find in the shepherds of the Old Testament? Not always. David expressed sorrow, remorse, and pain, as well as worship, praise and joy. We can find all of that, and more, in the Psalms.

Have you ever noticed how some of the Psalms take us on a journey? In one psalm we can read of the grumbles and struggles of the psalmist, as well as of their faith and their joy. They express what they are feeling, and in doing so, find again the joy that comes from faith in God. It may well be that those psalms weren't all written on one occasion. They wrote down the hard stuff – how God seemed to be absent, and their enemies winning. And maybe some time later, came back to the psalm and finished it, once they had come again to realise God was there with them and there was cause for joy as well as sorrow.

What about us, in the midst of all we face now? There may well have been times when all we wanted to do was cry out to God and say, 'why?' 'How long, O Lord?' Can we, like King David and the other psalmists, notice the reasons for joy, the presence of God in our midst. Even as we prepare for a Christmas that will be different to what we're used to, can we still see Jesus, Immanuel, at the heart of it?

Shepherds in tea towels

Reflection by Revd Mark Stennett

Over the years, the nativity play has become quite popular. Whether a primary school or church Sunday school production, these recreations of the original nativity story can often be remarkably different (and one comedy festive film even includes a lobster!).

This year these humble offerings, if they are able to take place, are going to have to be even more creative, and if they are to go ahead, then they may involve Mary and Joseph on Zoom, or an angel on FaceTime.

But even with these latest limitations I'm always excited to see how the nativity story will be retold this year, and whilst I'm reminded of one of my early years in ministry or a supernumerary aghast that the Sunday school had included the '3 wise men' in the nativity (as that is technically Epiphany), I felt quite the opposite as I was just glad they were at least happy to be in church, exploring the well-loved Christmas story.

Was it accurate? No. Was it fun? Absolutely. Did it detract from the message of God's son? Absolutely not!

As we reflect on nativity plays old and new, I simply encourage us to reread the Christmas story, to reflect on which elements are important to our faith and other bits we're happy to let slide. You may even want to make a note of our own assumptions and characters before we reread the bible passages as we even find some surprises. Whether it's a nativity play or a reread of the original story, please have fun getting to know the true meaning of Christmas.



18th December

The unconquerable gift of joy

Reflection by Revd Tanya Short



Happiness is an emotion that can disappear as quickly as it rises to the surface. Joy however is a choice.

We have a choice. God gives us a joy that is unconquerable. We can choose to live in an attitude of resentment, anger and fear or we can choose to pursue the joy of Christ. So, what is the picture of joy in the Bible?

Joy is trusting when you want to doubt...

As Christ followers we aren't pressured to do it all for everyone. We trust in Jesus to do the heavy lifting. The key is trust. We just need to have Mary's response to the coming of Jesus.

Joy is receiving what you want to reject...

Can you imagine how the innkeeper would have felt if he had said to Mary and Joseph, 'Of course you can't stay in that stable! That's for paying customers. Who do you take me for?' We find joy in making room for people in need.

Joy is celebrating when you want to fear...

What's the first thing angels say to mortals? In just about every divine encounter they say: 'Fear not.'

The message is clear. God is not looking for ways to scare us into faith. He drew near to us to relieve the worries we have about crossing over the divide between heaven and earth.

He wants us to know that He's going to take care of us no matter what happens. One of the names that He was called long before he ever stepped on this world's stage was Immanuel meaning "God with us."

No matter what we go through we can whisper this simple truth: "Jesus is with me." Think about it. He is with us in our greatest victories and our most humiliating defeats. Jesus is with us at all times, in all things.

Why not today make a list of all the things that bring you joy?

Active Advent: Week Three

Our theme this week is Joy, and we reflect on the story of the Shepherds. The Shepherds left their hillside in sheer joy, racing to go and see Jesus.

•**Not too busy for joy.** If you find yourself busy at the moment, ask yourself what would bring you enough joy to make you put your busy-ness down. Is there something you get great happiness from, by yourself or with others, that you've maybe neglected recently? No time like the present- get on and do it! The trouble with busy-ness is that it will always be there. Find one or two things you can put down and do the thing that brings you joy.

•**Secret gifting.** Each year we depict the Shepherds as bringing a lamb to Jesus' cribside. We imagine, perhaps, the Shepherds offering whatever they had, whatever they could, to the infant Christ. This week, who can you secretly bless with a gift? You could make something, write something, buy something, donate something in that person's name, and all anonymously, offering what you can to promote the joy of another one of wonderful humans Jesus came to bring Good News to.



Baking with Becki

STENNETT COOKBOOK - LAMB CURRY

Glad tidings of comfort and joy are most welcome at any time of year. But the deep joy and comfort of the good news of Jesus' birth in the depths of winter is truly a great gift.

When shepherds in Palestine sat out on the hillsides watching twinkling silent stars in inky skies, I'm not too sure that the appearance of a throng of angels would have been an altogether comforting occasion!

But the news the angels sang to those despised people on the edge of society was such great joy, that their hearts were stirred and limbs warmed by a hearty race down into Bethlehem where their tiny Saviour lay.

Of course in thinking about the Shepherds we must have a lamb recipe, and one fit to comfort and fill the chilled bones and stomach of those keeping hillside vigil, and those of us who now enjoy a warming dish on a winter's night.

As you prepare this dish, perhaps you can take time to give thanks for those who strive in often difficult circumstances to ensure we have food. Perhaps you will pray for those around the world who are without food to sustain them, and reflect thankfully on all the comforts and joys we may have, even after a challenging year.

Lamb Curry

makes: enough for 4
(freezes well!)

Ingredients: root ginger
(thumb-sized chunk)

2 onions

4 garlic cloves

2 tbsp oil

1 cinnamon stick

1 tbsp ground coriander

1 tsp ground cumin

1 tsp ground turmeric

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp fennel seeds

750-800g diced lamb

400g chopped tomatoes

1 red chilli

small bunch fresh coriander



Method: Grate the ginger, chop the onions finely and crush the garlic. Add all of these and the oil to a deep pan and soften over a medium heat. When the onions are very soft, add the cinnamon stick and dried spices to the pan, along with the diced lamb. Stir constantly (adding a touch more oil if the meat begins to stick) until the lamb is browned. Tip in the chopped tomatoes, along with the same amount of water. Slice the chilli finely (deseeded if preferred), add to the pan, cover and simmer for one hour. After one hour, stir in the finely chopped stalks of the fresh coriander, cover the pan again and simmer for another 30 minutes, adding a little more water if needed. Finally, stir in the roughly chopped leaves of the fresh coriander, and serve with rice, mango chutney and raita!

20th December

Candle of the Angels for

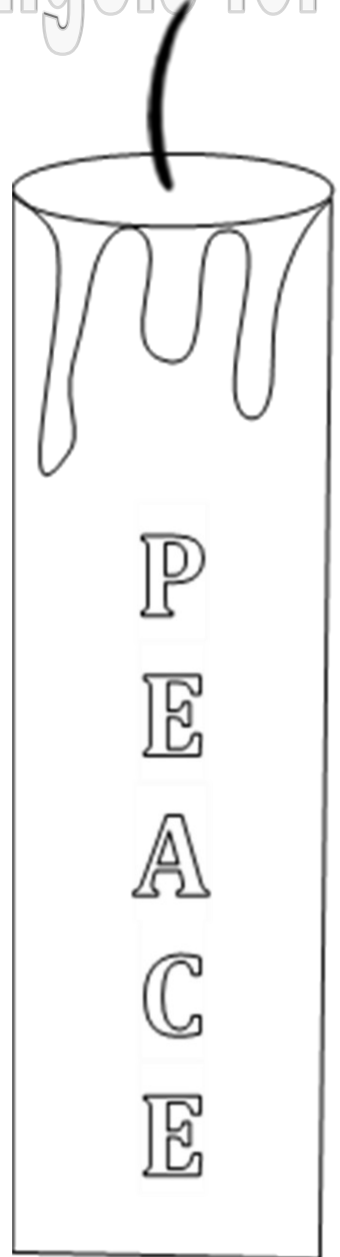
Isaiah 9:6-7 (NIV)


For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.

He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

Luke 2:13-14 (NRSV)

Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,
'Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom
he favours!'





light this candle as we remember the angels and the messages of peace. They have spoken to people through the ages, messages we still hear today.

Prayer

Father, this fourth week of Advent,
keep us in perfect peace
as our minds are stayed
on the truth of your powerful love.
Thank you for your mighty, sovereign hand.
Help us to trust fully in you
and rest in the peace that you offer.
It's in the precious name of Jesus we pray.
Amen.

Sing/read

He came down that we may have peace (x3)
Alleluia for evermore

21st December

Treasured Memories

Reflection by Anne Vautrey

Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. Luke 2:18.



I got my memory box out today. It was a beautiful polished oak when Joseph gave it to me before we were married, but now it shows signs of the years and the journeys it has made. We took it to Bethlehem with us carrying the swaddling bands and perfumed ointment my mother gave me for the birth. I used it later to store the gifts from those venerable guests from the east when we fled into Egypt. There's just one piece of gold in the box now, with the containers which held the frankincense and myrrh- long used but the fragrance lingers, permeating the wood. I've stored small mementoes of my firstborn's life in there.

But today as so often when I'm troubled I reach for that small piece of unfinished embroidery, tucked away in the corner. I've never been very good at that type of work, and this was my first attempt, a very simple square I was trying to make into a handkerchief for Joseph. We had just become engaged and I wanted to give him a gift. I was sat by the open window to catch the best of the afternoon light when the angel came. It was so unexpected and I pricked my finger with the needle. The angel's words were such a shock, my head was spinning- me pregnant, and my child would be so special. Yet in all that the angel radiated a peace and serenity. There was a calmness in their presence. A stillness, a peacefulness overcame me as I bowed my head, acknowledged the presence of the angel and said yes. Joseph never received that handkerchief, but over the years I've held it in my hands to bring me to a place of peace, to recall the presence of the angel and those words: for nothing will be impossible with God. Luke 1:37.

The Angel and Zechariah

Reflection by Revd Helen White

In this week's Advent liturgy, we lit the candle of the angels for peace, but are they really bringers of peace? I'm not sure some of those who encountered them in the Bible would have said so – at least not at the time. As we travel through this week, look at what they say to those they visit, and the response they get...



The angels had a busy time of it in the first couple of chapters of Luke's gospel. Zechariah was the first port of call. I sometimes wonder what it was like, to be visited by an angel. I think it must have been pretty scary. Have you noticed how often an angel begins by saying, 'Fear not...'? Zechariah is busy going about his usual role, even if he is honoured by being the one chosen to enter the sanctuary and offer incense. He is surprised by the angel – at least I assume he must have been. Even when we go into the church for worship, we don't expect to see an angel, do we?

Anyway, there's Zechariah, doing what he's supposed to, and he's given unexpected news. Unsurprisingly, he's struck dumb. I know we lit the candle of the angels for peace – but I doubt we'd got that kind of peace in mind – the quiet that comes when someone can't talk. Elizabeth may have found it peaceful, with Zechariah not talking. Equally she may have found it frustrating. Or, when she discovered she was pregnant, then later met Mary, did she manage to join all the dots, and realise what was going on, see God's hand in it all?

The candle of the angel for peace – a peace that's not about the absence of noise, or struggle, or pain – at least in the immediate. It's a peace that settles deep within, that only God can give. As the Prince of Peace would later say, 'My peace I give to you...'

Her life turned upside down: The angel visits Mary. Reflection by Paul Coleman

Based on Luke 1:26-38 (The Passion Translation)

The visit of the angel to Mary must have been an extraordinary event. I am often surprised that Mary is more troubled over the 'words of the angel' than by the fact that an angel has visited her in the first place. Yet it is perhaps no surprise that she was troubled by this message. Everything about it promised to upset the plans she had for her life, plans to marry and start a family with Joseph. It certainly would not have been an easy life but compared to what was promised by the angel it was simple and predictable. The visit of the angel turned all of this upside down.

When reading the Bible, it is perhaps easy to think of angelic visitations as quite a common occurrence, yet this is obviously not true. Mary would have known that a visit by an angel was always a monumental and life changing occasion. It would have been clear to her that her life was about to become a lot more challenging and eventful. Yet her first question is simply ... "how could this happen?" Following an (all too brief) explanation and having been told of Elizabeth's pregnancy, Mary responded in faith. "This is amazing! I will be a mother for the Lord! As his servant, I accept whatever he has for me. May everything you have told me come to pass." Having just been told that her whole life was to be turned upside down, Mary appears to have been strangely at peace with everything she had been told.

Many of us will likely never get that angelic visitation, yet simply accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour brings us that same monumental promise. Not the promise of a simple predictable life, but of one that will be forever changed. When Mary accepted that promise she had little idea of how radically different her life would be, or that she would be forced to watch as her son was put to death. Yet she had peace because she trusted in the promise of God, for whom nothing is impossible.



Joseph's Dream

Reflection by Revd Tanya Short



You're a faithful man, Joseph. You trust in the Lord. You like things to be clean and in the right order. But things don't always turn out that way. Mary's pregnant, and not by you. The woman you love. The shame, the scandal.

You busy yourself in the day. You throw yourself into your work. You shut out the dark thoughts, the chaos. If you didn't have your work and your religion, your life would be utterly torn apart. You only find some rest in sleep, but then out come all your buried feelings - that is when I, an angel of the Lord, appear to you in a dream.

Today you've decided to do the decent thing. You won't subject her to public shame. You'll break the engagement quietly. But what if God has another plan? What if Mary, as you know deep inside, is as straight and true as one of your pieces of wood? My message from God is this. Don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife. Her baby wasn't conceived in her by any man, but by the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son who will save people from their sins. Trust God and not your reason.

I feel your relief and joy. God knows how much you love Mary and want to be a father. This is his gift to you. But I sense a new fear. Are you fit for this responsibility? Sometimes God calls people to do great works on the public stage or in their local community, often out of nowhere. But God's role for you is to be a quiet man, your birth and life and death, and almost everything about you, unknown; your work hidden; and you will never see his ministry and destiny. You will simply bring this child up as you would any other. When you feel inadequate to the task, trust this child to be your saviour. For this child will never sin.

When you wake, and test this dream, ask Mary to confirm the name I give you for this child: it is Jesus.

Why did God choose this way? Why should a scandal surround his birth? Why come to this backward corner and not some great capital of civilisation? Why should God become a baby in his mother's womb? These are mysteries angels long to peer into, but the wisest choose not to inquire. Trust God, Joseph, you'll do well. He's given you a gift the whole world would long for.

Christmas Eve

A Prayer for the Evening

For this short time of prayer in the evening, you'll need a candle and something to light it with, a drink of your choosing, and a Bible.

Lighting the candle, pray:

God who knit me together in my mother's womb, you know my inmost feelings.

You know how I have travelled to this evening, the burdens I bear, the hopes I hardly dare to articulate.

In sorrow and in joy, you are the light in the darkness of the world.

Taking a sip of a drink, pray:

God who stepped into human existence, you know my every need.

You know too well that sometimes my needs and those of other humans go unmet. Remind me of all I have, and all that you can offer to us in times of plenty and emptiness.

Opening the Bible at John 1, pray:

God who calls us on to all things new and very very old, you have heard my anxieties that Christmas will be different this year.

Remind me that whether or not we have tinsel and choirs, your goodness to us in Christ is unchanging, as is your faithfulness to me tonight and every night.

In the beginning was the Word through which all things became possible. Help me to hear, own and share that Word, knowing that in You all things are possible because of your immeasurable love. May that truth bring me joy this Christmas.

Amen.



Baking with Becki

STENNETT COOKBOOK- SLIGHTLY SPICED STARS

Throughout the biblical accounts of the coming of Christ, angels have a very distinctive role to play. Sometimes they're declaring the wonders of God and the great news of Jesus coming, sometimes sharing warnings in quieter moments.

What's clear, though, is that the angels are not simply bystanders. They're not like some celestial observers in this story: they get involved, and they *share* with humans the generous, compassionate, radical words of heaven.

Peace may be something we strive for in our own lives, but it's lasting impacts are only felt when peace is shared, when we work together to make and maintain peace.

This week, I want to share with you the recipe for these slightly spiced stars. But these aren't just for you! These are for you to make and share, heralding the good news of heaven sharing with earth it's most precious Son, with a simple baked treat.

There is no separate activity for this week- only the challenge to bake and share these scrummy stars!

Slightly Spiced Stars

makes: 12-15 stars

Ingredients: 200g Plain flour
(220g if gluten free)
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp Bicarbonate of soda
Pinch of salt
 $2\frac{1}{2}$ tsp ground ginger
1 tsp mixed spice
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp cinnamon
75g soft brown sugar
75g butter/margarine
3tbsp golden syrup
(or $2\frac{1}{2}$ tbsp agave nectar)



Method: Preheat the oven to fan 150°C , conventional 170°C or gas 3. Line a baking tray with greaseproof paper. Sift together the flour, bicarb, salt and spices. Warm the sugar, fat, and syrup together in a saucepan over a low heat. When the fat has melted and sugar dissolved, add the warmed mixture to the dry ingredients. Mix well and knead to form a smooth dough. Roll out to a thickness of about 2.5 mm, and use a cutter to cut stars out of the dough. Bake for about 10 minutes, then allow to cool. These are yummy left plain, but why not mix some satsuma juice into some icing sugar for some festive topping!

25th December

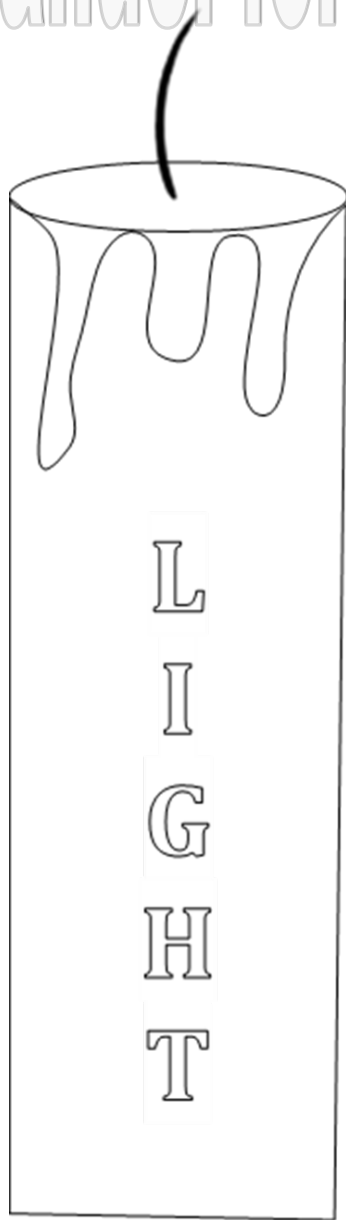
Candle of Immanuel for


John 1:1-9, 14 (NRSV)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.





light this candle as we remember the birth of Jesus, Immanuel, God with us, the Light of God coming into the world.

Prayer

Great God of love and light,
we thank you now for the light of that special
star over two thousand years ago
that guided humble shepherds
and learned wise men
to the holy babe.

Lead us now, by the light of your love,
that we also may follow you to new life in him.
In celebration of the birthday of our King
and our Saviour, Jesus Christ, we pray.
Amen.

Sing/read

He came down that we may have Light (x3)
Alleluia for evermore

Christmas Day Prayer

Jesus,
take the tinsel, the trimmings, the turkey,
take the joy of all we have and the sorrow of what we're missing,
take the preparations we have made and the anticipation that has
built and
today
this day
take all our living and loving as our offering to you.
You have given us all life, all love, all hope
and now we kneel at your manger and marvel at the danger
into which you stepped
for us.
Just us.

Jesus,
bring us joy today,
bring comfort, hope, peace and love,
bring yourself to the centre of our day
today
this day
every day

that whether we have all we want, or we're left wanting for all we have not,
we may remember again as the moments tick past
that your presence is the present that will always last,
the gift of our God, Creator, King.

Jesus,
make today about you,
make our lives about you,
make our words and our thoughts and our actions about you
today
this day
every day
forever
that we may always share the joy
of you, the tiny infant boy,
who has changed the world forever
today.



Christmas

Reflection by Revd Edward Sakwe

Reading: John 1: 1-14



The Christmas story is by far the greatest story the world has ever known. God loved the world so much that He sent His only Son to earth in order to show us the right way to live.

In the Gospel according to John, this miracle is described in just a few words – “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14 - NIV). I like the paraphrase of this verse in the Message Bible: “The Word became flesh and blood, moved into our neighbourhood.”

Christ has come among us to show us who God is and what God is. Jesus shows us God in a way we can understand – in a way that gives us hope. Jesus became a man to feel our hurt. He identified with our pain. The pain of loneliness, he felt it. The hurt of rejection, he felt it. The sadness of losing a loved one to death, he felt it. The scars of mental or physical abuse, he felt it. He was called names. He was blackmailed. He was accused.

When Jesus became a man, he understood us. He identified with us. He felt our pain and hurts. Whatever your difficulties, nothing can spoil our relationship with Jesus Christ or our hope in Him.

Christmas is a reminder of all He Has done for us. Stay focused on Jesus and look out for ways to share His blessing with others.

As we continue to adapt to our coronavirus altered world, you may find yourself facing seemingly insurmountable trials or feeling anxious and overwhelmed about what the days and months ahead may hold. No matter what you are going through, He can be trusted and He loves you best.

Prayer

Almighty God, who has poured upon us the new light of your incarnate word; Grant that the same light enkindled in our hearts may shine forth in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Psalm for Christmas 2020

Come, let us celebrate the birth of Jesus;
Online, in person, with music and dance,
words and actions, joy and laughter.
Visible, human child, divine Son of God,
you bring hope to the world.
Invisible, awesome God, devoted Father,
you share our delight and pleasure.
Daily we offer you our thanks and praise
for your steadfast grace and compassion.
Nothing can separate us from the wonderful gift
of your everlasting love.

Karen Illingworth
December 2020

Wearing A Crown

They came from the east wearing crowns,
Wise men in finest robes and gowns.
They studied the stars, twinkling and bright,
Millions of light years away in the dark night,
An unusually large and bright star they saw,
Filling them with excitement, wonder and awe,
Following on camels through lands and time,
To where it shone down, with a king to find!
Meeting king Herod to find out some news,
Sent to search further, with bittersweet views,
Found a stable where cattle stay,
A pure, innocent baby in a manger lay.
Love and gifts given him were fit for a king,
The love of God radiating from him.
Here is the one who wears the crown,
High on the cross as he looks down,
Giving forgiveness to those he can see,
Forgiveness and love for all, for you and for me.

Sharon Walker

Travelling Wise Men (Epiphany)

We often forget about the Christmas season after Christmas Day. Last year I decided to honour this special time and evolved the travelling nativity into the wise men coming to see the baby Jesus. Adding a star above the stable and putting out 12 steps to it. I used wooden table numbers, but this can easily be done with pebbles, stones or an alternative again (I didn't have 24 numbers for advent haha). Place the wise men at the furthest from Mary, Joseph and Jesus. You can either take one away a day, or with using the wooden circles we put the wise men on the relevant day as we counted down. We also kept a gift back for Esther to receive on Epiphany (6 January), like the wise men took for Jesus.



New Year

Reflection by Revd Dr George Bailey



Do you know the one about the man with many noses? This is a New Year tale that was passed to me by my father from his family memories, and then I in turn confused my young children with it. Such is the turning of the years that they are now old enough to greet this annual ritual with their special withering look reserved for Dad's bad jokes. Maybe one day they will pass it on to the next generation? Here goes...

There is a man with as many noses as there are days in the year. Most days he hides away from public view, but on New Year's Eve he comes out, and you should not miss this special annual opportunity to go and look for him on the town hall steps...

The numbering of the days is a fairly arbitrary quirk of history, and we could each pick any day to do a review of the year just passed, and look ahead to the year coming. However, there is power and wisdom in taking stock together as a community. The early Methodist people developed a ritual gathering for New Year called the 'watchnight' which some churches still celebrate – staying up late together, or even all night, to pray, sing and read the Bible. This year, New Year gatherings will be limited. I hope this booklet can give you an experience of looking forward and looking back together with many friends from the churches across North and East Leeds – lots of people are reading this today; some you know, and some are new friends waiting to be made... maybe this year? There has been much to think about in 2020, and we pray together that in 2021 our Advent reflections on hope, faith, joy, peace and light might become tangible fruit in our homes, workplaces and communities.

We do not just gather together, but also before God. We hold out to God the person we have been in the year just gone and we seek God's will for our lives – for tomorrow and into the year coming. You may not be able to sit on the town hall steps with the man who has as many noses as the days in the year, but perhaps make a point of coming out of the shadows of your yesterday and let God find you, sit beside you and turn your gaze to the future.

A Prayer for Epiphany

We have wandered, Abba, and we have wondered:

We are wandering and wondering yet.

As the Magi, compelled to follow the signs you gave,
yet not knowing exactly what they would find,
give me the courage to learn from the journeying with you,
not distracted when I don't know exactly where you're taking me.

In my wandering and wondering, be the Star guiding me on.

In my journeying with you, keep my footing sure.

Grant me companions on the road who will encourage and spur me on.

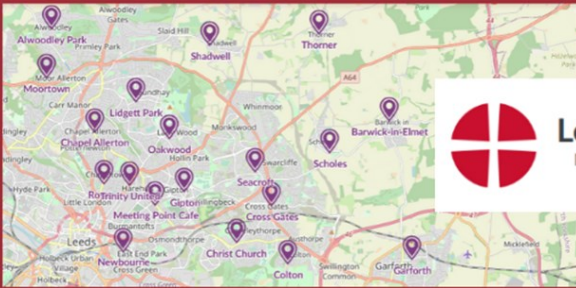
Grant me a hunger to keep on seeking you through uncertainty and peril.

Grant me wisdom to know only you are the true King.

And give me the deep peace of knowing that all I am is all you require, to
offer only all of me as gift as I kneel before you.

Amen.





Leeds (North & East)
METHODIST CIRCUIT



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