



December 2015/January 2016

Greetings

Just about the time Americans have devoured the last Thanksgiving turkey left-overs, sad-faced TV newscasters tell them that it "looks like a bad Christmas" this year. What they mean is that sales in retail shops may be down during the upcoming shopping season. And that makes for "A Bad Christmas".

We understand why this is news. Many companies need a year-end consumer spending frenzy to stay afloat financially. Yet there is something in me that doesn't like people talking about a "bad" Christmas, even when if it is only referring to poor sales figures. How can the celebration of the birth of the Messiah, the Saviour of the world, ever be bad?

Let's look at that familiar story again. In the months before Jesus was

born, Mary ventured to a nearby town to visit her relative Elizabeth who was also expecting a child. As soon as Mary spoke, the baby in Elizabeth's womb leapt for joy (Luke 1:44). There was excitement in the air for those who knew the true identity of Mary's baby.

Let's recapture that joyous by refocusing our attention on the event we celebrate, rather than the celebration of the event. It is the birth of Jesus we are honouring, and that always makes for a GOOD Christmas.

*Beyond all else the day should be
A day of holiest memory
When all the world should joyfully
See Christ the Lord in Christmas.*

We love Christmas and all that it means to us, as

our Lord God sent His only Son to this earth for our salvation. We rejoice together at this special time here in our Christian family, Christian fellowship is so sweet and is precious to us. When one is happy we are all happy and when one hurts we all hurt; so I pray for you my dear friends this Christmas, whatever your condition that God will bless you real good every day. I wish you a blessed and happy Christmas and then as we approach another year, that it may be a year of service and love for Our Lord Jesus Christ and each other.

God Bless you.

Ron Percival

Inside this issue

Greetings	1
Visiting Preachers	2
What's On	2
Focus	2-3
Special Events	4
Prayer Requests	4
David's Dialogue	4-5
Additional Notices	5
The Final Word	6
Christmas Word Puzzle	7

Special points of interest:

- *Christmas Service details*
- *A message about a message*
- *The poor preacher*
- *A Christmas puzzle challenge*
- *Party time!*

Visiting Preachers

The preachers for our services are:

December

6th am—Mr.D.McDonald

6th pm— Mr.A.Hunter #

13th am— Mr.R.Povey

13th pm— Mr.J.Tobiasen

20th am— Mr.D.McDonald #

20th pm— Mr.D.McDonald

27th am— Mr.R.Peers

27th pm— To be confirmed

The plan for 2016 is not yet published so the details of the speakers in January are not yet known.

Morning services start at 10.45, evening services at 6.00

Services marked # are sacramental services

The 20th December will be the day of our carol services. And there will be an additional service at 10am on Christmas day morning.

What's On

Our regular meetings (all in the church's schoolroom unless otherwise stated) consist of:

Prayer Meeting & Bible Study—Wednesday evening 7.30 onwards with the Bible Study starting at approximately 8.15.

Boomerang (for school-age kids) & crèche (for little ones)—Runs as part of the Sunday morning service from 10.45 onwards till approximately 12 noon. This facility

is provided on an as required basis.

Men's Fellowship—The meeting is usually held on the third Tuesday of each month, 7.30pm. However there is no meeting in December other than the annual Christmas hot pot supper with special guest speaker. Please let Lester Atherton know if you intend joining us.

Women's Auxiliary— The WA usually meet each week on Thursdays at 2.30pm. In

December there will be no meetings other than the annual Christmas lunch on Thursday 7th December.

The meetings in January will be used as choir practices for Women's Sunday.

Focus

A couple of months ago I took the evening service and as an introduction I spoke about the Newsletter and how many times it must have been published over the years: how many articles I must have written, how many greetings Ron must have penned, how many times Lorna must have e-mailed Ron's articles to me. I mentioned that I had no idea how many times the Newsletter had actually been issued although I

thought it might have been going for 15 years or so.

As it happened, a couple of weeks later Anne and I spent an afternoon clearing out the loft and in a box of forgotten stuff at the back of a cupboard I found a collection of old computer discs upon which were stored all the old Newsletters. So I checked through them and it appears that the first one was issued in November 1999. As you may remember, for

the first few years, the Newsletter was issued on a monthly basis, and then it switched to every other month. So as the first one was issued on November '99 and we switched to publishing them every other month in the middle of 2004, that means that in December 2015 when you receive this edition, we will have been issuing the Newsletter for sixteen years and this Newsletter that you are reading right now is the one hundred and

seventeenth edition.

And whilst this is the December issue, it is worth saying that this is the 17th time we will have had a Newsletter which includes a Christmas message. And every year, I start to wonder what I could say this year that might be different from other years, how I could look at the story in a different way, and it occurred to me that there was no need to do that – this is the most wonderful story, It needs no embellishment or special viewpoint, no analysis or exposition—it is simply this: the wonderful opening chapter in the greatest story ever told.

It is a story so familiar to us, and even to those who perhaps never attend a church it is likely that they will be able to recall the details of those events because it is told in all sorts of different ways—from Nativity Plays in primary schools, through the singing of Christmas carols—and even if the details of fact and fiction are blurred sometimes (I have seen children’s Nativity plays which introduced space aliens and fairy-tale characters to the stable scene), the basic story is known to almost everyone.

And it is, of course, a story of great simplicity and beauty—the most simple, natural and believable elements: the journey to a city, the struggle to find accommodation, the kindness of a stranger, the birth of a baby—as well as a story of supernatural wonder and fantastic events—the messages to the shepherds, the choir of angels, the star in the east that brought the wise men in search of a new-born king.

And I think that is why this story captures our imagination and stirs our spirits in the way that it does,

On a human level we can sympathise with the family – vulnerable, far from home, in desperate need and we can celebrate with them in the joy of the new-born child. And on a spiritual level we can but gaze on in wonder at the bigger picture—the Son of the Most High God brought to this earth in the form of a tiny helpless child, heralded by a heavenly host of angels, protected by the sheltering arms of the Father from the evil intentions of Herod and his murderous forces.

It is a simple story, beautifully told, and for that reason, I will offer no more comment but allow those wonderful words to speak for themselves:

Luke chapter 2, verse 1

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. ² (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) ³ And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judæa, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) ⁵ to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

⁶ And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. ⁷ And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

⁸ And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And, lo, the angel

of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. ¹⁰ And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this *shall be* a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, ¹⁴ Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

¹⁵ And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. ¹⁶ And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they had seen *it*, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all they that heard *it* wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. ¹⁹ But Mary kept all these things, and pondered *them* in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

I wish you every blessing this Christmas time.

Special Events

Christmas Services —our Christmas Carol services will be on Sunday 20th December. The speaker at both of these services will be David McDonald. The morning service will be the Family Carol Service and the children of the Sunday School will be taking part. And the evening will be the Candle-lit carol-service

In addition there will be a service on Christmas morning (Friday 25th December) starting at 10.00am. The Service will be lead by David. If you wish to take part in any way please let David know.

Party time—Our Annual Church Party will be held on Saturday 9th January at 5.00pm. If you wish to attend, please put your name on the list in the porch so we know how many to cater for.

Please advertise these services amongst friends and family.

Prayer Requests

Your prayers are requested for the various members of our congregation and wider community who are ill and infirm, suffering loss and bereavement, or struggling with hard-

ship at the moment.

A reminder too that the charities and groups that we support — Warrington Food Bank, Barnabus, NorthEast Help-Link, Warrington Youth For

Christ and its work at our local high school—all need our on-going prayerful and financial support.

David's Dialogue—A Messenger Doesn't Always Have To Travel Far

LUKE 1 Verses 30 – 35 & 38.

But the Angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his Father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be?" Mary asked the Angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The Angel answered, "The Holy

Spirit will come upon you, and the power of The Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called; the Son of God."

"I am the Lord's servant" Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

Mary is a pretty central character in the Christmas story.

Obviously Jesus bagged the starring role. But Mary's definitely a close second. The obedient young girl who calmly and humbly accepted the imponderably huge

task of bearing God's Son. Epic stuff.

But you know what? Mary's task isn't as far from our own reality as we might think.

I don't want to lessen the significance of Mary's role, but we need to look again at the do – ability of her task. What her angelic visitor asked of her was quite straightforward: "You will conceive and give birth to a son." Clearly that had some fairly awesome follow-on effects – Jesus would sit on the "throne of his Father David" and "reign over Jacob's descendants for ever" and "his kingdom will

never end” ut those were all things that God was going to bring about. Mary was simply asked to go through nine months of pregnancy, give birth to a child and raise that child until he became an adult.

It’s wonderfully conventional really. Approximately 50% of the worlds population is capable of doing what Mary did. Millions of women (and men when it gets to the parenting bit) are doing it right now.

Don’t get me wrong – I’ve watched enough friends with children become sleep-deprived

zombies and heard enough shudder-inducing labour stories to appreciate that having a child is no walk in the park! I’m not saying Mary’s task was easy, but it was ordinary. It was within her comfort zone. She was about to get married to Joseph and, given the culture of the time, she would have been expecting to bear children. Indeed, after Jesus she had several more.

We imagine God prefers to work through grand gestures, but we mustn’t overlook the ways we can be messengers in the ordinary things of life – the work-

place relationships, the conversations with our neighbour, where ever we meet socially with friends. In God’s extraordinary hands, every ordinary thing we do for him has significance.

Of course there will be times when we need to take an uncomfortable step outside our comfort zone or speak up when we’d rather stay quiet. But most of the time I think God is simply asking us to look around, to see the landscape we’re in and the people travelling with us, and to deliver his gospel message right where we are.

Additional Notices

Jack Boote - we bring the sad news of Jack’s recent passing. Jack has been a faithful member of our congregation and a founding member and stalwart of our Men’s Fellowship for many years. So we are sorry to hear that Jack has passed on after a few years of failing health and we offer our prayers and sympathies to Jack’s friends and family. Jack’s funeral will be held at our church on December 7th with cremation to follow at Walton Lea.

Monthly Collection—our collection this month is for Barnabus, tinned food, clothing and toiletries will be gratefully accepted. But please check the weekly no-

tices for information on specific items which may be required. Donated items can be left in the boxes provided at the back of the chapel.

Thank you— first of all many thanks to all those who assisted with the preparation and installation of the new carpet in the church—it was an operation planned with military precision and (almost) ran like clockwork.

And a second thank you to Ewan for his efforts in pumping out the cellar, and to David for organising the pump hire. There are countless jobs done all year round to keep our church well-maintained and more often than not the work that goes in to that goes un-noticed. It

is greatly appreciated nonetheless,

Newsletter—please send contributions for the Newsletter to James. We are always short of suitable articles—photos, jokes, poems, recipes, anything within reason will do and whatever they are, we can use them. Your contribution will help make this Newsletter a happier and fuller place. Items sent by e-mail are best as they are easiest to copy into the Newsletter, but handwritten articles are just as welcome. Please help out!

We wish Lester a speedy recovery from his operation

The Final Word

Many thanks to the various contributors this month:

The Shopping Trip

A man and his wife went on a trip to their nearest big city for a Christmas shopping trip. They had not been there for a few years but soon found their way around and recognised many of the bigger shops and landmarks. After the first couple of hours they decided that they would get more done if they split up and then met up again a little later. So they went off in different directions. Some while later the wife had more or less finished her shopping and decided to ring the husband to see if he was ready to meet up again. So she called his mobile phone.

"Hello, love, I just wanted to see what you'd been up to and where you were"

"Well" replied the husband "do you remember the last time we came here?"

"Yes" said the wife.

"Well do you remember that we went into a jeweller's shop and you really liked a diamond necklace that you saw, and how you said you'd really like one of those for Christmas one day?"

"Yes" said the wife, filing up with tears, overwhelmed with emotion that her husband had remembered her special wish after all these years...

"Fantastic" he said, "Do you remember where that jeweller's shop is?"

"Yes" she said.

"Good—because I'm in the pub next door to that."

Charity Begins at Church

After the church service, an eight year old boy said to the preacher: "When I grow up, I'm going to give you some money."

"Well, thank you," the preacher replied, "but why?"

"Because my daddy says that you're the poorest preacher he's ever had."

Early Bird

It was coming up to Christmas and the Judge was in a jolly frame of mind.

"Now then, please tell me, what is the charge against you?"

"I was caught doing my Christmas shopping very early." replied the man in the dock.

"That doesn't seem like an offence to me. What do you mean by 'very early'?"

"Well, your Honour." said the defendant, "It was before the shop was open."

The Sunday School teacher

A Sunday School teacher was taking her class and was describing that when Lot's wife looked back at Sodom she turned into a pillar of salt.

A little girl in the class interrupted.

"My mummy looked back once while she was driving," she announced, "and she turned into a post box."

The Argument

At a monastery high in the mountains, the monks have a rigid vow of silence. Only at Christmas, and only by one monk, and only with one sentence, is the vow allowed to be broken.

One Christmas, it was Brother Thomas's turn to speak and he stood up and announced, "I like the mashed potatoes we have with the Christmas turkey!" and he sat down. Silence ensued for 365 days.

The next Christmas, Brother Michael got his turn, and he said "Well I think the mashed potatoes are lumpy and I really don't like them!" Once again, silence for another year.

The following Christmas, Brother Paul got to his feet and declared, "I am fed up with this constant bickering from you two!"

CONTACT DETAILS

**RISLEY INDEPENDENT
METHODIST CHURCH**

Fearnhead Lane
Fearnhead
Warrington
Cheshire
WA2 0BQ

Telephone 01925 825956
E-mail risleyimchurch@yahoo.co.uk

Newsletter Contact Details

Editor: James Tobiasen
Telephone 01925 267158
E-mail postcardcat@gmail.com

Next Newsletter:
June/July

To be published as near to the first
weekend in June as possible.
Articles and contributions by the last
Friday in May please.