

Advent and Christmas 2023

# Contact

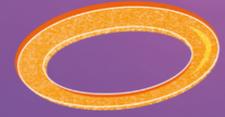
*The Magazine of South Essex Methodist Circuit*



Sharing the 'good news' that is happening across the circuit and in our local communities.



# Out of the Ordinary



## Advent and Christmas 2023 resources

Out of our ordinary acts, in our ordinary lives, the world-transforming, extraordinary love of God can shine through.

Check out Advent and Christmas Resources to help you take some time in a really busy time of the year to reflect and engage meaningfully with Advent and Christmas from the Methodist Church. These resources are intended to help you engage with the Methodist Church's Advent and Christmas campaign for 2023, *Out of the Ordinary*, and reach your local community at a key moment in the year. You can access the resources here: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/advent-and-christmas-resources/>.

**Out of the Ordinary**

Scratch beneath the surface this Christmas

The Methodist Church

methodist.org.uk/OutOfTheOrdinary

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### Weekly Advent Readings

**Week One:** Letting stuff Go  
Isaiah 64.1-9; Mark 13.24-37

**Week Two:** Changing your mind  
Isaiah 40: 1-10; Mark 1-8

**Week Three:** Pointing to the light  
Isaiah 61.1-4, 8-11; John 1.6-8, 19-28

**Week Four:** Speech bubbles  
2 Samuel 7.1-11, 16; Luke 1.26-38

**Christmas Day:** God in us  
Isaiah 9.2-7; Luke 2.1-14

**Christmas One:** God in other people  
Isaiah 61.10-62.3; Luke 2.22-40



## Call for Advent Candle to Remain Unlit for Peace

To remember all those who have died in the Israel/Palestine conflict, Methodist churches across the country are being called upon to leave their second Advent candle unlit this year.

The call not to light the candle, which represents peace, on the second Sunday in Advent (10 December) and on subsequent Sundays, follows the news that celebrations to mark Christmas in the Holy Land will be subdued this year.

The Revd David Hardman, Methodist Liaison Officer, Jerusalem, is currently fulfilling his role from the UK and remains in touch with those living in the Middle East. David explained, "Our Christian colleagues in Bethlehem tell us that this Advent and Christmas the lights that normally adorn the birth place of Jesus will remain unlit in memory of those who have been killed in the current conflict. We are inviting Methodist churches in Britain to leave the second candle of Advent unlit to serve as a reminder that we stand in solidarity with all who are suffering in the Holy Land."

The President of the Methodist Conference, the Revd Gill Newton, commented, "The events of over 2000 years ago and of now, remind us that sadly, nothing much has changed. We are still caught up in conflict and challenge, fear and uncertainty. This Advent, to stand with Palestinian Christians, we invite Methodist Churches to leave the Advent candle on the Second Sunday unlit and for it to remain unlit throughout advent."

"God is still present even in the most difficult places, and in the midst of violent conflict so many people are wishing for and seeking peace!"

Churches who participate are invited to take a photo of their Advent Ring on Christmas Day with the second candle unlit to be shared with local church communities in the Holy Land.

On Christmas Day churches are invited to take a photo of their Advent Ring with the second candle unlit and send it to [office@mlojerusalem.org](mailto:office@mlojerusalem.org). The staff at the Methodist Liaison Office will forward pictures to local church communities in the Holy Land.

# Prayer for Humanity

Revd Felicity Al-Hassan

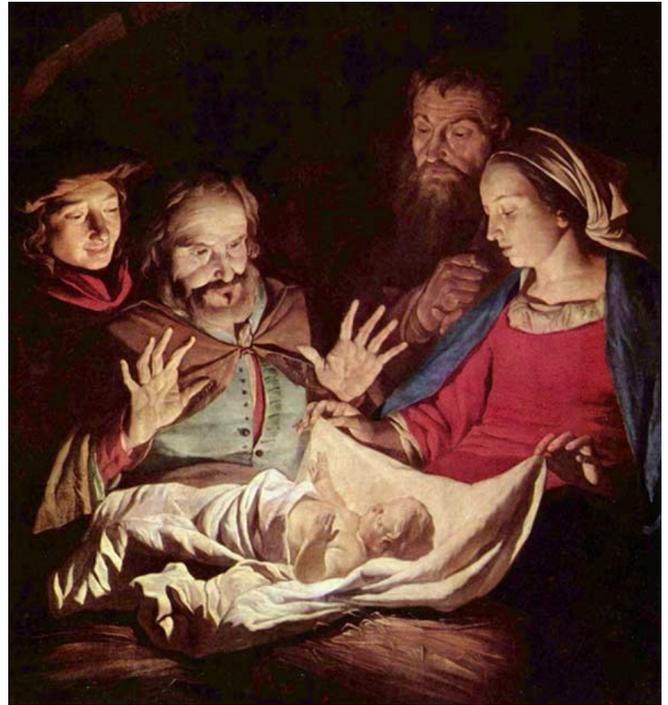
Dear Friends,

Like many others in the world today you might share this feeling that the world is precariously tilted in these times and that we are in danger of losing the very substance that holds together human co-existence. That the practice of dialogue, negotiation, recognition and respect of a common humanity - perhaps something that was always at its best, aspirational – is in a losing position, giving way to an unrestrained, polarized, uncompromising and uncaring stances that divides and denigrates humanity according to the side we most align with.

It recalls to my mind the expression, “may you live in interesting times.” At first hearing this sounds almost like a well-intentioned bidding yet the more you dwell on it, the more sinister meanings emerge from it. Living in ‘interesting’ times often describes times of uncertainty, chaos, brokenness – an unconstructive even destructive time. It is how I feel about these times we’re living in. The Russia-Ukraine war, still ongoing after 21 months; and now the implosion of Gaza with the daily massacre of Palestinian civilians in the Israeli objective to exterminate the terrorists they feel pose a dangerous threat to their safety; as well as the many heartrending violations against humanity in many other parts of the world which for one reason or the other, fail to make headline news.

I take great consolation from that final prayer of Jesus for the protection of his disciples, where as recorded in St John’s gospel, chapter 17: 15-19, Jesus says: “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.”

In November, we remembered the saints of old in our celebrations of All Saints. Recalling inspiring aspects of their lives which enabled them, in spite of what I imagine would be often knee-trembling moments, to be fully conscious of their vulnerability and yet filled with determination to hold onto and fulfil their calling to be justice-seekers, truth-tellers, bearers of light in the darkness, proclaimers of the hope they held in the one who promises and is faithful, pressed on in faith. Many



Gerard van Honthorst: *The Adoration of the Shepherds*, painted between 1625 and 1650

ended up killed for their faith but thankfully there were also many who lived to tell the tale. They have left us with footprints that we too might follow their example.

Often it feels misplaced to bring world events into the hallowed spaces of faith, and yet as the saints of old inspired by their Lord, and ours, remind us, we also must respond to our dual call in our identity as followers of Jesus as well our response to his call to mission. What we do not have is the option of turning a blind eye to the events of the world, like the 3 monkeys, who ‘see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil’, instead by Jesus own example, and holding on to the promise we are given, we must seek to go against popular sentiments if these are not God honouring nor loving to ourselves and our neighbour; to be bringers of light into the darkness; practitioners of compassion; truth-speakers and justice seekers committed to a life which shows a reverence for all of creation, men and women created in the image of God and the good of all the works of his creation.

I dwell on the inspirational advice conveyed in the words of Rudyard Kipling’s beautiful poem, ‘IF’ (wishing only that it wasn’t so gender-centred!)

“.... If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,  
Or walk with Kings - nor lose the common touch,  
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,  
If all men count with you, but none too much;

If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,  
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,  
And - which is more - you'll be a Man, my son!”

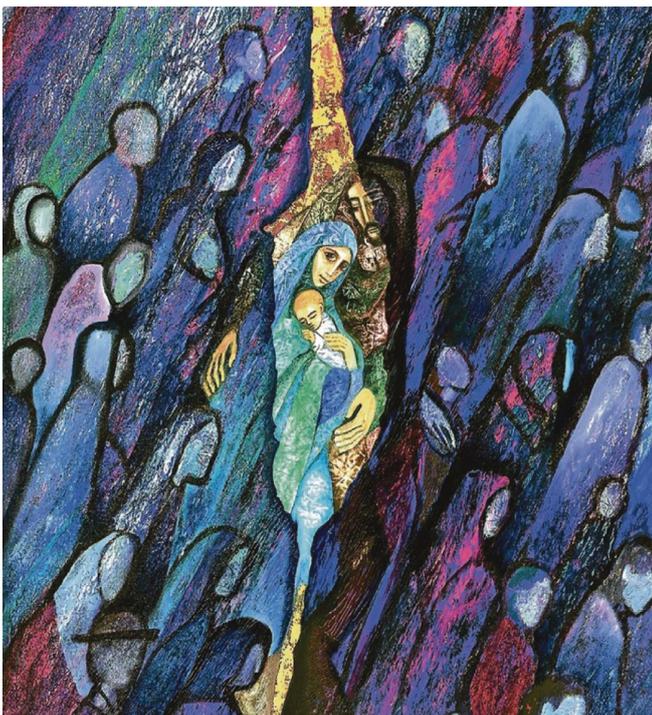
And so particularly in these 'interesting' times, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit remain with you and with all whom in love he has made, now and for all time. **Amen.**

### A message for Advent



At no time has the message of hope that Advent-time brings been more needed. Advent leads to the celebration of Christmas when we remember and celebrate the miraculous first coming of the Saviour

### A message for Christmas



born in the form of a defenceless baby born in the manger, the Saviour of the world yet dependent on human care.

But preparations for a celebration of Christ who is already with us is not all that Advent represents. For disciples of Jesus we are conscious that our preparations are also for his promised second coming. Matthew's gospel 25: 31-46 describes this coming and the judgement that will follow, a theme also picked up in Revelation 11:15, when 'the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever'. No doubt these words inspired the Wesley's hymn, "Lo, he comes with clouds descending.... God appears on earth to reign".

To encourage our Advent preparations the Methodist Church has prepared an Advent resource 'Out of the Ordinary' inviting us to scratch beneath the surface during this season and discover how small, ordinary acts of committedness to kindness may well turn out to be breakthroughs to the extraordinary.

*'Advent candles tell their story  
as we watch and pray,  
longing for the Day of Glory,  
'Come, Lord, soon,' we say.*

*Pain and sorrow, tears and sadness  
changed for gladness  
on that day.'*  
(STF 165)

May this Christmas be a time of peace, healing and joy for you and all whom you love and in the year ahead seek to worship and serve the Christ-child born at this time.

And may I leave with you the gift of these reflections from one of my favourite theologians, Howard Thurman.

'The true meaning of Christmas is expressed in the sharing of one's graces in a world in which it is so easy to become callous, insensitive, and hard. Once this spirit becomes part of a person's life, every day is Christmas, and every night is freighted with anticipation of the dawning of fresh, and perhaps holy, adventure.'

I will light Candles this Christmas

Candles of joy, despite sadness,  
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch.  
Candles of courage for fears ever present,  
Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,  
Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens,  
Candles of love to inspire all my living,  
Candles that will burn all the year long.

With season's greetings  
Rev Felicity

# Basildon Methodist Church Retreat Day

On 4th November 2023, Members from Langdon Hills, St Paul's and Trinity met together at Swan Mead Church to explore the day's theme 'Unearthing the treasure within'. Breakfast of pastries tea and coffee were on offer along with the opportunity to chat with people from the other churches.

10am worship was led by Rev Felicity Al-Hassan, welcoming and encouraging us to reflect on what we value in our lives of faith and through our church life.

After a short break Stuart Watkins, Learning Network Officer, BEH District gave an address entitled 'Renewal'. He used his three dogs, Mungo, Percy and Mouse as an analogy. Mungo and Percy had been with the family for a while, so when Mouse a younger dog arrived things had to change. They did change to the betterment of the dogs and their humans.

We then had a chance to use the Creative Spaces put together by the vision team, which consisted of a prayer station where a coat of arms could be coloured in with characteristics of faith. There was a pool of water where we could reflect on our church community, its challenges and achievements. Negative thoughts were written on dissolvable paper and placed in the water! Positive ones were kept. Thumb prints were also placed on leaves and hung on a tree symbolising life, unity and going forward as one to further God's Kingdom.

Using 2 Corinthians 4:7 "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" we had the opportunity to make jars, some more successfully than others, but it was messy and all enjoyed it.

On another table you were able to make or colour the triquetra

An excellent buffet lunch was enjoyed at about 12:30 with lots of conversations going on.

Andy Harris with his Power of Drums followed using djembe drums and other percussion instruments. This was a sight to behold 40 adults following instructions and harmonising! After an hour of drumming another tea/coffee break was had leading on to a return to the creative space, a quiz based on Exodus, or chatting.

We were called together at 3:30 for feedback which was positive, with some wishing to meet again soon.

The day finished with worship and the blessing.

Many thanks to all who were involved in making the day possible, enjoyable and informative.

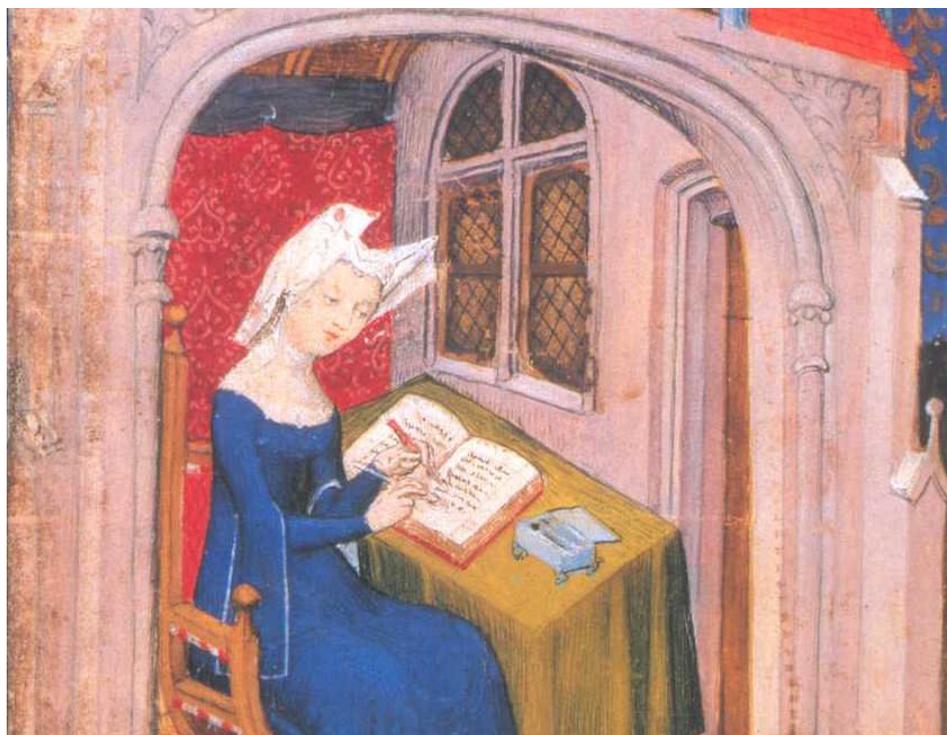
By Jan & Jackie

# Here are Some Photos of the Day.



# Margery Kempe – Medieval Eccentric – or Holy Fool?

Revd Celia McDonald



It is worth getting to know Margery Kempe (1373 – about 1438), a singular and intriguing personality from centuries ago. In her own day, people didn't know what to make of her. By her own account some thought her mad and were alarmed by her unusual behaviour; others were sceptical, found her attention-seeking, exploiting the well-meaning and gullible. Serious churchmen were puzzled by this devout woman, who could display such unashamed religious fervour, yet when questioned proved sober, conforming to church doctrine, also perceptive, quick-witted, and bold to challenge impiety and injustice.

The earliest manuscript of The Book of Margery Kempe was only discovered in the 1930s. It reveals a unique 'memoir' of a Medieval woman – her own life-story, told in later years possibly to her son, and afterwards written up in consultation with her by a friend, a sympathetic and literate monk.

Margery was born the daughter of John Brunham, a leading citizen and mayor of Lynn in Norfolk, on the river Ouse, at that time a busy port, thriving on trade with the Baltic and North Sea ports.

Married to John Kempe, Margery enjoyed the status of a leading merchant's wife, indulging in expensive clothes and jewellery, which she reluctantly gave up as her spiritual life deepened.

She bore twelve children; after her first childbirth she suffered severe physical and mental illness. As she recovered she felt guilt and contrition for her past life, and a growing devotion to Christ. After her father's death the family's status and prosperity declined; her attempt to run a brewing business failed. The experience of relative poverty and failure turned her thoughts towards a different way of life.

Then in mid-life she began to experience a series of visions, hearing wonderful music

and birdsong, often during church worship. She tells of Christ being very close to her as a loving friend, answering her questions, assuring her of His love despite her doubts and self-reproach. She took direction for her life from such inward and intimate encounters. She persuaded her husband to live separately, became vegetarian for some years, and took to wearing all white clothing. Devotional teaching of the time encouraged the devout to enter into Gospel scenes in their imagination; in almost domestic detail Margery sees herself helping Mary to care for the infant Jesus, and after the Crucifixion comforts her, bringing her "a good hot drink of gruel and spiced wine."

Gospel scenes and figures are as real to her as daily life, and Christ is as truly alongside her 'here' as He is in her visions.

She began to travel, at first to Norwich, where she records visiting the well-known anchoress Mother Julian, who encouraged her to stay true to her sense of calling. And then came her first experience of bouts of uncontrollable weeping which could last for hours. She wept in penitence for her own sins, in pity for the sins and suffering of people around her, above all in sorrow that all this should cost Christ His Life. Such behaviour in a matronly woman, dressed all in virginal white, attracted attention, some admiration and sympathy, but also ridicule and abuse. Some protested that she disturbed worship, made it difficult to hear the preacher, one friar had her thrown out of the church. More than once she was imprisoned briefly for questioning, suspected of being a heretic, but she was soon released, and vindicated as innocent and worthy of respect by clergy, both grudging and puzzled.

She felt commanded by Christ to visit holy places further afield, so she travelled as a pilgrim to Compostela, Rome, and even Jerusalem. It was dangerous for a woman on her own, even travelling with groups of other pilgrims, for her husband rarely accompanied her, though he had to come

to her rescue at times. She could be brave and resourceful, but often felt vulnerable and deeply afraid. She had some money, but never enough, she was sometimes defrauded, or robbed. In Rome as a spontaneous act of devotion, she gave away all she had! Impressed by her evident sincerity others helped her out with food and shelter, but at one point she had to travel with a group of beggars.

Yet always she found Christ to be her companion and protector, and she was blessed with more powerful times of emotion, more overwhelming visions, especially in the Holy Land, the place of Christ's ministry, the Crucifixion and Resurrection.

Her last journey abroad was to accompany her daughter-in-law back to Danzig, where Margery's son John had settled, like other English merchants. From there she made her way to Aachen and then eventually back to Lynn, and to quieter home life, as she nursed her husband through dementia until his death. She herself seems to have lived into her sixties, a long life for that period.

In September we spent a few days in King's Lynn. Going into the minster, St Margaret's Church, Margery's home church, we discovered that the congregation and the town are celebrating the 650th anniversary of her birth. On a plinth stands a small sculpture made to honour her as an outstanding woman of East Anglia, one of unusual enterprise and perseverance. She expressed her deep faith in her daily life and actions, risking slander, mockery, and worse, to be a witness for Christ. She is still a singular and striking woman who has left a record of great interest, as we know so little about the individual lives of Medieval women, still less about their experience of Christian devotion.

The Book of Margery Kempe is available in print in an affordable and very readable paperback format.

# God, Faith and Sport

*Jon Waldron*



WHEN George Moncur scored a dramatic winning goal against Preston North End to save EFL club Colchester United from relegation on the final day of the season, he was quick to openly speak about his religious beliefs in a post-match interview. "God has a plan for me and I always knew something like this was going to happen," said the former West Ham United youngster, a devout Christian. "Whatever happens is already planned out but no-one can tell that apart from the big man up there."

As a sports journalist of more than 20 years, I'm happy to say that it's not uncommon to hear or see professional sportspeople express their faith in such a candid, positive way. To hear young people such as George talk so passionately of their allegiance to God is refreshing, in a modern world where theological rhetoric is perhaps not as forthcoming as it once was.

Among the Christian sportspeople I have interviewed over the years, there appears a clear recognition and acknowledgement that God has blessed them with an ability to play sport and furthermore, to make sure they maximise their potential and talent. There is a

very real awareness that God has gifted them with the necessary attributes to excel in their profession and use them in a positive way.

Olympic gold medallist sprinter Allyson Felix once said: "For me, my faith is the reason I run. I definitely feel I have this amazing gift that God has blessed me with, and it's all about using it to the best of my ability."

Another of Colchester's former players, Brendan Wiredu, who now plays for League One side Fleetwood Town, made sure he set aside time for poignant contemplation before every game.

I once asked him how important his faith was to him and how it played its part in his performance, on the pitch.

"I say a little prayer before the match," said Brendan.

"I pray for everyone on the pitch and that no-one gets any bad injuries and that God guides us as players.

"I also pray because my brother passed away a few years ago and I know he's watching me, so I do a little saying to him before I go on the pitch.

"Faith is important to me.

"Over the years, I've become more faithful and it's become a key part of my life.

"I believe in God and I think a lot of it is about belief; that's key to me."

Brendan praying that no-one is injured during a match highlights not only an empathy for his opponents in the heat of sporting battle

but also a firm Christian ethos. It's lovely to hear this and it is a sign that even though sport is essentially about winning and losing, there is still plenty of scope to act and behave in a manner that is befitting to God.

Sportspeople often like to express their Christianity and their love of God through their actions, on the pitch.

Like Brendan, some say a short prayer before getting underway with the task in hand, while it is also common to see footballers point to the skies or show the sign of the cross before or after a game, or perhaps after an important moment has taken place.

At top-level sport, such as the English Premier League or at the Olympic Games, expressions of faith such as this can be seen by millions around the world, an acknowledgement of God and all of his glory and goodness reaching a global audience.

So in this sense, it is not only the performer who is identifying a religious connection within sport but also those watching, too.

Studies have shown that such spirituality can enhance sporting performance and sport and religion have always been inextricably linked.

As a Christian, it is both heartening and encouraging to see and hear the expressions of faith and love of God on such a regular basis, both on and off the pitch. Indeed, it would be lovely if more Christian top-level



Sustained by her faith: Olympic gold medalist Christine Ohuruogu. John Walton/PA/Alamy

sports stars express their faith and use their status in such a positive way, to praise God as such adoration demonstrates that religion continues to have a place in modern-day sport and moreover, that the relationship is an integral one.

## Methodist Prayer Handbook 2024/2025 Praise and Protest

The Methodist Church 

## Praise and Protest – 2024/2025

**We need your prayers!**

The 2024/2025 *Methodist Prayer Handbook* title and theme is: **Praise and Protest.**

**Please use the following to craft and submit a prayer:**

In her song of praise, the 'Magnificat' (Luke 1:46-55), Mary thanks God for the child Jesus, who will announce God's kingdom which

“brings down the powerful from their thrones and lifts up the lowly.”

To engage in God’s mission and be part of that transformation, we believe the Methodist Church is called to become an increasingly evangelistic, inclusive and justice-seeking Church.

Following the prophet Isaiah’s call, echoing through the ages to us and reflected in Mary’s prayer, the 2024/2025 *Prayer Handbook* will focus on how the Church can “learn to do right; seek justice and defend the oppressed” (Isaiah 1:17a, NIV).

We invite you to offer prayers using Isaiah’s three key actions for becoming the justice-seeking Church we are called to be, in response to God’s love in Christ:

**Learn:** We invite prayers that we might be attentive to God’s ways, and discern how we go about learning to live justly in our local communities and churches.

**Seek:** Please offer prayers that seek God and God’s ways, and invite us to love God and to love our neighbours. Prayers could relate to looking actively for what God is showing us as the Body of Christ corporately, or more personally, to become people who recognise injustice and take action.

**Defend:** Finally, we welcome prayers for the Church to become more aware of the voices of the people we are called to defend – those who are marginalised and silenced. We welcome prayers that support others in their protest and prayers for how we get involved.

## Guidelines for submitting prayers - deadline Monday 8 January 2024

Please email your prayer and any related photographs to: [prayerhandbook@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:prayerhandbook@methodistchurch.org.uk)

Prayers may be posted to: Prayer Handbook Editor, Methodist Church House, 25 Tavistock Place London WC1H 9SF

1. Prayers must not exceed **120 words**.
2. Please submit **no more than two** prayers.
3. All prayer content must be appropriate for use from **September 2024 to August 2025**.
4. **Specific prayers.** To help users pray relevantly, please include specific information on:
  - named countries, regions, communities
  - needs or projects, eg praying for people with specific needs, care for the environment, or rural concerns, etc.
5. **Creative prayers.** Feel free to move beyond lists of information to form a more creative prayer. Visual prayers, such as drawings, may also be submitted (follow guidelines for photos below).
6. The Methodist Church is committed to becoming an **‘Inclusive Church’**. Please use inclusive language in your prayers. For example, refer to people for who they are, not by their experience, ie ‘people experiencing poverty’ (not as ‘the poor’).
7. **All prayers must be your copyright.** They may have been used or published elsewhere, but you must have permission to reproduce them. Unless you indicate otherwise, on submission your prayer will become the copyright of Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes. Extracts from the Prayer Handbook are used for **‘Prayer for the Day’** on the Methodist Church website and also in **‘Prayer Focus’**, the prayer journal of the Methodist Church in Ireland.
8. **Please note that all published prayers will be edited**, more or less, depending on how they fit on the page and relate to other prayers in the Handbook. The editorial process also ensures all prayers use inclusive language. By submitting a prayer, you agree that it may be edited as the editor sees fit.
9. When submitting prayers, please give your postal address, your full name, and how you would like to be described (eg Jane Jones, local preacher, Townton).
10. Please note that it is not possible to include all prayers submitted for the *Prayer Handbook* or related online content.

## Guidelines for submitting photographs

1. Photographs must support your prayer and help bring our theme to life. Photos most likely to be published will show people in action.
2. Please provide a caption so that the editor knows **what** the photo is, and state **where** it was taken. NB: if your photograph is used it may be given a different caption in order to fit the theme and the prayers on the page.
3. All photos must be sent as **digital high-resolution files**: JPEG, 300dpi. If your email gives you the option of sending a photo in a different size please choose 'original size' (or the biggest file size). If your email account will not allow you to send large files please use [wetransfer.com](https://www.wetransfer.com) to email to [prayerhandbook@methodistchurch.org.uk](mailto:prayerhandbook@methodistchurch.org.uk)
4. Images are reproduced small, so make sure photos are bold and clear, ie no group shots.
5. Make sure you have **permission** from the people shown in your photograph: and that they have given their consent for their image to be published. It is crucial that parents/guardians of children give **written consent**. When you email in your photo(s), please forward permissions and consents.
6. Photographs must be **your own copyright**. If you take a photograph of a piece of artwork (eg a painting or sculpture) and that work is in copyright you must also send the **artist's written permission** for their artwork to be used in the Prayer Handbook.
7. Unless you indicate otherwise, your photo will become the copyright of Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes.

## Linford Methodist Church

*Cathy Beckwith*

In the last issue I wrote about a forthcoming new event at our church - the Afternoon Tea for the members of the Re-Engage group. To be part of Re-Engage you have to be widowed, over 75 and live in Thurrock. About 20 members attended, along with several carers. All seemed to enjoy the food, the company and even the entertainment (me!). We had a lovely letter of appreciation after the event from Lorraine, the Co-ordination of Re-Engage, Thurrock

We continued our commitment to support our local community by donating food from our Harvest Festival to our local food bank. In total we donated just over 90kg of food. Thurrock Foodbank accepts donations at it's newly enlarged building in Corringham. The food is then sent to several different venues around Thurrock for those in need.





Reverse

# ADVENT CALENDAR

Please collect these items throughout November to donate

In: *December*



<b>1</b>  Tinned Potatoes	<b>2</b> Selection Boxes 	<b>3</b>  Minced Pies	<b>4</b>  Christmas Cake	<b>5</b>  Gravy	<b>6</b>  Cranberry Sauce
<b>7</b>  Stuffing	<b>8</b>  Christmas Pudding	<b>9</b>  Tea Bags	<b>10</b>  Hot Chocolate	<b>11</b> Christmas Crackers 	<b>12</b> Christmas Napkins 
<b>13</b>  Yorkshire pudding mix	<b>14</b>  Tinned Ham	<b>15</b>  Chocolate	<b>16</b>  Custard	<b>17</b>  Mashed Potato	<b>18</b>  Soup
<b>19</b> Savoury Snacks 	<b>20</b>  Tinned Vegetables	<b>21</b>  Coffee	<b>22</b>  Chocolate	<b>23</b>  Milk	<b>24</b> Tinned Chicken / Ham / Veggie Option



Please check with us to find the best time and place to donate, email: [info@thurrock.foodbank.org.uk](mailto:info@thurrock.foodbank.org.uk)  
[www.thurrock.foodbank.org.uk](http://www.thurrock.foodbank.org.uk)

Reg. Charity No. 297569 | Reg. Eng. & Wales



In November Helen Watts distributes a Reverse Advent Calendar to give ideas of donations required to give the recipients a happy Christmas.

Many of us like to make up a food hamper using these suggestions. Maybe it will give you ideas of what to donate to your local foodbank!

As I write we are yet to finalise our Christmas arrangements. We hope not to shut over the Christmas and New Year period this year.

We will be having a children's Christmas Yippee Club on Friday, December 8th from 4-6pm. Children of any age are welcome from the circuit, as long as they are accompanied by a grown up. There will be craft activities, music, food and drink provided. ENTRANCE FREE but donations welcome!

Our popular Carol Service will take place on Sunday, December 10th. We welcome old and young but hope some residents of the Merrie Loots Rest home, in the village, will attend, like last year.

All at Linford Methodist Church would like to wish everyone in the circuit a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

# My Advent Playlist

Revd Fiona Smith



I am a firm believer that every season, or life event, needs a playlist to accompany it. This allows me to explore the emotion of the event and get into the spirit of the occasion. In light of this, I thought I'd share a few of my favourite songs from my Advent playlist to help get us all into the Advent spirit, as well as a bonus Christmas hymn.

1. **The Canticle of the Turning** by Rory Cooney, Gary Daigle, and Theresa Donohoo.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9QeTmRCpW4> Mary's Song, or the *Magnificat*, is probably one of the most well-known speeches ever given by a woman. Her words form part of our evening prayer liturgies and advent lectionary, as well as being immortalised in our hymnody, most famously in Timothy Dudley Smith's *Tell Out My Soul*. At first glance this hymn might not sound very much like an Advent hymn, as it makes no specific references to Jesus' coming. However, the context of these words, proclaimed by Mary to Elizabeth after Elizabeth had recognised how Mary had been blessed by God, and the recognition that something new and world-changing is about to happen, that God is coming to bring justice for the weak and oppressed, very much embody the spirit of Advent. This new interpretation of the *Magnificat* emphasises the anticipation in Mary's words with the repeated refrain 'and the world is about to turn'. The firm beat and upbeat tempo also

give a sense of certainty, and inevitability, to our movement towards a day when God's justice reigns.

2. **Of the Father's Love Begotten** by Aurelius Clemens Prudentius.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofk2UM724TA> This hymn is easily one of the oldest in *Singing the Faith* as Prudentius lived before the fall of the Roman Empire in 476AD. Singing a translation of words written well over a thousand years ago by candlelight in a dark church never fails to fill me with a sense of awe that I should share that experience with so many people through history. To me it speaks of the enduring nature of the faith that we profess, as well as the enduring nature of God's love, which leads us to praise 'evermore and evermore'. The translation and the tune may be more recent but the call to worship God as the source and end of all things, and Jesus the long-expected King, remains the same.
3. **Humbug** by Owl City.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zblhY65gPOk> Stepping away from hymns for a moment, this song is for everyone who, like me, struggles with Christmas shopping. In the next few weeks there will inevitably come a moment when I will be pulling my hair out trying to decide what to get family members and friends for Christmas. When



# The ABC NATIVITY

Revd Moses Agyam



**A** is for **Angels** appearing so bright, telling of Jesus that first Christmas night (*Luke 2:13*) **B** is for **Bethlehem** crowded and old, birthplace of Jesus by prophet foretold (*Micah 5:2*) **C** is for **Cattle** their manger His bed, there in the trough where He laid down His head (*Luke 2:7*) **D** is for **David** and his ancient throne, promised forever to Jesus alone (*Luke 1:32*) **E** is for **East** where shone the bright star, which Magi on camels followed from afar (*Matt 2:1-2*) **F** is for **Frankincense**, with myrrh and gold, brought by the Wise Men as Matthew has told (*Matt 2:11*) **G** is for **God** who from heaven above, sent down to mankind his Son full of love (*John 3:16*)

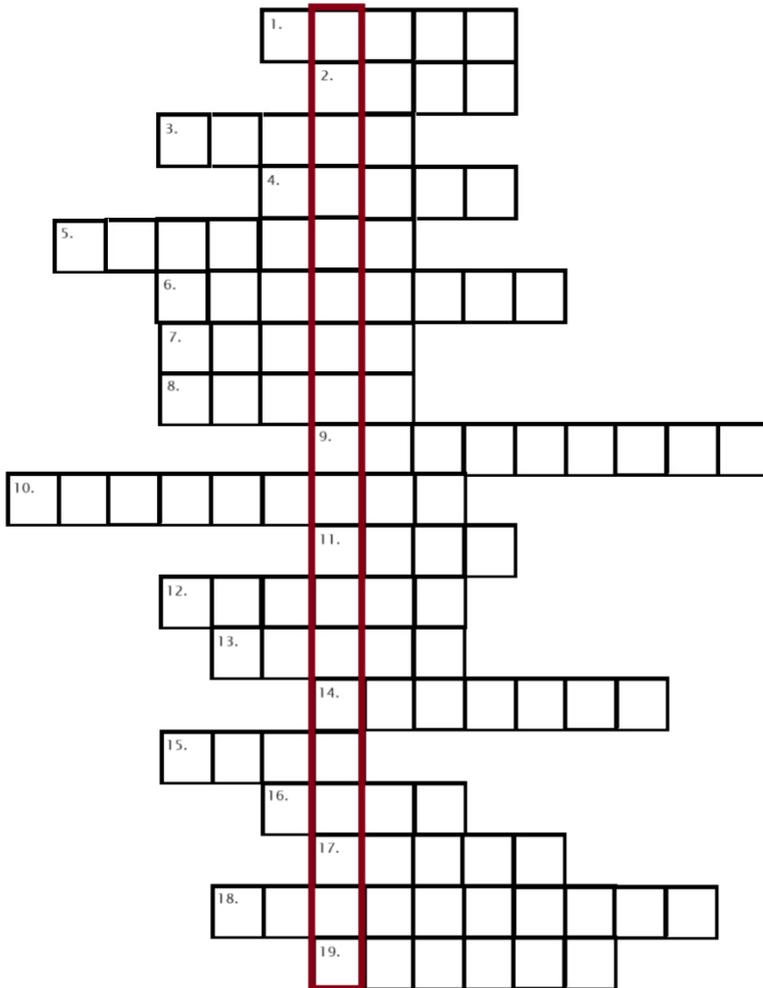
**H** is for **Herod** whose murderous scheme, was given to Joseph in a nocturnal dream (*Matt 2:13*) **I** is for **Immanuel** which means "God with us," for Christ brought man back to his Father's house (*Isaiah 7:14*) **J** is for **Joseph** so noble and just, obeying God's word with absolute trust (*Matthew 1:24*) **K** is for **King**; a true king He would be, coming in power and authority (*Zechariah 9:9*) **L** is for Love that He brought down to earth, the divine enfleshed in lowly birth (*1 John 4:9*) **M** is for Mary His mother so brave, counting God faithful and mighty to save (*Luke 1:38*)

**N** is for Night when the Saviour was born, for nations on earth and for people forlorn (*Luke 2:8*) **O** is for **Omega** which means "the last;" He's eternal, He's present, future and past (*Revelation 22:13*) **P** is for **Prophets** when living on earth, foretold His redemption and His blessed birth (*Isaiah 11:1-3*) **Q** is for **Quickly** as shepherds who heard, hastened to act on that heavenly word (*Luke 2:16*) **R** is for **Rejoice** for the sorrow of sin, is banished forever when Jesus comes in (*Luke 1:14*) **S** is for **Saviour** for this purpose He came; the angel of God assigned Him His name (*Matthew 1:21*)

**T** is for **Tidings** of joy not of danger, telling of Him who was laid in a manger (*Luke 2:10*) **U** is for **Us**, to whom Jesus was

given, to show us the way and lead us to heaven (*Luke 2:11*) **V** is for **Virgin** foretold by the sage, God's revelation on prophecy's page (*Matthew 1:23*) **W** is for **Wonderful**, His works and His words, the King of all Kings, the Lord of all Lords (*Isaiah 9:6*) **X** is for **Christ**, it's X in the Greek, Anointed, Messiah, mighty, yet meek (*Acts 10:38*) **Y** is for **Yes**, God's Word ringing clear, all that this world ever needed to hear (*John 1:1*) **Z** is for **Zeal** as it burned in Christ's heart. Lord, by thy Spirit to us zeal impart (*John 2:17*).

# Fill in the Words and Reveal the Hidden Message!



1. In the ..... month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee. (Luke 1:26)
2. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, .....; you have found favour with God. (Luke 1:30)
3. A shoot will come up from the ..... of Jesse. (Isaiah 11:1)
4. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father ..... (Luke 1:32)
5. "I am the Lord's ....., " Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." (Luke 1:38)
6. In those days Caesar ..... issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (Luke 2:1)
7. So, Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to ..... (Luke 2:4)

8. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a ..... (Luke 2:4)
9. Mary said: "My soul ..... the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. (Luke 1:46-47)
10. She gave birth to her ....., a son. (Luke 2:7)
11. On those living in the land of ..... darkness a light has dawned. (Isaiah 9:2)
12. There were shepherds ..... out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. (Luke 2:8)
13. Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour ..... (Luke 2:14)
14. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby ..... in cloths and lying in a manger." (Luke 2:12)
15. After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, ..... from the east came to Jerusalem. (Matt 2:1)
16. When they saw the ....., they were overjoyed. (Matt 2:10)
17. On coming to the ....., they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. (Matt 2:11)
18. He will be called Wonderful ....., Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)
19. The light ..... in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1:5)

*Bible references taken from the NIV.*

Created by Revd Fiona Smith

# Faith

Saturday December 16

# Folk

3-4pm

Queens Park Community Church

CM12 OTX

# Nativity

*As a prelude to Christmas...*

Enjoy a musical adventure,  
featuring folk-singer Tim Almond,  
armed with guitar, bouzouki and  
keyboard, along with a  
few surprises!

There will be the chance to sing along  
some well known carols as well as  
listening to original songs offering  
fresh perspectives on an old story.

Seasonal refreshments included!



*Faith*

*Folk*

*Nativity*

*Advent  
and Christmas Activities  
& Services at the . . .*



*Billerica  
Methodist Church*

# Join us for our Advent and Christmas Activities & Services

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## ADVENT PILGRIMAGE



During the four weeks leading to the birth of Jesus we will be focusing on each of these Advent themes: Hoping, Waiting, Fearing, and Preparing.

### **Hoping: What are we hoping for in life?**

*Sunday, 3 December, 10:30 am at Western Road*  
Advent Sunday service (Incl. Holy Communion)  
led by Rev Moses Agyam

### **Waiting: What are we waiting for in life?**

*Sunday, 10 December, 2nd Sunday in Advent at Western Road*  
Toy, Parade & All Age Worship supporting the work of Changing Pathways  
led by Ian Brown

### **Fearing: What are we afraid of in life?**

*Sunday, 17 December, 3rd Sunday in Advent at Western Road*  
led by Tim Almond

### **Preparing: What are we preparing for in life?**

*Sunday, 24 December, 4th Sunday in Advent at Western Road*  
led by Rachel Gallehawk

## CHRISTMAS SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES

### **Faith, Folk & Nativity: Light-Hearted Sing-Along Carols**

*Saturday, 16 December 3:00-4:30 pm, at Queens Park.*

Come and enjoy a musical adventure, featuring folk-singer Tim Almond, armed with guitar, bouzouki and keyboard, along with a few surprises! Seasonal refreshments included!





### **BLUE CHRISTMAS SERVICE**

*Thursday, 21 December, 8:00 – 9:00 pm at Western Road*

This gentle, reflective, and pastoral service is for all those who have suffered loss or are feeling those losses at Christmas. Please come and join others for a shared time to remember that we are not alone.

### **PEACE ON EARTH: A CAROL SERVICE**

*Friday, 22 December, 11:15 am at Queens Park.*

Join us for our service of carols with traditional hymns and readings focusing on the theme of peace, hope and reconciliation.



### **CHRISTINGLE SERVICE**

*Saturday, 23 December, 4:00 – 5:00 pm at Western Road*

Join us for our fun and interactive family Christingle Service. All are welcome.



### **A CANDLELIGHT CAROL SERVICE (WITH 'POSADA')**

*Sunday, 24 December, 6:30 pm at Western Road*

Join us for our traditional Candlelight Carol Service of well-known carols and readings. All are welcome.



### **ALL AGE CHRISTMAS DAY WORSHIP**

*Monday, 25 December, 10:00 am at Western Road.*

Join us for Christmas Day All Age Family Celebrations to welcome Jesus, the light of the world and Prince of Peace, into our world.

**\*\*Please note the earlier start time for the morning service at Western Road\*\***



### **CHURCHES TOGETHER IN BILLERICAY CHRISTMAS DAY LUNCH**

*Monday, 25 December, 1:30 pm, at Western Road*

Are you (and your partner) alone on Christmas Day? Churches Together in Billericay invite you for lunch on Christmas Day at Western Road. There is no charge and lifts will be arranged if you require one. Contact Lorraine or Sue on these numbers: 07910 811004 or 07772 278063.



*May the peace and joy of Christmas be with you  
and yours throughout the New Year.*

# Christmas Services 2023 Across the Circuit

## Western Road:

23<sup>rd</sup> December: Christingle Service, 4pm.

24<sup>th</sup> December: Candlelit Carol Service, 6.30pm

25<sup>th</sup> December: Christmas Day Service, 10am, AAW

## Langdon Hills:

25<sup>th</sup> December: Christmas Day Service, 10am, led by Rev. F Al-Hassan

## Trinity

25<sup>th</sup> December: Christmas Day Service, 10am, Local Arrangement

## Horndon on the Hill and Stanford le Hope:

24<sup>th</sup> December: Christmas Eve Service, 11.30pm, led by Rev. F Smith

25<sup>th</sup> December: Christmas Day Service, 10am, led by M McPherson.

## Christ Church

25<sup>th</sup> December: Christmas Day Service, 10am, led Rev. T Williams

## St Paul's

25<sup>th</sup> December: Christmas Day Service, 10am, led by S Burton