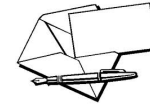




**St. John's Methodist Church
Whitchurch**

**December 2023
& January 2024
Newsletter**

Message from the Manse



Hello friends,

Each year I look forward to seeing Christmas ads on TV for the first time and as soon as I saw this year's John Lewis commercial online I loved it straight away. For those of you who haven't seen it a boy buys a seed from a second-hand sale believing it to be from a kit for "*planting a perfect Christmas tree*". He plants it, and it grows into a Venus flytrap. The plant happily grows in the corner of the living room until it tries to eat the boy's dog, table lamp and furnishings, so his family throws it out into the garden. The family replace the Venus flytrap with a traditional Christmas tree whilst the rejected plant looks in through the patio doors, its trap shaped leaf face squished up against the glass in longing. The little boy reaches out to his flytrap friend, taking a beautifully wrapped present out to the garden and then his family, inspired by kindness, do the same. The Venus flytrap eats the presents, then regurgitates them back up and spits them at the family, helpfully unwrapped.

On the face of it this is a rather unusual Christmas advert - it's not sentimental, cosy or sparkly. It features a giant present eating plant that almost ruins Christmas. But if you look a little deeper I think it has something very profound and honest to say about our annual festivities. A clue can be found in the backing track, a song especially written for this advert, with Andrea Bocelli theatrically repeating the lyrics '*la vita è una festa*', meaning 'life is a celebration'.

The Methodist Churches 2023 Christmas campaign is called "Out of the ordinary" and this advert is certainly that! But it reminds us that in the everyday, in the ordinary and not so ordinary there is still an opportunity for love and kindness to shared and for God's presence to be known.

The first Christmas wasn't exactly ordinary either. It was the first year that a decree was sent out for everyone to return to their home town to fill in a census. It was not ordinary for a bright star to align

with planets in the night sky, which is why it drew the attention of the wise men to follow it to where it would lead. It was not ordinary for a woman to give birth in a stable, and for the first visitors to be the wild outcast shepherds from the hills. Gifts of Frankincense, Gold and Myrrh aren't exactly ordinary gifts for a baby. And it was certainly not ordinary for a King, let alone the Son of God, to be born in such humble dwellings. There was nothing sentimental, cosy or sparkly about this Christmas Day.

But out of ordinary people, Mary and Joseph, became God's most precious gift to us. Jesus, the Christ child, born in extra-ordinary circumstances to show us God's great love for us. And in that moment, the gift of life was truly a celebration.

In the advert, the gift of the plant, the life that came from the seed, was rejected. It didn't act, look or do what a Christmas tree is supposed to do. It didn't fit in. In fact, it made a right mess and risked ruining the plans that people had in place for the "perfect Christmas". So it was dragged outside, into the cold and shunned.

When you think about the life of Jesus, this is exactly what the world did to him. They didn't want their world to be turned upside down; they didn't want to accept something different; Jesus was not the kind of king that they were looking for and they certainly didn't want to accept his message of love for the outcast and the stranger. And so they dragged him out of the gates of Jerusalem and away from the city.

But the plant was not forgotten. The little boy, went out to it, and gave it a gift. He doesn't forget it. And through his compassion and kindness, the family do the same.

We live in a world that says to us that we need X Y and Z to be happy, to have the perfect life etc. And Christmas, if we are not careful, is the worse time for this. We want everything to be perfect, and everything to look nice. But if we are not careful we can lose sight of what that time of year is all about. If we aren't careful, we can get so caught up in the tinsel and trimmings that we end up putting Jesus, his stinky stable and his odd and weird guests out in the cold.

The plant may not have been what we were expecting, it certainly didn't do what it was supposed to with the gifts it was offered to sit under it. But Jesus the Christ child was not what we were expecting either.

Life is a celebration, eternal life has been gifted in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. God loves us all, no matter what, whether we are ordinary or not, just like the little boy, who loved his perfect Christmas tree despite it not being ordinary. So don't leave Jesus out in the cold this Christmas, don't reject the stranger or a different way of doing things, put aside the things that distract us, invite them in and experience the true meaning of Christmas that lies beneath the wrapping papers and in the words of Andrea Bocelli, remember, 'la vita è una festa' - 'life is a celebration'.

With love at Christmas and the new year

Rev Donna

Christmas by Candlelight

Saturday 16th December

7pm at Tilstock Village Hall

Fun Christmas music/ sing-a-long carols

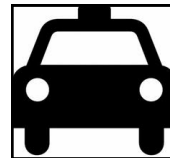
Soprano soloist: Holly Teague

Tickets £10 to include mulled wine and mince pie

Children under 16 free with accompanying adult.

Tickets available from Chris Crowther

Taxi for December & January



The following drivers are available to transport you to the services. Please 'phone before 9:30am.

December

3rd	Hazel or Mike Nimmo
10th	Hazel or Mike Nimmo
17th	Hazel or Mike Nimmo
24th	Pete Shingler
31st	Pete Shingler

January

7th	Hazel or Mike Nimmo
14th	Hazel or Mike Nimmo
21st	Pete Shingler
28th	Pete Shingler

“I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!”

— Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-82) American poet and educator

PRAYER REQUESTS



Pray for those known to us who are ill, housebound, in care, lonely, bereaved or in any other kind of need.

St John's

Remember BBT and MORE as they meet each week.

Pray for people from outside St. John's who are entering our church for the first time through room bookings passed over from the Civic Centre.

Our Town

Give thanks for the work of Churches Together in Whitchurch and pray for the joint activities.

Remember our Town Council and their work.

Our nation

Pray for those hardest hit by the cost of living rises and inflation

Pray for those caught in the record asylum numbers backlog.

Our world

Pray for the situation in Gaza, that the fragile periods of cease-fire may be the start of reconciliation. Remember those in distress caught up on both sides of this conflict through no fault of their own.

Pray for those caught up in the results of global warming and remember the COP28 talks taking place in Dubai from 30th November to 12th December.

Pray for the people of Ukraine as they continue to try to live amongst the chaos and heartbreak of invasion by Russia. Pray for all who grieve the loss of loved ones there.

Pray for a change of heart for Vladimir Putin.

“Christmas is a piece of one’s home that one carries
in one’s heart.”

Freya Stark (1893-1993) British/Italian explorer & travel writer

"Christmas is a together-y sort of holiday."

Winnie the Pooh (A.A. Milne (1882-1956) English
playwright and writer)



Hope Journey Friday 8th December



We will be hosting the Hope Journey again
this year for the Year 3 children from
Whitchurch Junior Academy to come to St
John’s to meet the Nativity
Characters.



If you would like to be involved by escorting
groups of children around our church, serv-
ing refreshments, helping with a craft or
dressing up as a character in the Christmas Story please
speak to someone on the BBT Rota.

Christmas Fayre

Saturday 9th December 12 noon till 4 pm at St.
John's

Sunday Services for December & January



3rd Dec	Malcolm Crook (First Advent)
10th 6:30pm	Rev. Donna Broadbent-Kelly (Carols)
17th	Rev. Donna Broadbent-Kelly
24th	Rev. Brian Acty
31st	Local Arrangement
7th Jan	Graham Dimelow
14th Jan	Rev. Jenny Arthurs (Communion)
21st	Rev. Rob Hilton
28th	Paul Jackson

Congratulations

To Gwen Reeves on her receiving her Artserve Award from the Methodist Church in recognition of her 50 years service as a church organist.

Zoom Service

You are warmly invited to share in our zoom services, which take place on one Sunday afternoon per month at 4pm. Please contact Avril for the time, date and the link in December and January.

COP28

As leaders from over 140 nations meet in Dubai for the next 2 weeks of COP (Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change), there are some interesting programmes on Channel 4 Catch-up.

Apart from clarifying what the causes and main issues of global warming really are, they are also a good way to find out what progress is being made in our country to tackle climate change.

The programmes to search for are:

The Great Climate Fight

By Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, Mary Portas and Kevin McCloud

A Year in the Ice—The Arctic Drift

The 2022 Grierson Award winning documentary about 300 scientists living and observing the Arctic Ice

Is it Time to Break the Law?

By Chris Packham, who explores whether groups such as “Extinction Rebellion” and “Stop the Oil” are effective in their protests against the lack of response to climate change, and what approaches could be successful.

The Great Climate Scandal

Are companies that claim to be tackling the climate emergency really putting the planet over profit? Journalist Matt Shea discovers deforestation and alleged human rights abuses as he investigates.



BBT@St Johns

Bumps Babies and Toddlers will be looking at the Christmas Story in December. Please join us from 9.30-11.30am for craft, toys, singing, stories coffee chat. Our final session before Christmas will be 18th December and then we will be having a break and starting again on Monday 8th January.

We are keen for more people to join our rota of helpers so if you would like to help or just want to come and say hello, please speak to someone on the rota.

BBT Rota for December and January.

	Leader	Open up	General & Craft	Tea
4 th Dec	Kathryn	Mike	Briony Hazel	Sarah
11 th Dec	Kathryn	Briony	Elaine Dot	Chris
18 th Dec	Kathryn	Mike	Dot Brenda	Sarah
	<i>No BBT Christmas Holidays</i>			
8 th Jan	Kathryn	Briony	Elaine Dot	Sarah
15 th Jan	Kathryn	Mike	Brenda Hazel	Chris
22 nd Jan	Kathryn	Briony	Dot	Sarah
29 th Jan	Kathryn	Mike	Elaine Hazel	Chris

*Christmas hath a darkness;
Brighter than the blazing noon;
Christmas hath a chillness
Warmer than the heat of June,
Christmas hath a beauty
Lovelier than the world can show:
For Christmas bringeth Jesus,
Brought for us so low.*

From 'Christmas Eve' by Christina Georgina Rossetti

"Surely everyone is aware of the divine pleasures which attend a wintry fireside; candles at four o'clock, warm hearthrugs, tea, a fair tea-maker, shutters closed, curtains flowing in ample draperies to the floor, whilst the wind and rain are raging audibly without."

Thomas De Quincey

One kind word can warm three winter months.

~Japanese Proverb

The Oxen

*Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock
'Now they are all on their knees.'
An elder said as we sat in a flock
By the embers in hearthside ease.
We pictured the meek mild creatures where
They dwelt in their strawy pen
Nor did it occur to one of us there
To doubt they were kneeling then.
So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! Yet I feel,
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
'Come, see the oxen kneel.'
In the lonely barton by yonder coomb
Our childhood used to know
I should go with him in the gloom,
Hoping it might be so.*

Thomas Hardy

Christmas Prayer

Oh, God help us rightly to remember
the birth of Jesus, that
we may share in the songs
of the angels, the gladness
of the shepherds, and the
worship of the wise men.
May the Christmas morning
make us happy
to be your children.

Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-94) novelist, poet and travel writer

*I am Joseph, carpenter,
Of David's kingly line,
I wanted an heir, discovered
My wife's son wasn't mine.
I am an obstinate lover,
Loved Mary for better or worse.
Wouldn't stop loving when I found
Someone Else came first.
Mine was the likeness I hoped for
When the first-born man-child came
But nothing of him was me, I couldn't
Even choose his name.
I am Joseph who wanted
To teach my own boy how to live.
My lesson for my foster son:
Endure. Love. Give.*

Joseph by U.A. Fanthorpe (1929-2009) English poet

*"Christ was born in the first century, yet he belongs to
all centuries. He was born a Jew, yet He belongs to all
races. He was born in Bethlehem, yet He belongs to all
countries."*

George Truett (1867-1944) American Baptist Minister

"We started singing, and we were all moved by the words and the sudden trueness of our voices. We sang:

*'He neither shall be borned, In housen nor in hall
Not in a place of paradise, But in an ox's stall'*

And two thousand Christmases became real to us then - the stars were bright to guide the kings through the snow; and across the farmyard we could hear the beasts in their stalls. We were given roast apples and hot mince-pies, in our nostrils were spices like myrrh, and in our wooden box, as we headed for the village, there were golden gifts for all."

From 'Cider with Rosie' by Laurie Lee (1914-97) novelist and poet

"Christmas gift suggestions: To your enemy, forgiveness. To an opponent, tolerance. To a friend, your heart. To a customer, service. To all, charity. To every child, a good example. To yourself, respect."

Oren Arnold (1900-80)
American novelist, journalist and humourist

"Winter is the time for comfort, for good food and warmth, for the touch of a friendly hand and for a talk beside the fire: it is the time for home."

— Edith Sitwell (1887-1964) poet and critic

Edna's Story

Children have always been important to me. I was an infant teacher for nine years. When we were living in Dudley I was also a Sunday School Teacher, I was appalled that at the beginning of every Sunday service, when a good number of children were present, the preacher didn't use those opportunities to talk to them about God or Jesus. They went to their classes having sat through an adult hymn and prayer. I questioned this in church councils but nothing seemed to change.

One miserable November afternoon as I was looking out of the window I brought the subject to God in prayer. A paperback Good News Bible had been left on the sill and I flicked it open. Imagine my surprise when it opened up at Psalm 107 and at the top of the page, as if in answer, were the words, "Tell others God saved you". Immediately I answered in my mind "God you can't mean me Lord, I tell individuals and work in Sunday School. Local preaching can't be for me".

Then my eye dropped to verse 32. "Let them praise him publicly before the congregation and the leaders of the nation". My fate was sealed. God had made his will known. Dear Ivan and the family agreed. So I became a local preacher in due course after my training, but God wasn't satisfied. As I went around the circuit many greeted me with, "Edna, have you thought about ministry?" I applied in order to show that after a year of 'going through the hoops' of candidature I would not be suitable.

I was.

God won.

Here I am.

Edna

Christmas Fayre

9th December 12-4pm at St. John's

Bric-a-brac, cakes, raffle prizes, mince pies etc - and volunteers to supervise stalls are all needed for this event—see Dot if you are able to help with any of these

Congratulations

To Michael Mulliner on receiving his Artserve Award from the Methodist Church in recognition of his 50 years service as a Methodist Local Preacher

Candle-lit Service



10th December 6:30pm at St. John's

Offers of Mince Pies and help will be gratefully received for this much-loved event.

Contact Dot if you are able to assist in any way

Dates for your Diary:

BBT Mondays 9:30-11am (not on 25th December)

MORE+ every Monday 12-4pm & Thursday 1-4pm
(Not 25th December)

Christmas Fayre 9th December 12-4pm at St. John's

Sunday 10th Candlelit Carols 6.30pm at St. John's

Sunday 17th Family worship with Christingles 10.30am

Wednesday 20th December – Merry Mince Pies at the
Manse 7pm

Christmas Day celebration 9.30am at St. John's

Thursday Jan. 18th 2pm - Ladies' Coffee at Jones's

February 2024 Newsletter

Please let Mike Nimmo have all your submissions for
the next Newsletter by 21st January.

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*"I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to
keep it all the year."*

*"Remembrance, like a candle, burns brightest at
Christmastime."*

— Charles Dickens (1812-70) English Novelist

**Never are voices so beautiful as on a winter's evening, when dusk
almost hides the body, and they seem to issue from nothingness
with a note of intimacy seldom heard by day.**

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) English Novelist

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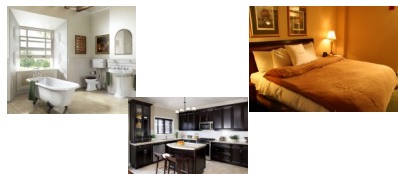
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