

Weoley Hill Church News



December 2017

From the Moderator

Living faithfully in turbulent times

Those with good memories (or who are good researchers) might recall that when I wrote my Advent/Christmas message last year, it was Election Day in the US. We were waiting then to see which way (probably) the most powerful nation on earth would sway. Many of us (perhaps not all) have been disappointed in the outcome of that election.

We had our own vote last year, with campaigns conducted disgracefully (in both the common and purer usage of that word) by BOTH sides, resulting narrowly in a vote to leave the European Union. Sadly, the rhetoric, from BOTH sides hasn't improved since the result was announced. The results of that led, indirectly at least, to a bitterly fought General Election campaign, with the result again a surprise and again bringing us into a new politically-unsettled age.

How then can we live faithfully in these turbulent times? How can we navigate as disciples and as witnesses in these days?

I read an excellent article in Country Way magazine calling for unity after the Brexit vote. You can find and read it yourself <http://germinate.net/resources/cw75->

brexit-time-unity/ and I would encourage you to do this. Whichever way (or whether) you voted in the Referendum, the article's author makes a very positive case for saying, "here's where we are, let's use our churches to build bridges" (rather than dig trenches.) His concern, as Chief Executive of the tenant Farmers' Association, is particularly for the future well-being of rural communities, but the message applies equally to those in town, suburban and city contexts.

We have a message of reconciliation. We are called to offer hope and peace to all.

The prophet Isaiah proclaims, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them a light has shined." (Is 9:2 NRSV) Please note the tense: they (we!) HAVE seen a great light!

Let us be ever ready and always engaged in sharing light and hope to all.

My prayer for you is that you know Christ afresh this Advent and Christmas season.

Steve



Advent Thoughts

Another year rolls by, and once again we come to that old, familiar story of 'God, made man in Palestine' and all the wonder that springs from it. Time again for the readings we know by heart, the nine lessons and associated carols that tell of a Saviour's birth and the heralds among the prophets who pronounced the divine message of hope in dark times.

Most of us know the verses as they appear in the Gospels, where the apostles quote perhaps a line or two with the message that this particular prophesy was being fulfilled in the birth of a carpenter's son from Galilee. Usually there's a lot more to them in the original setting, particularly in the case of the best known one – Isaiah 7 . 14, "A virgin will conceive and give birth to a son".

When you read the original story it isn't perhaps as comforting as our familiar rendering makes it sound. In fact it could be taken as quite threatening. King Ahaz, the King of Judah wasn't exactly the most devout and faithful of Jewish rulers – indeed quite the opposite. And his kingdom is under threat from its enemies, who have formed an alliance against him.

Isaiah goes with a message from God, telling Ahaz not to be afraid; be patient and trust in God. In the most scornful tones he dismisses their enemies as mere hollow men and invites the king to ask God for a sign of his promise. And faithless Ahaz blows it. No, he replies. I won't put the Lord to the test.

The prophet lays into him. God will give him a sign, since he won't ask in faith, and it'll be one he won't like. The sign, the virgin's child, is really one of judgement. Before that child is able to know wrong from right Judah's enemies will be no more – and

neither will the House of Judah. Assyria will bring destruction and desolation as reward for both the king's and the nation's faithlessness.

Matthew, in the first chapter of his gospel, makes it clear that this was ultimately fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. Jesus himself affirms his divine mission in John 12. 47, but shifts the emphasis a little. "I didn't come to judge the world," he says, "but to save it." Yes, there is judgement too; like Ahaz it is for those who will not listen and reject God's message of love, and his messenger, his own Son, who brings the words of love.

There is indeed a double edged message in the Christmas story. This is 'make your mind up' time – as the old Reformers asked, "What think ye of Christ?" Jesus himself leaves his hearers under no illusions. Those who accept him accept his heavenly Father also – those who look at him see the one who sent him. There are no half measures. As C S Lewis pointed out, you cannot regard Jesus as simply 'a good man'. Taking his words at face value brings you to one of only two possibilities; he was either dangerously insane – or knew that what he said was true. There's nothing in between.

And if that sounds grim, well, don't forget that Jesus knew how to make the most of a party. He wants to enjoy it with us; for us to enjoy his presence as we celebrate his birthday. He just asks us to remember what it is really all about, and enter into that presence in full too.

John Davies

Personalia

Séana Davis is out of hospital.

Please remember everyone who is ill or undergoing treatment: Edna Bayliss, very poorly following surgery on a broken hip; the Uptons and the Woods—in both cases both spouses are not well.

Please remember everyone who is recently bereaved or still facing the problems of bereavement, thinking especially of Hilary and family and all Jean Greening's family.

Please remember people, in our fellowship and outside it, who are in insecure circumstances.



Rachel, Sarah, Kathy and Richard would like to thank everybody for their cards, messages and prayers following the death of their mother, Jean Greening. The collection raised £555 for the Alzheimer's Society.

Neighbourhood News

News and events from other local churches:

At Barnes Close: Sunday 10 December at 3 PM: *The Bundle*, a play about refugees .

Thursday 14 from 10-4 PM *Reflection Day*

Tuesday 19 at 7.30 PM: *Open Christmas*



THE BOURNVILLE SOCIETY

The Bournville Society is one of the most popular local history groups in south Birmingham with over 100 members.

The Bournville Society's last meeting of 2017

Wednesday 6 December 2017: Dr Bob the Magician is a member of the Magic Circle and currently President Elect of the British Magical Society. He will be providing a fascinating slide show and talk illustrating the history and development of magic from the days of the Egyptian Pharaohs leading up to anecdotes on some modern-day performers. In a finale he will perform a live magical cabaret illustrating some of the classical items in his magical repertoire. If you like magic this will both intrigue and amaze you! Seasonal drinks and mince pies to start the evening.

Christmas Worship & events



Lunch Club Christmas Lunch,

Wednesday 6 December, 12.45 for 1 PM, £5

All welcome, just Nancy know if you are coming so we can plan for the right number.

Friendship Group Festive Tea

Wednesday 13 December, 2.30 PM, £5.

All welcome, just Nancy know if you are coming so we can plan for the right number.

Candlelight Carol service

Saturday 16 December, 5 PM mince pies to follow

Christmas Eve

10.30 AM: Worship

5 PM: Christmas Crib service for families

11.15 PM: Christmas Eve Communion.

Christmas Day

11.00 AM: Christmas Day family worship.

New Year's Eve

10.30 AM: 'Songs of Praise' family worship

5.30 PM: Worship with quiet reflection & prayer

FRIENDSHIP GROUP

Editor's note: *if you want full details of Friendship Group talks, you will just have to be present! There is rarely room in the newsletter for more than a brief summary.*

Eighteen members went travelling with **Chris and David Marlow** as they journeyed “**From Singapore to Suez**” in March this year, flying out from Birmingham.

A few of the highlights of their cruise:

The fabulous Singapore Botanical Gardens and a glimpse of the famous Raffles Hotel. The view from 88 story buildings in Kuala Lumpur. Beaches and tropical rain in Thailand. A coach tour of Colombo, Sri Lanka. Pirate drill in the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf. The biggest constructions in the world in Dubai. The Imperial Palace and a container port in Abu Dhabi. The Gulf of Aqaba.

And a visit to the *rose red city half as old as time* —Petra, well worth a 2 hour coach trip and a mile walk through the Siq, a narrow, steep-sided passage carved out by water. Petra, a great centre for trade and commerce from about 300 BC, is now in ruins. Built by the Nabatean Arabs, the city grew rich on the trade of myrrh, incense, spices, glass from the Mediterranean, and damask and silk from China. Most buildings, including many tombs, were carved out of rock; an incredible 100-mile long water system, including flood control, channelled rainwater from cisterns. The population swelled to 20-30,000 inhabitants 200-300 AD; the Romans did not destroy the city but influence its layout and building styles. Even after a huge earthquake in 363 AD and a massive flood and a huge loss of life in the 5th Century,

the city was still occupied. Remnants of papyrus scrolls dated to the 6th Century show it was still an important centre. However the rise of Islam, with Petra not on the pilgrims' route, and then a further earthquake in 750 AD which destroyed the water system, the inhabitants gradually left.

Following the visit to Petra, the *Arcadia* sailed in convoy through the Suez canal—ships passing in the opposite direction appear to be floating through the sand.

We hope to 'finish' the journey with the Marlows next year.

Our next meeting is the **Festive Tea on Wednesday**

13December. This replaces our usual lunch so please note that the time is **2.30 PM**. We hope to do a very special 'Ritz' tea with much more than just tea and cake (not champagne unfortunately) and *everyone* is invited whether you come regularly, or have only been once or have never been before, so do come along and invite a friend possibly. The cost will be £5 each and obviously we need to know numbers so please give your details to Nancy (475 4980) or Deb (477 9063) as soon as possible.

Lorraine DaCosta



Mum

You took your time, Jean'

Mum never evangelised in the sense of trying to convert you. But if you knew her well you'd be hard-pressed not to believe she is in heaven with Dad now. One aspect her children might not agree with her with is whether Dad said "You took you time Jean" or whether, as Mum preferred to think, there is no sense of time in the life after death—It wouldn't be heaven if you were missing a loved one and that didn't fit with her clear understanding of a loving God.

Although Mum also firmly believed God knows best, and taught us to pray 'thy will be done' rather than ask him for things. She believed in his plan and mysterious ways beyond our understanding and that gave her strength and comfort. I wondered how her loving God could let her have dementia of all things, and was afraid she would lose her essence and her faith. Her God is good, he never left her and she showed me that it was possible to be gracious in dementia.

On the night she died she told the paramedics she was fine, there was nothing wrong, and gave them a cheery farewell. We prayed the Lord's Prayer together, she checked all her family were ok and sent them her love. Then she waited for Sarah to arrive and peacefully left two of us together to continue her own journey to Dad.

Rachel

October 2017

AUTUMN FAIR

This was a very successful event overall with several people from the local community supporting us as well as our usual congregation. Very many thanks to all those who helped by delivering leaflets in the displaying posters, by contributing items, (filled jars, books, and plants as well as delicious home-made jams, chutney, marmalade and lots of cakes), by serving on stalls and by setting up early then finally clearing away at four o'clock. A special thank you to Nancy and her team who served refreshments non-stop throughout the afternoon.

It was a pleasure to have stalls from the Guides and Scouts, the Bryony Road Street Association, a personalised Christmas bauble table run by Joyce and Susan Cope, and of course John Davies with his wonderful model of the railway at Aix En Pains, as well as the usual book stall (Barbara Viney), Traidcraft Christmas cards (Chris Marlow), and a, parrot-filled handicraft stall (Liz Roberts)! We raised £309.45 on the day with a further £87.05 the following Sunday making £396.50 in total, up on last year, for the Youth and Family Worker fund. Jars not won or bought from the tombola were donated to St Mary's school fair tombola and we took the opportunity to sort and tidy the book trolley, donating many books and the CDs to St Mary's Hospice. Chocolate lollies and fudge made by the Guides and donated to us were also later sold so nothing was left over or wasted. Once again many thanks to all.

Lorraine DaCosta

Play an active part in worship

We need more prayer leaders, and more people to help prepare the elements and table for communion. Training provided! The intercessory prayers can be taken all or in part from a book or other source (there are many). The more experienced prayer leaders are willing to help—even to lead with you once or twice. And new communion helpers can be partnered with someone more experienced. Even occasional help is welcome. See Cheryl (prayers) or Doreen (communion).

Cheryl

December retiring collections— Water Aid

Extreme poverty won't end until everyone, everywhere has clean water, decent toilets and good hygiene.

Water Aid is determined to make that happen within a generation – and they believe the best way to do it is by working with others.

We are WaterAid

Our vision

is a world where everyone, everywhere
has safe water, sanitation and hygiene.

Our mission

is to transform the lives of the poorest
and most marginalised people by improving
access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene.

WEOLEY HILL UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

PRAYER DIARY

A child is born to us, a son is given to us and he will be our ruler. He will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6

	Church members	Topical prayers
WK 1: 3-9 Dec	Margaret Shiner Vida Southall & Carys Kumar & Gini Tambyraja	For the world: for those areas where people live in fear of violence and for those who work to restore peace, encourage reconciliation and heal trauma. For Zimbabwe as it begins a new era.
WK 2: 10-16 Dec	Helen Thompson Gordon & Cheryl Thornett David & Kathleen Upton	
WK 3: 17 -23 Dec	Barbara & Philip Viney Rachel Wakeman Michael Walpole	For our country and our city. For those we know who are not well and those who have recently been bereaved.
WK 4: 24-30 Dec	Ron & Iris Webb Brian & Kathleen Wood Xiujuan (Jane) Zeng	That the Christmas message of hope is heard afresh in a meaningful way in our community.

NOTE: As always, please feel free to send any feedback on the 'Prayer Diary' and specific prayer requests that you would like to include in future lists to Sue Beeby

You may wish to add other members of the families mentioned to your prayers.