

Triangle



The quarterly magazine of the
Methodist Churches of
Wombourne and Springdale

Winter 2014

Christmas past and forever

David Hotchkiss, editor



The first Christmas I remember was 1960. I know this because one of the presents I unwrapped from my bulging pillowcase was the 1960 Playhour Annual, whatever that was. I recall nothing of the contents of said annual, but always the “1960” on the front. It accompanied a toy piano which, in retrospect, was surely tuned in the Far East, such was its distance from conventional European pitch. The black notes were painted on to the white ones. I loved it, of course, and was doomed forever to be drawn to keyboards, and still play in my untutored way.

As older children we were taken out on late-night trips to midnight mass at the local Catholic church (my mother was a former nun, but that’s another story). The church was always packed, and I remember once overhearing a woman reprimanding her husband, who had clearly been over-generous with the self-anointing on the way in. “That’s holy water, Brian,” she hissed, “not whisky!”

I was wakened one Christmas morn in my teens by my older brother, for whom the magic of the season has never worn off, and remember turning over, sullenly, and only reluctantly coming downstairs some time later. Teenagers are like this. As a young man, Christmas meant late nights with amusing friends, and always ending up at Mom and Dad’s with various people, to sample warming fluids.

Pauline and I went to town on Christmas in our first home, despite its miniscule dimensions, and continued the “tradition” in larger homes. Though we had no children of our own, over the years we have rejoiced in sharing the wonder of Christmas with family and friends. Even the dog sends us a card these days. Thank you Ty, but that’s not how you spell “yule”.

I may have mentioned last year how much I dislike the commercialism of Christmas, but, if we can sweep away the glittering horrors on TV and in the shops, there remains an unbreakable thread of joy and hope, so deeply embedded in us that we feel it will last for all eternity. We just can’t help holding Christmas in our hearts.

I wish you and all you love the most wonderful Christmas and New Year.

The deadline for the next edition of Triangle is

March 15

Articles can be given to me or your stewards, sent by post to David Hotchkiss, email: [triangle\[at\]springdalechurch.org.uk](mailto:triangle[at]springdalechurch.org.uk)

God amongst us

The Reverend Christopher Collins



Dear Friends

Everywhere we look at the moment there are signs that Christmas is fast approaching. Winter scenes in shop windows and penguins in John Lewis. Then there are the adverts with all of that fabulous food from Aldi, Tesco, Sainsbury's, Lidl or Marks & Spencer's.

There are adverts galore for all the wonderful gifts you could buy, the knitted Christmas jumpers to wear in front of that roaring open fire next to the immaculately decorated tree. If we're still lucky enough we might even get a traditional nativity complete with donkey, angelic angels, shepherds, wise men, and Mary and Joseph gazing adoringly on their spookily quiet new born baby.

Perhaps that describes Christmas for some of us. But then again maybe not. Perhaps our Christmas looks a bit foggy or lonely. Perhaps we will find it hard to find any Christmas cheer this year. Not because we are "Scrooges" but because that's the way life is for us at the moment. We feel as though no amount of turkey, cracker jokes or Morecambe & Wise repeats will clear the fog.

And actually, I wonder if that is not a more authentic experience of Christmas. Christ was born into an occupied territory amongst a fearful people who yearned for God's light to shine in the darkness. He was born to a young mother who must have been terrified. Then there was Joseph, what did he really make of all this? Life must have seemed a bit foggy then too. We will do well if we remember that amongst our enforced cheer.

But there is something more too. We don't just celebrate the birth of a baby. We remember and celebrate that God came and dwelt among us. She pitched her tent in our midst. Heaven came to earth. In the mystery of the Christ-child God declared his hand to us – "For I so love you . . ."

So if, like me, you are put off by others telling us we should be happy because it's Christmas – then forget the turkey and tinsel and remember, on that holiest of holy nights, God declared his love for you, for me, for all humankind. For God is with you even if he feels far off, because God still dwells within us.

May you be blessed and assured of the love of God this Christmas season and in the weeks, months and years ahead.

Shalom, Rev'd Chris

Health issues facing the Church

Pete Prescott at the District Synod, Trinity Church, Codsall

The main theme of this Synod was mental health issues and how the Methodist Church can respond to these. The Vice-President of Connexion, Gill Dascombe, was invited to attend and share her experience as someone who had a career in psychiatry, as well as being the sole carer of a son who developed schizophrenic tendencies.

Gill provided a keynote talk, with there then being five related workshops, repeated twice, with delegates able to choose two to attend. Below are some statements from Gill's talk, which I hope will give some background to this subject:

- 50 per cent of doctors' referrals are now mental health related, but these only attract 11 per cent of the National Health budget.
- 70 million working days are now lost each year from stress-related illnesses, this figure has risen 23 per cent in the last five years.
- Mental health issues are still viewed by many people in society as a sign of weakness.
- Up until the 1900s, people with mental illness were largely segregated from society and their families in asylums and similar institutions. This was so they couldn't pass on their disease!
- From the 1950s, modern psychiatry began, with increased studies into mental health issues occurring, while medication was gradually introduced which gave sufferers a chance to remain with families and in society.
- But more than ever we still need in the 21st century greater compassion and an increased Christian influence on how society views people displaying irrational behaviour, who still often find themselves laughed at, shunned or stigmatised.

*Delegate **Seija Wallace** also offers this feedback on the workshop entitled **Theology/Bible and Mental Health**:*

"We didn't really discuss the Bible or theology of mental Health but we heard some moving testimonies by the leaders of the workshop and by people taking part in it. It was obvious that healing miracles still happen today. God is equally able today to heal and cure as he has always been and will be, but in our society it is mostly only required when the medical professionals have done everything they can.

"We received a paper about healing (Guidelines for Good Practice for those involved in the Christian Healing Ministry). There are Healing Services in the District and the best contact for information would be Rev'd John Davies, Walsall."

Message of The Maltings

Wombourne folk enjoy fellowship at sheltered complex

On December 18 members from Wombourne celebrate their third Christmas at The Maltings, the sheltered accommodation complex in Walk Lane. Every third Thursday afternoon for the past two years, barring the August break, we have held a short service in the The Maltings' communal lounge.

There are prayers, plus a short message, but the emphasis is on singing the residents' favourite hymns. To this end, we have created our own Maltings Hymn Book, which grows every month as favourites are added to the "playlist" and, hopefully, learned by keyboard player David Hotchkiss.

Carole and Eric Walker, who launched the services, have seen them grow steadily in popularity. At first it seemed residents were keen to get back to their apartments soon after the event; now we're hard-pressed to get away, such is the fellowship and enjoyment (we always have tea and biscuits, which helps!). Sometimes we are joined by the lovely canine friends of residents and of the complex manager. They are very well behaved!



Residents of the Maltings prepare for musical praise.

The services are just as important to the core of Wombourne members who come along to join in. They have all made new friends and take part not only in the singing, but often by providing a thoughtful message or perhaps reading a special passage or poem. Over the months we've had a visit from the minister and even an interactive interpretation of Pentecost to keep everyone on their toes!

On the 18th, there will be Christmas treats to enjoy as we sing our favourite carols and share the wonderful Nativity story. All are welcome.

● *On Christmas Eve, at 6pm, resident and local preacher Phil Bridgewater will be leading a carol service for Maltings folk, their families and friends and staff. Again, all are welcome to join in what promises to be a rather special event.*

Springdale vestry news

Phyllippa Cooper, senior steward

It doesn't seem long since I was writing the autumn report! This year has flown by so quickly, but there is much to look forward to over the next few weeks during Advent. It is wonderful to see Rev'd Chris mobile again and able to drive. We are thankful that his operation in October was such a success.

The Scouts rounded off our 60th anniversary celebrations by providing us with a wonderful evening of entertainment, food and fellowship on October 18th. Many thanks go to everyone who helped out. The atmosphere was really lovely and the sing-along was most enjoyable.



A bring-and-share lunch was held after the World Church Service on November 16th. As usual everyone was very generous with their contributions towards the meal. Thanks to Judy Staley for organising the event.

Hotpot is going from strength to strength. I cannot imagine just how much work is put into the preparation but the enjoyment of everyone who attends is very clear to see. It is a real privilege to be involved, seeing the young people wearing their crowns after the craft session on November 11th was such a treat!

We had an extremely busy weekend at the beginning of December! Our Christmas Fair was on Saturday 6th and this was followed in the evening by a concert featuring the West Midlands Concert Band. Proceeds from the concert, organised by our Wives group, will be going to their nominated charity – Parkinson's Disease Research. Our Toy Service, on December 7th, was once again in aid of the Haven, Wolverhampton. On this occasion we also welcomed our uniformed organisations for a Parade Service.

The members of Junior Church are busy rehearsing for the Nativity Service on December 21st and judging by the rehearsals so far it should be a really wonderful service. Our young people always manage to convey the Christmas message in such a moving way.



Although Jane will give further details in her pastoral report I would like to mention just a few recent events. Earlier in November we were all very sad to hear of the death of our very dear friend Bob Tong. He will be sadly missed by us all.

On a much happier note we send our warm congratulations to Emma and Tom Varty on the birth of their son, Sam, on November 6th. On November 16th we wel-

comed the family and friends of Dennis Kinston John Hill as he was brought for baptism.

Finally many congratulations to Alastair and Kelsey Fyfe on the occasion of their wedding on November 14th in Yorkshire. We wish them every happiness for their future together.

By the time that you read this Christmas will almost be upon us. The vestry team would like to take this opportunity wish you all a very Happy Christmas and a peaceful and healthy New Year,

May all the blessings and joys of Christmas time be with you.

Opportunities for worship

Richard Gould, Springdale

Our principal weekly service is on Sunday morning at 10.30, when we experience, and are able to partake in, a variety of styles of worship aimed at all age groups within our church. However, are you aware of our other services, and would you consider what you might be able to contribute or gain from worship at other times?

On Sunday evenings at 6.30 we have a more reflective service where we are able to benefit from the wide range of experience within our circuit staff and local preachers. Congregations are generally about 15, but we would always be glad to welcome more. Circuit United Services are generally held in the evenings once a quarter, when we are able to experience worship and fellowship with our fellow Christians across the 22 churches in our diverse circuit. We also share worship with our neighbouring churches of Beckminster and Wombourne on an occasional basis.

Wednesday Worship is a short service held on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm in church, usually led by one of our own lay people (not necessarily a preacher). This is an opportunity for exploring different styles of reflective worship, a quiet oasis in the bustle of the week, in contrast to the Scouts' activity in other parts of the building.

Every Thursday at 10am, Morning Prayers are held in the atrium (usually led by Penny), while Chris, or sometimes Donald, leads a Quiet Communion on the second Thursday. The prayers are an opportunity to witness to passers-by who might see us gathered round the prayer table. This is also an opportunity to remember members of our congregation, who are systematically named in the intercessions.

So why not consider worshipping at other times of the week as well as Sunday morning? You will be made very welcome.

Wombourne pastoral news

Pauline Hotchkiss, pastoral secretary

It is Advent Sunday as I write. It is reported that this summer has been the hottest for many years. Autumn was very wet, but it has been a very good year for growing sprouts! Now winter is here, and we look forward to welcoming Jesus into this world as a baby.

At the annual meeting of the Pastoral Group we welcomed two new pastoral visitors. This meant we were able to assign everyone to a group. We also said good-bye to three of our long-standing visitors. Between them they had clocked up 69 years! A special thank-you is being arranged – watch this space!

Val and Stan Edwards and their family welcomed the safe arrival of their new great grand-daughter, Maddie Charlotte. She was born on September 11th (not November 9th as previously reported – I am sorry about the error). The new grand-daughter of Keith and Val Moss was born on November 29th. Isabella Jasmine Tomlinson weighed in at 7lbs. We were able to congratulate Val and her mum in church when it was announced.

At the July meeting of the prayer circle we prayed for the families of those who had lost loved ones. We remembered those who are sick and in need of God's healing hand. We always remember our older loved ones who are no longer able to care for themselves and are in residential care. If you are in need of prayer, or if someone asks for a prayer, the Prayer Book is in the porch, on the table. You are welcome to write requests in it.

Each month we share in ministry to The Maltings sheltered accommodation in Wombourne. It is always a delight to share with this wonderful group of people. We will be celebrating our third birthday on the afternoon of the third Thursday of the month, singing carols and of course enjoying festive party food.

We will also be singing carols at our monthly visit to Himley Mill. I am sure the residents and staff will enjoy singing them. If anyone is interested in joining in with either of these monthly events, please ask Carole Walker about the Maltings and Denis Beaumont about Himley Mill. I am sure there will be a welcome for new people to join them

Pauline and Philip Bridgewater have been worshipping with us for a while now. We recently welcomed them officially into membership at Wombourne, having been transferred from the Kidderminster circuit.

Philip has been very busy getting to know where all the circuit churches are. He is a local preacher and is on the plan. He has a great store of facts about hymn writers. Pauline makes greetings cards; we have already seen her work at a sale at The Maltings, where they live. They have settled very well and Philip has spoken at a couple of meetings at church.

Margaret Shadlock, Val Moss's mum, has moved into the village to be near Val. She is a staunch Methodist, and is still on the church council at her home church aged 93. She has already settled into our church life and is getting to know the ladies from Women's Fellowship and the Wives group. We look forward to officially recognising her as a member at Wombourne soon.

Our memorial service was held in November. Everyone placed a card on the cross bearing prayers for their loved ones. A candle of remembrance was lit and we were invited to light a tea-light from this candle. We were able then to take one home. This was a very moving occasion and I am sure there was joy, as well as sadness, present. It was good to see so many people in church. Coffee was served after the service and many of those who attended stayed and chatted.

Our prayers are with those who are in hospital, especially for Lynne Nicholls and her family. We ask that the Holy Spirit will watch over them. We pray for those who have been in hospital and ask God to place His healing hand on all those who are sick. We ask Him to sustain their loved ones during this time.

We continue to pray for Cathy Anderson, Emily, the grand-daughter of John and Edna Fellows, and Robyn, the grand-daughter of Eric and Carole Walker. Lord, we thank you for their continuing return to good health.

The funeral of Jean Hayward was held at the beginning of November. Jean had been a member of the Women's Fellowship for many years. Let us remember her loved ones, and the friends from church, in our prayers.

The prayer circle meets every two months to update our prayer cards. We pray for the families of those who have lost loved ones and remember those who are sick and in need of God's healing hand.

We always remember our older loved ones who are no longer able to care for themselves and are in residential care. New names are added to the list and those who are well and no longer in need of the prayer circle are removed. It is also a time of shared fellowship for the members of the group. We ask God to sustain those who pray daily for those in need.

Many thanks are due to Denis, our lay pastoral worker, and all the Pastoral Group visitors, for all the work they do in caring for us all in so many ways.

If I have failed to mention anyone with a need or with good news then I apologise. Jesus knows our every need and will watch over us.

I will finish by sending my thoughts and prayers for a Happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year to you all.

MP Gavin opens Wombourne bazaar

Members raise £1,600 at Community Centre event



South Staffordshire MP Gavin Williamson was invited to open Wombourne's Christmas Bazaar on November 22. He stayed for some time, chatting with stallholders. The bazaar raised around £1,600.



Above, Heather Jones with Oliver Pountney and mum Sarah on the Scout tombola. Left, our covergirls Olivia and Charlotte



Above, Pauline Hotchkiss, MP Gavin, Kathy Monckton and Sue Moyle on Bubbles Bathroom Boutique. Left, Louise Wright's hamper





Carol Walker sells cards



Gavin Williamson MP with John Pike, bazaar organiser Gill Worroll and daughter Charlotte. Nell Piper is in the background.



Left, Janet Bryon, June Rawlings and Barbara Tromans sell clothing. Below, Doreen Pike and daughter Alison with gifts



Left, Jean South and Doreen Jenks sell pictures. Right, Lynn Hancox and Jane Meddings on the Big Raffle



STOP PRESS: Springdale Christmas Fayre (Dec 6) has raised £2,163 to date, says treasurer Nicola Jones.

Hallelujahs that open the heavens

Sheila Barnfather on the Messiah experience

Amidst all the preparations for Christmas many choral societies and choirs are practising the countless semiquavers in Handel's remarkable work, Messiah, in order to perform it as part of their Christmas celebrations. The oratorio refers to the birth of Christ but it highlights the significant features of the whole life of Christ and the purpose of that birth.

With his musical genius, Handel uses the Biblical narrative of prophets proclaiming the coming of the Messiah, of how His coming will shake the earth and thus purify the people. "For unto us a child is born and government shall be upon his shoulders" is followed by the heavenly host visiting the shepherds. Here strings sound the fluttering of the angels' wings. Christ becomes shepherd of the human flock and the soprano sings of the gentleness of his caring in a lovely pastoral siciliano. Handel takes John the Baptist's words "Behold the Lamb of God" and then the narrative turns to how "He was despised".

In the passion of Christ section, the chorus declares "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows and with His stripes we are healed." The chorus becomes the angry crowd shouting "He trusted in God, Let Him deliver Him" in a fugue which emulates the blood-thirsty mob. Following the passion there is the proclamation of faith in "I know that my redeemer liveth" and "the sound of the word going into all lands". Throughout, the words are sung to music which colours them, gives them life.

Handel wrote Messiah for the Foundling Hospital, an institution for the care and education of "exposed and deserted children". He supported this orphanage by giving an annual performance of Messiah, the first of which was in 1750 in Dublin, when the men in the audience were requested to attend without swords and the ladies without hoops in order to give maximum space for the numbers attending!

For me this work is the perfect marrying of Handel's distinctive music and the Christian faith. There are so many memorable facets within it, such as the tenor singing of the downfall of the wayward Old Testament people as being "dashed in pieces like a potter's vessel". In this aria one can almost hear the breaking of the terracotta. Handel asks the chorus and instrumentalist to "Behold and see if there is any sorrow like unto His sorrow". The bass questions "why do the nations so furiously rise together?" Later the assurance is given by the bass in "The Trumpet Shall Sound and the dead shall be raised". The trumpeter sounds out the affirmative message in duo with the soloist.

Whether being in the audience at the Albert Hall each Good Friday in my teens or singing in church choirs and choral societies, I have found this work, not only memorable in performance but an experience. When we sing "Worthy is the Lamb Who was slain" there is a reaching out to the audience present and beyond as we

declare this. Then there is a tremendous fugue in this final chorus in which there are so many “Amen’s” with different rhythms and intervals, it is as though Handel has “Amen” coming from different people from all corners of the earth, each affirming their Christian faith.

Near the end of this chorus Handel uses longer notes to slow the orchestra and choral parts as they gather together in harmony and he gives the sopranos a top A, and a falling sequence to sing “Amen”. It is at that moment, we all seem to join “those upon another shore and in a great light” singing praise. Leigh Hunt said “Handel’s Hallelujahs open the heavens”; the Amen chorus does that also.

I have always found it to be an uplifting experience to explore this music. A performance is coming soon near you when the conductor, soloists, orchestra and chorus will bring Handel’s masterpiece to life once more.

● *As Triangle was in preparation, Messiah was due to be performed by Womborne and District Choral Society on Saturday, December 13th, 7.30pm, at St John’s Church, Wolverhampton.*

BC : AD

by U. A. Fanthorpe

*This was the moment when Before
Turned into After, and the future’s
Uninvented timekeepers presented arms.*

*This was the moment when nothing
Happened. Only dull peace
Sprawled boringly over the earth.*

*This was the moment when even energetic Romans
Could find nothing better to do
Than counting heads in remote provinces.*

*And this was the moment
When a few farm workers and three
Members of an obscure Persian sect*

*Walked haphazard by starlight straight
Into the kingdom of heaven*



Wombourne vestry news

Diana Beaumont, senior steward

We celebrated harvest on October 12th with a bring-and-share lunch after our morning service. We had a collection for All We Can/Methodist Aid Relief, and donated most of the produce to the Little Brothers, whose need for food and other basic necessities continues to grow.

Later in the month came our ecumenical One World Week service, which it was our turn to host. The theme this year was "Making a difference". A large number came, and they enjoyed watching the different people taking part, including our own young people and others, acting and singing and reading. A speaker from Christian Aid also took part.

Towards the end of the month some of us visited the Englesea Brook Museum of Primitive Methodism to see their exhibition on the Great War, and the different attitudes to it and actions taken. Their director, Jill Barber, who will be next year's Vice President of Conference,



Enjoying tea with Englesea director Jill Barber, right, are Rev'd Chris Collins, Fred Jones, Diana and Denis Beaumont and David Hotchkiss

gave us a very interesting tour. We didn't see all of the museum, so hope to go back there soon – it's not that far away, and I recommend it for an interesting day out.

On All Souls Day there was a memorial service, when we remembered past members of own families and our church family. It was a moving occasion and well attended. The following Sunday, Wendy Gould took our Remembrance Day service. Again, a large number of people were there, including Scouts, Cubs and Beavers.

Four of our Scouts have been chosen to represent the county at the World Jamboree in Japan next year. We congratulate them and wish them a memorable time. We have been able to contribute towards the cost of them going, as each has to raise a certain amount.

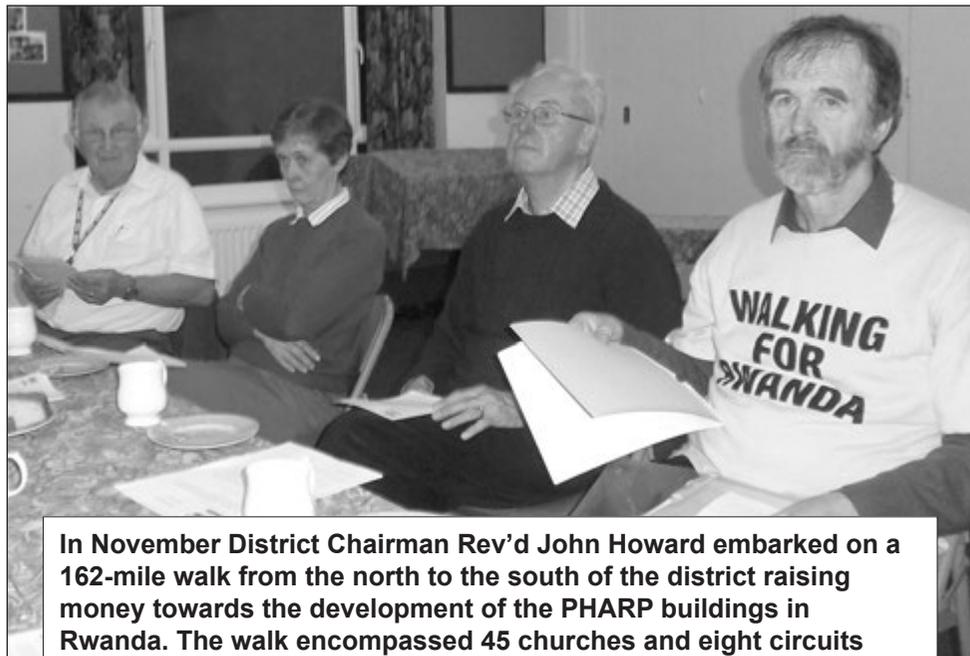
Our annual bazaar took place on November 22 and was a great success, raising £1,600. People enjoy the opportunity to chat to friends and stock up for Christmas, as well as buying homemade cakes and jam. Many thanks to all those whose hard

work made it possible, especially Gill Worrall. Our regular activities continue, including our new Toddlers, Tea and Toast event each Wednesday in term-time, when children and their carers enjoy a chance to play and chat.

As we enter Advent, we look forward to the coming of Jesus into our troubled world. We feel especially for the people of Bethlehem and their many difficulties. We are glad to be able to support Wi'Am, the conflict resolution centre there, founded by our friend Zoughbi Zoughbi, a Palestinian Christian. In order to learn more about their work, for example with children and young people and with women's groups, we have put some information in the vestibule and on noticeboards in the hall. I'm sure that when you have read it you will agree that it is a very good organisation to support at this time of year.

The long walk for Rwanda

Chairman's 162-mile trek through district



In November District Chairman Rev'd John Howard embarked on a 162-mile walk from the north to the south of the district raising money towards the development of the PHARP buildings in Rwanda. The walk encompassed 45 churches and eight circuits across the district. On Day Three John stopped off at Springdale and Wombourne, leading prayers and highlighting the work being undertaken in Rwanda. He is pictured with Charles Clowes and Wendy and Richard Gould. John ended his walk in the first half of December and to date has raised £1,600 for the project.

Springdale pastoral news

Jane Rawlings, pastoral secretary

Well another year is almost over and everyone is preparing for Christmas – what a wonderful time of the year!

On November 16th we welcomed the family of Denis Kingston Hill as he was baptised. May he continue to grow in the knowledge that God is with him every step of the way.

Sadly, in the last few months we have lost three of our church members. Ken Fynn at the end of August, and Betty Relphs and Bob Tong in October. They have all left a gap in our church family and we continue to pray for their own families and friends who are still trying to come to terms with their loss. At this time of year the loss of a family member or friend is especially difficult, and we pray that they find comfort in their memories as they move into the New Year.

At this time of year we also remember all of our church family who can no longer be among us due to failing health. We thank God for all the people who take care of them on a daily basis, offering support and comfort to everyone who can no longer manage in their own homes. May the joy of Christmas visit everyone, wherever they may be.

During the Christmas season we look forward to welcoming people back with us as they return to spend Christmas with their families. We especially welcome our youngsters back from university and hope to hear all about what they have been up to over the last few months.

Here at Springdale we seem to be in a bit of a baby boom at the moment. It started with Gianna Ruth being born on September 29th, a baby girl for Annette and Nic, grand-daughter for Wendy and Richard Gould. Then it was a baby boy named Samuel David for Emma and Tom Varty on November 7th. Finally Esben arrived on November 24th, a son for Caroline and Magnus Weighton. How amazing, to witness God's creation in the form of a baby child, especially as we all remember the birth of our saviour Jesus.



As we look forward to a new year we will hopefully have many more events to celebrate as more births are due. May God bless all the parents involved in these happy events and we pray for the safe arrival of them all.

Well, this is the last Triangle for this year, so may I take this opportunity to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. God Bless.

Injustices we must not ignore

How you can support the Justice & Peace group

The Wombourne and Springdale section now has a “Justice & Peace” group. Rev’d Chris was interviewed to find out more.

Q: Is it fair to say that social justice issues are high priorities for you?

A: Well I don’t disagree! I remember going to an MAYC weekend when I was 18 and becoming really engaged with issues of injustice. For me it is about bringing the kingdom of God to earth and freeing the victims of injustice.

Which issues in particular have you been involved with?

An early and major campaign was Jubilee 2000. Since then, issues of global poverty, tax justice, Fair Trade, climate change and anti-war have been significant.

So why do you think it’s important to have a Justice & Peace group?

I think all of these issues and many more should be of great concern to the church. However, some of the issues are complicated and we hit the question of “what can I do?” By bringing together a group of like-minded people, we can work out what our response can be and be a reminder to the church that these issues are important.

What is the group up to at the moment?

A significant focus at the moment is the heart-breaking situation in the Middle-East. We organised the film showing in November of *The Stones Cry Out*, about the lives of Palestinian Christians. From that we are working on ways to facilitate conversations responding to the Kairos Britain report, which asks us to stand in solidarity with Palestinian Christians. We have also participated in vigils against the use of drones in modern warfare. We have been to an exhibition about the Methodist Church in World War One at Engelsea Brook Chapel & Museum. We will shortly be promoting an evening considering the Trident nuclear deterrent replacement. (*Jan 17th – watch out for further info.*)

What issues do you think will become important?

I think local food poverty and inequality are going to become increasingly urgent for our communities. Alongside that is the ongoing challenge of being prophetically concerned with peacemaking in the light of increasing violence and risk around the world.

It sounds busy! Do many hands make lighter work?

As always! The group is always open to anyone who wants to be involved! To a large extent we work on issues important to members of the group. If you have an issue you’d like us to look at, why not come along?

Old-fashioned treats and worthy causes

Meg Gough, Springdale Wives secretary

We have had some good meetings this year, including a chocolatier who came and spoke to us about making her chocolates. She brought along samples which were lovely. Another lady came and talked to us about handmade cards and paper craft. The ladies had a go at making their own which I think were quite successful.

Jeremy Hobbs talked to us about his life and music. We were surprised how many star names he knew.

Our charity was Fisher House at The Queen Elizabeth Hospital, and a representative came along and talked to us about how it came about and the ongoing programme for it. We managed to raise £1,300, for which they are very grateful. Our charity for the next 12 months is Wolverhampton Parkinson's Support Group and we are having a representative come along next year to talk to us about their work.

We had a great summer outing to Cannock Organ Club, where we were treated to an organist playing to us and an old movie, The Plank with Eric Sykes, and a choc-ice like the good old days! Another treat was a pianist playing and another session on the organ, plus a wonderful buffet after the whole thing.

We are now into the autumn session which has included a talk about the history of the calendar. We also decorated pottery. Some did little dishes which were beautiful some did Christmas tree decorations, and our demonstrator took them home to put them in her kiln to fire. They turned out beautifully. We also had a talk on Catherine Clark's fashion hats and her life.

Our winter meal this year is Christmas afternoon tea at the Goldthorn Hotel, finishing off the year with our carol service.

If anyone has ideas for speakers I will gladly accept them and any ladies wishing to come along and meet with us fortnightly will be made very welcome.

Toddlers, Tea and Toast

Carole Walker

The initial meeting of Toddlers, Tea and Toast took place at Wombourne on October 1st. We were overwhelmed by the response, but the following weeks have seen an average of six or seven little ones.

They, with mums, grans, other carers and one dad, enjoy the time together, along with toast and drinks. The Wednesday morning sessions have been run by different teams of helpers, who come in monthly. I wish to thank everybody involved, without whom this weekly commitment would not be possible.

Please will you pray for this group, that it may continue to flourish in the New Year.

Faith by numbers

Bob Hughes

The twelve days of Christmas start on Christmas Day and finish on the eve of Epiphany, January 5th. The carol of the same name dates back to its English origins in the 16th Century, although the well known tune is reputed to be French.

Each of the twelve days has a religious meaning:

- 1) **True Love** refers to God
- 2) **Turtle Doves** refers to the Old and New Testaments.
- 3) **French Hens** refers to faith, hope and charity, the theological virtues.
- 4) **Calling Birds** refers to the four gospels and the four evangelists.
- 5) **Gold Rings** refers to the first five books in the Old Testament, the Pentateuch, which gives the history of man's fall from grace.
- 6) **Geese a-Laying** refers to the Six Days of Creation.
- 7) **Swans a-Swimming** refers to the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- 8) **Maids a-Milking** refers to the Eight Beatitudes.
- 9) **Ladies Dancing** refers to the Fruits of the Holy Spirit.
- 10) **Lords a-Leaping** refers to the Ten Commandments.
- 11) **Pipers Piping** refers to the Eleven Faithful Apostles.
- 12) **Drummers Drumming** refers to the Twelve Points of Doctrine in the Apostles Creed.



So, if we understand the words of this carol, we have the basic facts about our faith. Happy Christmas!

Words of wisdom

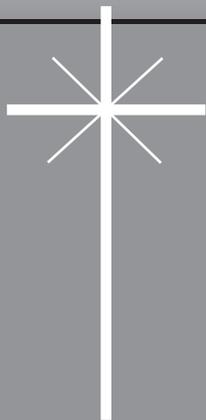
Finished wrapping that last present yet? At this time of year the world can seem even more materialistic than it usually does, which is saying something.

Sir Wilfred Grenfell, who served as a medical missionary in the early 1900s, offered this maxim, which perhaps rings especially true at the moment.

"The purpose of this world," he wrote, "is not to have and to hold, but to give and to serve."

A truth beyond compare

From John Betjeman's wonderful poem "Christmas"



*And is it true? And is it true,
This most tremendous tale of all,
Seen in a stained-glass window's hue,
A Baby in an ox's stall?
The Maker of the stars and sea
Become a Child on earth for me?*

*And is it true? For if it is,
No loving fingers tying strings
Around those tissued fripperies,
The sweet and silly Christmas things,
Bath salts and inexpensive scent
And hideous tie so kindly meant,*

*No love that in a family dwells,
No carolling in frosty air,
Nor all the steeple-shaking bells
Can with this single truth compare –
That God was man in Palestine
And lives today in Bread and Wine.*

