

Triangle



The quarterly magazine of the
Methodist Churches of
Wombourne and Springdale

Winter 2013

Watching and waiting

The Reverend Christopher Collins

So this is Christmas . . . as the song blaring out of the shop speakers tries to tell me. “No it’s not” I mumble under my breath in reply. You see, despite what the adverts for Waitrose, M&S, Tesco and all the others tell us, Christmas is not quite with us yet! We first enter and journey through the season of Advent which this year began on 1st December. Advent is a season of preparation and expectant waiting for the birth of Jesus our Saviour. The season consists of the four Sunday’s immediately preceding Christmas Day.

Advent has two themes linked with preparation. The ancient tradition focussed on the penitential nature of the season and a focus on the “last things”, that is Christ’s coming in glory and judgement. This theme is often picked up in the traditional prayers of the season. Alongside that we also celebrate and think of those who prepared for the coming of Christ. As our pattern of Bible readings through Advent remind us:

- Advent 1:** The Patriarchs (Abraham, our “father in faith”, and David, the ancestor in whose city Jesus was born)
- Advent 2:** The Prophets (those who foretold Jesus’ birth)
- Advent 3:** John the Baptist (who proclaimed the Saviour)
- Advent 4:** The Virgin Mary

Only on Christmas Day itself do we enter the season of Christmas when we celebrate the mystery and wonder of God’s incarnation – God’s dwelling with us. We remember the time when, as Graham Kendrick penned it, “heaven bended near with a tender kiss” as heaven and earth became one.

There is no denying that Christmas is a busy time and often the wonder and miracle of Jesus’ birth can become a little hard to find. Hopefully within our services through Advent and Christmas we can find time for peace and stillness to encounter our God of mystery and realise the wonder of the birth of our Saviour afresh as we look for his coming again amongst us. As we celebrate the moment of epiphany for the Magi in early January, let us again seek glimpses of his glory all around us and be reminded of who it is we worship and serve.

Of course another tradition, stemming from the 17th century Puritans and adapted by Wesley, is the annual Covenant Service which we will celebrate in early January. Wesley first intended the service for Christmas Day as a way to remember God’s readiness to enfold us in generous love which is not dependent on our deserving. We make our response to renew our commitment to that generous love.

So the weeks ahead are for watching and waiting for and responding to the generous love of God. The love that so mysteriously came to earth in the form of a helpless baby. May you have a very peaceful, blessed and Christ-filled Advent and Christmas.

Chris

Wombourne vestry news

Louise Wright, senior steward

It does not seem long since the last Triangle. It just shows how time flies by.

We had Ladies' Day on September 22nd and on October 6th our Harvest Festival. There was a lovely show of fresh produce, lots of tins and products of all sorts. Brenda took it all to the Good Shepherd project at Darlington Street and I am sure it will have been put to good use. After the service there was a bring-and-share lunch, which is always a feast, and it was nice to see Christopher's parents sharing with us.

On October 20th I went to the 60th church anniversary service at Springdale. It was a lovely morning and it was so nice to see Phil Harrison, Phil and Jo Summers and Robert and Teresa. They all send their greetings and good wishes to the people of Wombourne. I thought Chris did very well that morning, considering he had nearly lost his voice, and it must have been daunting to have so many ministers sitting right in front of him.

At night quite a few of us joined the choir at the Kingsway for the One World Week service. It is good to have an ecumenical choir at these occasions.

On November 3rd we had the memorial service and we welcomed families who had lost loved ones during the past year. On Remembrance Sunday we were joined by the uniformed organisations. It was nice to see so many there. After the service there was coffee and biscuits and drinks for the boys and girls.

The Bazaar on November 23rd raised more than £1,500 for church funds after a busy time collecting and making things. We always have a lovely morning and we are grateful to Gill for organising everything once again, especially this year, as she suffered the tragic loss of her daughter Sarah. Thank you, Gill.

Now we are in Advent and Christmas will be here soon. I wish you all a blessed Christmas, but let us also spare a thought for the less fortunate people all over the world.

With Christmas blessings . . .

Timeless connections

Retired minister the Reverend Bill Stubbs had an unusual request from Pauline and David Hotchkiss from Wombourne. Bill married them when he was in charge of Stratton Street Church in 1981. And at their silver anniversary renewal of vows he blessed David's new wedding ring – which he managed to lose seven years later. Pauline bought him a new one, which Bill has again blessed, this time in a private ceremony at his home, witnessed by friends Carole and Eric Walker. "It was a very moving moment," says Pauline, "and it is wonderful still to have that connection with Bill over all these years."

Springdale vestry news

Sheila Sanders, senior steward

We have reached the season of Advent, with all blessings it brings, but as the vestry team look forward we also look back and reflect on the past few very memorable and busy weeks in the life of Springdale.

Samantha Jones, a member of our church family, married Mark Cartwright on September 28th, a very a happy day.

The circuit Just Fayre day was held on October 5th at Springdale. There were many stalls selling fairly-traded goods, plenty of refreshments and a good number of folk present. Thanks to all who made the day such a success.

The weekend of October 19th and 20th saw us celebrating more than 60 years of Christian witness in Penn and what a wonderful weekend it was. On Saturday evening a well-attended concert was held with members and groups of the church family taking part. The Sunday morning service was all-age worship with communion conducted by Reverend Chris. The service was followed by fellowship over coffee in the atrium, the planting of an anniversary rose bush and the cutting of the 60th anniversary cake by Freda Bristow and Geoff Race, founding members of the church.

A special feature in the atrium was a large display of photographs and documents highlighting the history and development of the church. Several former ministers and their wives were present. The church family and friends enjoyed a delicious celebration lunch, which was cooked and hosted by the Scouts. Evening worship was a joint ecumenical service. The whole celebratory weekend was a great joy. We thank God for all that is past and trust him for all that is to come.

On the evening of Remembrance Sunday Mr Martin Rider conducted a well-attended memorial service for families whose loved ones' funerals had been held at Springdale during the last three years.

The Christmas Fair was held on November 30th and on December 7th the Wives Group were due to host the West Midlands Concert Band in aid of their charity, Fisher House.

We are very pleased to welcome James Peterson to the vestry team.

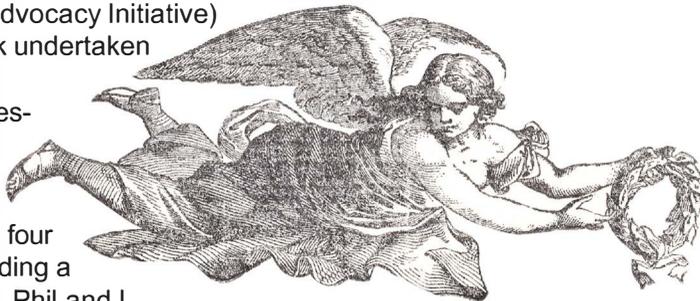
The vestry team wish you all a happy Christmas and peaceful and healthy New Year. May all the joys and blessings of Christmas time be with you.

I believe in angels!

Brenda Shuttleworth on the guiding hands during her West Bank adventure

I am not sure that I have given that much thought to the presence of angels beyond the Angel Gabriel and suspect that some people's philosophy is as much superstition as theology.

However Phil and I began to recognise the presence of angels on our recent visit to the West Bank. For a week and a half we were meeting with all sorts of individuals and groups before moving on to a ten-day programme of olive picking organised by the JAI (Joint Advocacy Initiative) which coordinates work undertaken by the YMCA in East Jerusalem and the Palestinian YWCA.



After spending four days in Jerusalem with four friends who were attending a Pax Christi conference, Phil and I embarked on an adventure all by ourselves! None of us had realised before arriving in the West Bank that it was the Muslim Festival of Eid-ul-Adha and we found ourselves in Ramallah at the height of the festival. (Imagine Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day all rolled into one and you can begin to imagine the joyful atmosphere that pervaded the city but also appreciate that civic amenities were a bit thin on the ground.) As we got off the bus from Jerusalem, it dawned on me that we had left our city map behind.

Enter Angel 1: Phil was cheeky enough to go up to a woman who was clearly Western and probably English-speaking to ask for directions to the Tourist Information Office. Not only did she show us but also insisted we took the map she happened to have with her, saying she had another back at her hotel.

Enter Angel 2: Having walked the length of the city centre to get to the Tourist Information Office only to discover it was closed, the proprietor of the cafe that we fell into for coffee ordered a taxi to take us out to our guesthouse in the little town of Jiffna. When he realised we were volunteers, he thanked us profusely, noting our great age to be embarking on such a pilgrimage. (We have to remember that seniority is venerated in that culture.)

Enter Angels 3: We were hugely disappointed that we could not go on the Sufi Trails as intended without information from the tourist office but discovered that the other guests in the B&B were members of a Quaker working party and they welcomed us with open arms into their midst. That gave us a foretaste of the olive picking programme but also helped us to engage with the issues that Palestinians face on a daily basis. We shared a wonderful lunch with the extended Palestinian

family despite the fact that they had had no water for 10 days and Phil and I actually slept at the house of a woman whose husband had been in administrative detention without trial for 14 months. (Both of these issues are aspects of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories.)

And so we moved on to meet a whole new set of friends from all over the world as we began our olive picking programme at Beit Sahour (the place where Christians commemorate the visit of the angels to the shepherds). Each day we went to a field, chosen because of particular difficulties the farmers were experiencing. To tell you all about that would be a whole other story . . .

Continuing my theme, we had a free day halfway through our programme. Most of our friends sallied off to explore Jericho, the Dead Sea and Jerusalem, while we thought we would potter around locally. Next door to our hotel was the Catholic location for the Shepherds Fields – no problem there. We then found the Greek Orthodox location, largely by following the onion shaped dome. We spent a bit of time looking at some amazing icons in the crypt there and then at some freshly painted frescoes in the church. Then the problems started. With hindsight we realise that were using a very impressionistic map!

Enter Angels 4: As we were walking out of Beit Sahour, we asked a family for directions, looking rather helpless. They bundled us into their car and took us to the town centre, delighted to help us. They were a Christian family in the Baptist tradition. We then got a taxi into Bethlehem, before catching a bus into Jerusalem where we did a bit of sightseeing.

Enter Angel 5: Finding the bus back to Bethlehem was no problem at all, but darkness falls quite quickly at teatime in that part of the world and we had no idea that we had reached our destination. From the seat in front of us on the bus a lovely young woman turned round unexpectedly and smiled at us, offering to help us. She, a Muslim, works in the Ecce Homo Guesthouse in Jerusalem. She found a taxi for us, explained to the driver that we were volunteers and accompanied us in the taxi as far as her home in one of the refugee camps in Bethlehem. We got a very good rate for the taxi drive too!

Angels everywhere: it would take a few volumes of the church magazine to tell you the stories of all the angels we met – people whose hospitality was humbling and courage amazing. People have asked whether we were frightened and I can honestly say “never”, even when we were dealing with Israeli soldiers who on two occasions were very challenging.

Phil and I would be happy to tell you our stories at any time, as I'm sure you know, and we do have an amount of olive oil and olive wood Christmas tree decorations from Bethlehem if you would like to buy them.

Springdale pastoral news

Jan Rawlings, pastoral secretary

Well Christmas is nearly upon us! Who can believe another year has gone by.

Since my last message a number of our Springdale family have been finding life a struggle with several having to spend periods of time in hospital. Francis Cox is currently in West Park Hospital awaiting a place in a residential home. I am sure you all join me in sending Francis all our love and best wishes and hope that this move is as stress-free as possible and that soon you will be settled into your new home. Alison Mellor has been in hospital for a long period but she is hopefully coming home soon for a while. But she may need to undergo further treatment in the future. May you find strength to continue through this difficult time with the knowledge that God is with you always. It is good to see John Roberts back worshipping with us on a Sunday. May God continue to reach out with his healing hand giving you strength to move forward with your recovery.

During this festive period it can also be a time for many people to remember loved ones no longer with us. Cherish the memories and remember that you are never alone and that God is always by your side.

Back in September we had the wonderful occasion of the wedding of Sam and Mark. A glorious day was had by all and the bride looked beautiful as you would expect. Sam and Mark, may you start out in married life together in the knowledge that God is travelling with you every step of the way, guiding and loving you both as you journey on.

Congratulations to anyone who has recently had or in the near future has a special birthday or occasion to celebrate. Have a wonderful time.

May I take this opportunity to wish everyone a Happy Christmas and a Healthy New Year.

Diamond geezer

Sent to Bob Hughes by Bob Hampson

It was Christmas Eve, and a couple were doing last-minute shopping when the husband disappeared. She phoned him on his mobile. "Where are you?" she asked.

In a calm voice he replied: "Darling, remember the jewellery shop we went into five years ago, and you fell in love with that diamond necklace that we could not afford, and I said one day I would get it for you?"

Her eyes filled with tears. "Yes, I remember," she said.

"Well I'm in the pub next door to that."

Wombourne pastoral news

Pauline Hotchkiss, pastoral secretary

When you read this magazine we will be in the season of Advent. At this time we will be awaiting the arrival of Jesus. This is the time of waiting patiently for the "Good News". Patience is one of the Fruits of the Spirit and one that is quite hard to put into practice.

We will be preparing for Christmas and through all the busy-ness of the season let us remember that Jesus came as a baby, also as Prince of Peace.

On October 27th we were delighted to welcome Sophia Marie Massingham-Wood and her family to celebrate her baptism. The church was full and there was a lovely atmosphere. Several of the hymns were chosen by Sophia's parents and the singing was wonderful. It was joyful that her family shared in the communion and we were able to speak with the family after the service. We hope to see them again soon.

Our prayers are with those who are in hospital, or have been in hospital. We remember Joy Brandrick and Tom Wood, who are both now at home recovering. We pray that God will continue to care for them.

It was on the morning of the Bazaar that we were told the sad news that David Slater had lost his battle with cancer and had died that morning. Our prayers are with Amanda and the children, and with the rest of the family and we ask that God will grant you peace and comfort as you come to terms with your loss.

When the members of the Prayer Circle met in November we prayed for those who had lost loved ones. We also remembered all 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 look after themselves and are in residential care. God bless them all.

Our monthly visits to The Maltings continue. We shall be celebrating our second birthday at the December meeting with a Christmas party afterwards. We also visit Himley Mill Nursing home each month and minister to the residents in two of the units there. They always appreciate us being there and join in with the singing.

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

Several people have celebrated special birthdays or anniversaries during the last couple of months and to them we offer many congratulations.

Do you find choosing Christmas presents for other people difficult? Well, the preacher Lloyd John Ogilvie may have the perfect idea for you. It's the perfect thing for any occasion – and it's free!

"The secret of life," he wrote, "is that all we have and are is a gift of grace to be shared." So when you don't know what to give, give yourself!

Lessons in peace

David Hotchkiss on the Corrymeela experience

A 14-strong party from our area visited the world-famous Corrymeela peace and reconciliation centre in Northern Ireland in September. It was an inspiring and educational visit, as well as being a lot of fun.

Members from Wombourne, Stratton Street and other churches were joined by two supernumary ministers and guests to spend a week in the modern Davey Village residential centre at Corrymeela, which is perched on cliffs overlooking the dramatic County Antrim coast near the resort of Ballycastle, and an hour or so from Belfast.

Ex Conference President and former Wolverhampton minister the Rev Dr Inderjit Bhogal is currently leader of the Corrymeela Community, and made a point of meeting our two parties – one off the ferry, the other at the airport. He stayed with us until business took him away midweek and led some of the sessions, and it was a real pleasure to be with him and Kathy again.

We were taken on trips to see the Giant's Causeway and the challenging Carrick-a-Rede Ropebridge, and our journey into Belfast included the fabulous Titanic exhibition, which is breathtaking in its design. On the same day we visited the expensively developed East Belfast Mission project and drove into the city's historically troubled areas, dismayed at the 20ft-high "peace walls" but encouraged by the messages of hope graffitied on to them.

Everyone agreed, though, that the highlight of the week was a talk given by Harold Good, former President of the Methodist Church in Ireland and director of Corrymeela, who was one of two independent witnesses to the decommissioning of the weapons. A straight-forward and kind man, he won the trust of the warring factions no doubt through his clearly-stated longing for peace. He made friends with Martin McGuinness and even, eventually, won over Ian Paisley.

Other sessions, in the comfy meeting rooms of the Davey Village, covered the work of Corrymeela, which has supporters and volunteers all over the world, and also asked us to look at our own attitudes to other sections of society. We were led and fed by a team of volunteers who immediately made us feel at home, among them Yvonne Naylor, a long-time member of the community, whose skills included puppeteering and a lot of marching in the light of God!

We came away with some happy memories and an awful lot to think and pray about.

Stand in the other man's shoes!

Pauline Hotchkiss

Recently I was having a conversation with a young girl, about 12 years of age. In the light of all the news about the plans for remembering the First World War next year and our visit to the Corrymeela peace community in Northern Ireland, we were talking about war. I asked her if she knew how situations got to the stage of great unrest.

She said: "Now Pauline, I believe that it starts with two people. They have an argument and then they each share that with two more people. You now have four people who are in conflict with each other. This then goes on to eight or more people falling out and each of them thinking that their views and what they say is right and the only way.



"Everyone has a view and whether it is right or wrong, each of them should try to think about the other person's view and try to be where that person is."

I was surprised that one so young already understands about how war starts and how it should be put right.

While I was in Corrymeela (see David's report, above), I learned that it was a place of peace where people could visit to air and hopefully understand their differences. The work there tackles many issues that divide people, but always encourages folk to "stand in the other man's shoes". Surely this is what my young lady is saying!

Guardian of the mountain

Many years ago, it is said, a shepherd was stranded on Ben Alligin in Scotland during a snowstorm. Shivering, he huddled under an overhanging rock. Nodding off, he later opened his eyes to see a kilted Highlander standing over him, his beard encrusted with frost, his bare head white with snow. Only his eyes were warm. Silently he beckoned to the shepherd and led him safely through the blizzard to his croft, then vanished.

More recently an English couple climbing in the same spot found themselves lost in a dense, cold mist and panicked, stumbling this way and that. Suddenly a shaggy-maned figure loomed out of the mist and silently raised his arms to bar the way ahead. Seconds later the mist cleared and the couple realised they were feet away from a deadly precipice. They hurried back to the safety of their hotel and told their tale.

"Aye," said one local man, "angels don't always come with wings . . ."

A Black Country First Christmas

C Beryl Wilkes, with thanks to Bob Hughes

“Are cor goo on Joe, are doh feel well,” was all as her could say.

“Yo’ve gorra goo, you’ll be with me arll help yer all the way.”

They’d gorra goo ter Bethlehem cuz it was census time,
an if they couldn’t get there thay’d at ter pay the fine.

“Arll never mek it,” Mary said. “Yo know the babby’s due,
an if we gets ter Bethlehem arm sure there’ll be a queue.”

“It’s seventy mile ter Bethlehem from Nazreth were we am.
We cor get there with me like this,” an Joseph said “We con.”

“Oh Joe, arm tired, are cor goo on, cor goo another mile.”
“Buck up mar wench, sit on this bench, rest thee self a while.”

Cuz Mary day feel very well they had to travel slow,
an when they got ter Bethlehem there wor no were ter go.

“Do worry, mar wench,” Joseph said, “we’ll find somewhere soon.”
“Sorry mate, yo cor come ere cos we ay got no room.”

The couple went to all the pubs but nobody wanted to hear.
Then a landlord showed em a stable an sed “Yo con stop in there.”

There were sum shepherds in a field a couple of miles away
Who suddenly saw the sky light up – it was as bright as day.

They sid a gorgeous angel who spoke ter them an sed:
“Get ter Bethlehem an find the Son of God, lyin in a manger bed.”

They fun out where the babby woz an in they went ter see,
The servya of the world God ad sent fer yo an me.

“Con we see the babby, please, the angel sed woz ere?
He sed e’s very special but there’s nothin fer us ter fear.”

“Doe be frightened, cum on in, excuse the place.”

“Doh fuss,” the shepherds sed. “Yo know it cud be wuss.”

They went up to the manger where the babby had been laid,
They knelt before the servyer, an silently they prayed.

The shepherds rose from off their knees an as they turned
ter goo said:

“Ee’s a lovely baby ay e?” an Mary
sed, “Ar know . . .”

