

Triangle



The quarterly magazine of the
Methodist Churches of
Wombourne and Springdale

Winter 2016

Lonely this Christmas?

David Hotchkiss, editor



Hello and welcome. A few weeks ago I welcomed my wife Pauline back home after her week in Cyprus. She'd gone with an old friend having heard that the composer Roger Jones was taking his soloists there to join local choirs performing his musical Barnabas. We'd first heard it in Kidderminster. It tells the story of "the encourager" Barnabas guiding St Paul on his mission to the island (see The Bible/Easyjet for details). Pauline and our friend Jo stayed at the home of Pauline's cousin, and saw most of the antiquities Cyprus has to offer, even venturing into the Turkish north to visit an ancient monastery, as well as hearing the musical in Paphos.

I didn't go. Well, such trips are seldom "disability friendly" and I didn't fancy the idea of hauling myself on and off planes, buses etc and then finding it impossible to access the historic attractions. Pauline would have a lovely, adventurous time with her friend and her cousin, and I would have a wonderful, carefree week, doing my own thing at home. I'm a dab-hand at catering and could catch up on all the sci-fi movies I'd saved to fill the solitude, as well as doing a little light DIY.

Perfect . . . except, of course, that it wasn't. Despite the wonderful hospitality and fascinating outings, Pauline wasn't really happy until I'd picked her up from the airport. She had missed me and had felt I really ought to have been sharing those experiences with her. And I was pretty miserable, too, living "on the surface" of the house and waiting for every phone call. To make matters worse, a dear friend died during the week, and I couldn't tell her for fear of spoiling the trip. We were so relieved to get back to each other, despite my having to break bad news.

It was, I suppose, a taste of loneliness, something we can only imagine when we're surrounded by loved family and friends. Long-term loneliness is magnified during the festive season, when it seems the rest of the world has shut you out, consumed by its own happiness. A special event at the United Reformed Church on December 22 (7.30pm) hopes to address loneliness and other issues. It's called "Blue Christmas" and will be led by Rev'd Chris and Rev'd Nadine. We pray it will help replace dread with hope at what can be a difficult time of year for many.

The deadline for the next edition of Triangle is

March 5

Articles can be given to me or your stewards, sent by post to David

Hotchkiss at triangle@springdalechurch.org.uk

Hark the herald cola lorry

The Reverend Christopher Collins



It must be Christmas. It must be – the John Lewis ad is on our TV screens, as well as that great herald of the season, the red Coca Cola lorries, snaking through our television adverts to the beat of “Holiday’s are coming”. Even Noddy Holder has declared it Christmas.

When I was training at Queen’s, the herald of Christmas always brought such mixed feelings. The splendour of the chapel carol service, the high jinx of the student revue tinged with the impending doom of end-of-term deadlines. But one of the best bits was the much-lauded day of carol singing in Birmingham.

As we stood in the confluence of footpaths outside the Bullring, where New Street and High Street meet, we watched passers-by get confused by our singing. Now it wasn’t because we couldn’t hold a tune but because the words we were singing were vaguely familiar but simultaneously unrecognisable. Gone were the familiar words about dreaming of a white Christmas to be replaced with

*“I’m dreaming of a just Christmas / just like those old-time prophets say:
Long-range missiles banished / and all fear vanished;
the world looks forward to that day.”*

And we didn’t sing the usual words to “O Come All Ye Faithful” but:

*“O come, heavy laden / shoppers to the Bullring /
Come ye, O come ye, to Birmingham.
Spend to the limit / of your hard-earned wages.
O see how we ignore him / O see how we ignore him /
O see how we ignore him, / Christ ignored.”*

We didn’t change the words only to be mischievous but to witness to Jesus our Lord as we deliberately blasphemed the many things we make gods in our world – money, weapons and anything that perpetuates injustice. We did it to make the point that the baby born at Christmas could change the world – if only we let Jesus in.

So as we approach this season of Advent and Christmas, I hope and pray that we can blaspheme all that hinders the Christ light so we can worship fully Jesus Christ our Lord.

May you have a peace-filled Christmas,

Rev’d Chris

Keeping hope alive

Lesley Cook, olive picking near Bethlehem, October



No doubt some would ask why Bryan and I would spend a “holiday” in Palestine (Israel), spending four mornings and one day in rocky, extremely dusty, olive groves helping local farmers get in their olive harvest. It was also unseasonably hot. The remaining time was spent in sight-seeing or lectures. Every evening bar one was spent at the local YMCA for lectures or films. Yes, it was demanding, physically and mentally. So much information, so many new people to talk to. But it was interesting in many ways.



Lesley at work up an olive tree

Firstly, we and 65 other folk from all over Europe and the USA, fell in love with olive trees! As we climbed them, shook them, picked the olives, sorted them and put them in sacks, they became really important to us – we were beginning to learn how these tough, long-living trees have become symbols of hope for the Palestinians whose land can be seized at any time by settlers or Israeli army. Seeing your trees bulldozed must be heart-breaking!

Then there were the conversations with like-minded people, all learning from each other. Many were Christian, some Muslim, many had no faith – it didn't matter. All ages were present too, the oldest being 83. We really enjoyed the hospitality of the farmers too. At about 1pm a folding table would arrive in the olive grove, followed by huge pans of chicken, rice and salad, with yoghurt and bottles of fizzy pop and juices. On the full day, this was followed by honey cake. That day, being a Friday, was a school holiday and we were joined by the farmer's extended family, including babies. All the children enjoyed practising their English on us.

The fields we worked in were situated around the Bethlehem area. Bethlehem is quite a large city in the West Bank (occupied by Israel in the 1967 war) and is nominally under Palestinian control, but 87 per cent is actually under Israeli control as there are 23 settlements and 25 outposts built illegally on Bethlehem's land. It is very close to Jerusalem, but that city is of course unreachable by most Bethlehmites because of the Separation Wall.

Many of the olive groves are surrounded by Israeli settlements (towns) built illegally on hills above the groves.

Some farmers are unable to reach their fields as the Wall or fence is in the way. To the farmers, we were an international presence, making a visual statement that we



Bryan working on the project



Lunch break: Palestinian Za'atar bread, pizza style

supported them. We were “Keeping Hope Alive”. We hoped that there would be no attacks by armed settlers while we were there and thankfully there were not.

Every year JAI (Joint Advocacy Initiative of East Jerusalem YMCA and YWCA Palestine) run Olive Picking and Olive Planting holidays. We were part of this initiative, but Bryan and I went with a group organised by Embrace the Middle East, a Christian charity which used to be called Bible Lands, so we were able to use our free day to visit some of the charities they support.

There is so much more to tell you, for instance how I cut my foot as I climbed over the motorway barrier to visit a Bedouin camp! So please do ask me about it all when you see me. More importantly, please pray for the people of Israel/Palestine, whether Jew, Muslim or Christian, that there might be a just peace in the land where the Prince of Peace was born.

Food for the Journey

Lesley Cook

Every two years, since 2002, there have been one-day or weekend conferences for lay people organised jointly by Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury District and Lichfield Diocese. I believe I have been to most of them and every one has been enjoyable or thought-provoking or both. However, “Unpacking Paul”, led by Dr Stephen Barton, held at the new venue of Yarnfield Park Conference Centre, was a real cracker!

Maybe some were put off by the subject, Paul (too difficult?) or by Stephen being labelled as theologian and biblical scholar (too highbrow?), but I am glad that I risked it, as the four lectures were challenging but relevant, bringing the character of Paul to life. Stephen’s endearingly accessible delivery meant that I learned more about the worlds in which he moved, and I have come to understand more about his style, character and faith.

We discussed passages from Paul’s letters and what they might mean in our churches today. My group was skilfully led so that all were encouraged to speak – and we did so with passion and commitment, but also with love and respect. The rest of our time was taken up with fellowship, worship, eating (excellent food) and even an optional quiz. So in about two years’ time look out for the next “Food for the journey”. It will be a one-day Saturday conference next time, but please consider attending – after all, it does what it says on the tin!

Storms, beer and the ABC

Richard (and occasionally Liz) Green at Greenbelt

The annual festival, where arts, faith and justice meet, enjoyed its third year at Boughton Hall in Northamptonshire. After initial teething problems, Greenbelt seems to be settling in well to the surroundings of a stately home. There is plenty of room for the campers – both tented and motorised. The event locations and supporting stalls, and the gardens, are ideal for adults to relax and for children to play.

We Brits always talk about the weather, which was in general better than last year. However, we did experience a terrific storm. As it happened, Liz and I were

sheltering in our tent with Lucy and Andrew and the grandchildren, and were able to see the tornado approach then swirl around the campsite – battering everything in its path.



Greenbelt at Boughton Hall – ideal for children and adults

I always like to hear John Bell of the Iona community at Greenbelt. Sadly, we had to abandon his first session as the marquee was too small (overflowing) and the PA system did not carry his voice outside. However, his second session on Women in the Bible was held in a much larger venue. His talk was most interesting and very amusing at the same time. The Wild Goose Worship Group, including John Bell, led a Big Sing in the Big Top. What an uplifting start to the day – everyone singing.

On Friday evening at 9.30pm, outside under the trees, a Eucharist for night-time took place, called Enter the Heart of the Darkness. Torches and candles provided a little light to read by, otherwise all was dark. Some of us were not sure about finding God in the darkness, rather than the light!

Someone else who I particularly wanted to hear this year was Justin Welby (the “ABC”). He was interviewed by Rev Kate Bottley (Gogglebox vicar and a Greenbelt trustee). She was obviously concerned as to how to address her “boss” in a public place. She need not have worried. Christian names were the clear choice. Although it was a generally light-hearted conversation, she did probe gently and produced some honest, thought-provoking answers from the Archbishop.

He appeared again at the Sunday morning Holy Communion, where he was questioned by a group of young people. He was asked why he wanted to become Archbishop. He replied that he didn’t, but maybe it was “because of the hat”.

Young people had prepared and led the whole service this year and we found ourselves doing the high-five of peace, not a handshake, and singing:

*“One day, one day,
Perhaps it will be Sunday
One day we will live in peace and a little child will lead us.”*

. . . accompanied by many kazoos!

Early on Sunday morning, I went to prayers with the Corrymela Community. This was a distinctly different and very simple act of worship to begin a new week. During The Peace, we were encouraged to talk to our neighbour. The lady next to me was a regular visitor to Mucknell Abbey (near Worcester) – a place which Liz and I had only recently discovered.

There is always so much available at Greenbelt that it is impossible to cover all that is on offer, but I would like to mention three other attractions:

- 1 Paul Cookson – poet and comedian, who always has his audience in fits of laughter, either at his one-man show or at “Late Night Twist”. However, this year, on one occasion he read a poem about Easter (The Nails) which had us all close to tears.
- 2 Bromance in the Big Top – we went as family with the grandchildren to see a group of talented acrobats. The adults enjoyed the show immensely, but I think the children had more fun running along the rows of chairs in the dark and dancing to the music.
- 3 Beer and Hymns – this was the first time that I had been to the Jesus Arms to join in the singing of popular hymns with a pint glass in my hand. It really is a very moving experience – especially when you have a member of the family accompanying you with a descant in your right ear. Liz told me afterwards that she could hear all the words back at the tent.

Long may Greenbelt continue!

Prayer Nativity

On Sunday, December 11th, Wombourne Methodist Church will be open during the day for anyone to pop in and spend time in the quiet of the sanctuary, away from the madness that the secular Christmas has become. Different aspects of the Christmas Story will facilitate prayer and reflection. All are welcome to stay for as long or as short a time as needed. Tea and coffee will be served.

A Christmas letter from Bethlehem

John Howard, Mission Partner, Israel Palestine



Dear Friends, I have just driven from my home in Bethlehem to TanTur, the Ecumenical Institute where the Methodist Office is located. To do so I have had to cross the “Separation Barrier”. This has been built within the West Bank, not on the internationally agreed border between Israel and the West Bank. Today there was extra security with a “flying checkpoint” at a road junction well within the West Bank.

As an international it wasn't a great delay. It did take a little while but the inconvenience was as nothing compared to the intrusion it makes to the lives of many Palestinians. Zoughbi, a Palestinian friend, who is programme manager for the World Council of Churches observer programme here, should have been at a review meeting in Jerusalem but he was not allowed to go.

The Christmas story would have been very different if Mary and Joseph had been traveling today. Living in Nazareth they would have been Israeli citizens and therefore would have been prevented from entering Bethlehem. If somehow they had arrived – and Jesus had been born – the Wise Men from the east would have found the journey from Jerusalem to Bethlehem very difficult. Had the gold, frankincense and myrrh been given to them by someone to take to Bethlehem? Were they going to stay in Bethlehem? What was the reason for their visit? Perhaps – as one of my colleagues was asked recently – “are you dangerous?”

I find it almost impossible to sing the lovely carol “Oh little Town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie”. Today, Bethlehem is a major city but a city being crippled by the occupation now fifty years old. Despair among the population of Bethlehem is palpable, and in despair some of the young people are resorting to pointless and self-destructive violence. In bed most nights I heard tear gas and live rounds fired.

Down the road in Beit Sahour – “the shepherds' field” where the angels sang “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and goodwill to those with whom he is well pleased” (Luke 2 14) – the last of the shepherds, just two years ago, had to abandon his way of life as the Har Hommar settlement grew still further, occupying the lands where the sheep used to graze. Today, as you look out from the shepherds' field you see the separation barrier.

But the coming of the baby into the world is for ever reason for hope. The baby was born into an occupation at least as violent as the occupation today. As God came to earth he didn't chose a comfortable stable and peaceful place, but he came to be with the people – in their midst, sharing the joys and the tears of life lived on earth. It is difficult to predict what the next few weeks will bring, the clouds hang heavy and it is difficult to be optimistic, but the coming of the Prince of Peace is a reminder that – in the words of Garth Hewitt – “No injustice will last forever.” In the end there will be peace and there will be justice for all God's children.

Please pray for peace in the Holy Land this Christmastime.

Wombourne vestry news

Charles Clowes, senior steward



Our big project over the summer has been the installation of the disabled access ramp into the schoolrooms and toilet from the Church. The builders have done a wonderful job and it has totally transformed the back rooms.

The ramp was finished in time for the Harvest celebrations. At the coffee morning on the Saturday there was a real “buzz” when people saw the finished project and tried the new partitions, which moved without any effort. The whole area has been given a new lease of life, even though there is still much decorating to be done.



The builders took care to reflect the old door in the new. There's another partition beyond this, creating an intimate meeting room.

We must now explore how best to use the disabled access for the community.



Testing, testing . . . the new entrance will soon be fitted with an electric opening device

It was good to get back to our normal weekly meetings after the work was completed, but sadly the Women's Fellowship has decided to call it a day. The late start did not seem to affect Toddlers, Tea & Toast, as they attracted more children and carers than ever.

It was a joy to welcome Rev'd Jean Spragg to lead our Ladies' Day service. It was a very busy weekend with the Just Fayre on the Saturday and One World Week service at St Bernadette's in the evening. Rev'd Chris led a very moving Memorial Service, with votive candles placed on a wooden cross in memory of a loved one. A few weeks later it was Remembrance Sunday, where we remembered those who made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom. Let us never forget. It is in the hard times that we need to trust God the most and find the peace that passes all understanding. God is still in control.

Our thanks go to Gail and Martin Cresswell for organising this year's Autumn Bazaar and to all who helped in setting up and manning stalls etc. It was a very pleasant morning and seemed to be well received.

As we approach Christmas we have some traditional events coming up such as the Toy Service (December 4th) and Carol Service (December 18th), plus a few new and different things, such as Blue Christmas at the URC (December 22nd), Prayer Nativity – a space for reflection and prayer (December 11th) – and the Christmas Eve midnight service which is aimed to coincide with midnight in Bethlehem, so begins at 9.30pm.

May you find joy and peace this Christmas. God Bless, **Charles**

Springdale vestry news

Samantha Cartwright, senior steward



In recent correspondence our Rev'd Chris has suggested we bear each other's burdens and share our struggles. The stewards at Springdale have definitely taken this on board – getting technical – and now we have a *WhatsApp* group dedicated to help us work better as a team. Setting this up has brought some laughs and we're not quite there yet!

There are many positive things to reflect on in the life of Springdale. A few stand out for me, personally: the Circuit Choir performance at St John's brought many people together for a pleasant afternoon of chatter, afternoon tea and music. The Church Anniversary dance was a particular success and even those who thought their dancing days were over enjoyed a cheeky few steps around the hall!

Furthermore, a couple of talks I have attended at Springdale recently have been fascinating. Firstly, hearing a talk about life in Palestine was particularly informative and life-affirming and a great way to engage with our duty as a member of the Kyros community. Moreover, it's a pleasure to share the great news that we raised enough money for a defibrillator and its demonstration by the West Midlands Ambulance Service was incredibly useful.

Indeed, I am filled with enthusiasm at our sense of togetherness and determination to reach out to the community, embrace "radical hospitality" and strive to connect with non-worshippers.

So often people find it easy to focus on the negative aspects at church but upon reflection there is so much to feel proud of being a member of Springdale that I apologise if I seem boastful! I think the plan to distribute mince pies to our direct neighbours around Christmastime is a great event to focus on (as well as the Christmas fair) and I am looking forward to building on its perceived success from last year. In an increasingly uncertain world, I thank God for my Springdale family and pray that we grow and can successfully reach out to others as part of our Christian mission.

Mary's Song

Charles Causley

*Sleep, King Jesus,
Your royal bed
Is made of hay
In a cattle-shed.
Sleep, King Jesus,
Do not fear,
Joseph is watching
And waiting near.*



Welcome also
Elliott Thomas, a
great-grandson for
Wombourne's
Betty Crossfield.
He was safely
delivered to Hana
(Betty's grand-
daughter) and
Michael Bailey on
August 14th, weigh-
ing 6lbs 8oz.

*Warm in the wintry air
You lie,
The ox and the donkey
Standing by,
With summer eyes
They seem to say:
Welcome, Jesus,
On Christmas Day!*

*Sleep, King Jesus:
Your diamond crown
High in the sky
Where the stars look down.
Let your reign
Of love begin,
That all the world
May enter in.*



**Pauline Hotchkiss and Sandra Noon
with footballs for Kenya**

Rags to riches

This year is the tenth Wombourne has supported Friends of Kenya's Children, a charity set up by Sandra Noon, from Derby, after a chance meeting (!) with Pastor Kenneth, himself a former street child who was then setting up an orphanage and a school as a thank-you to God for his own salvation.

Our members not only signed up to regular contributions to the project, but collected items for giant "three-day sales" in Derby, which have raised thousands for the project. We have also funded individuals going through school and helped when youngsters were seriously ill, as well as sending uniforms and school equipment.

Sandra reported that prized possessions, particularly among the boys, were footballs, often so worn out they had to be stuffed with rags. We were able to send some new (deflated) footballs recently, and are looking for more. Football boots would also be very well received. If you can help, please ring Pauline on 01902 336174.