

December 2021

Luke 2 v.14
Peace on earth



Greetings

We are singing again!

As you may be aware, we have now re-started singing, in a limited way, in our church services. Of course with new virus variants impacting the way we meet together all the time, we are constantly having to check how we meet, how we sing, whether or not we wear masks... but, with Tom or Stan playing the organ, we are now singing congregational hymns. We started at the beginning of October, with our Harvest service being the first in which we sang all our hymns together accompanied by the organ. And what a difference it makes to feel that we can again actively take part in the worship in our church.

Of course this is just one of many changes we have had to make in our church over the last two years or so as

we have adjusted to the threat of the Corona virus and its impacts on the way we live and worship (and there are more details on our latest Covid-related updates elsewhere in this newsletter),

The demands it has put on so many people have been great. The Warrington Foodbank is one of the organisations that has had to respond to very challenging circumstances over the couple of years, especially since the universal credit uplift was taken away by the government. One of the consequences of that has been that David McDonald has been working ever-longer hours as the manager of the Foodbank. As a result David stepped down as both our church president and our

minister during the early summer of this year. So it is only right that we recognise the enormous contribution that David has made to our church in those roles over the last few years. A huge "thank you" is due to David for his ministry and service over the last decade or more.

Of course, Chris Mayes stepped into the role of church president and we thank Chris for taking up this role and we should all offer our active and prayerful support to Chris as we negotiate our way into the future (which seems to be ever-changing, shaped as it is by the ongoing Covid crisis). Praise God, we have so far, come through safely and we look to Him for guidance and encouragement in the

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Special points of interest:

- *Christmas Services*
- *A pair of special anniversaries*
- *Light in the darkness*
- *A festive quiz*
- *Our new website*

months ahead.

So let's celebrate Christmas, meeting together, singing praises to our Saviour, join-

ing together as a body of His people.

I pray that God will bless you and be with you this

Christmas and into the New Year.

James

Visiting Preachers

We will continue to have only one service per week, usually alternating between the evening and morning from one week to the next.

The services planned are:

December

19th pm—Candle-lit Carol Service—Chris Mayes
25th—Christmas Praise—Lester Atherton (10:00am start)

26th—no service

January

2nd pm—Ray Peers
9th am—Doug Wood*
16th pm—James Tobi-asen*
23rd am—Phil McDermott
30th pm—Ken Irwin

February

6th am—David Okell

13th pm—Philip Gleave*

20th am—Stan Kinsey*

27th pm—Chris Mayes

Morning services start at 10.45, evening services at 6.00.

The only exception is Christmas Day when the service will start at 10:00am.

Services marked * indicate sacramental services

What's On

Of course for the time being most of our mid-week meetings or activities are on hold but that could potentially change quite quickly depending on a number of things beyond our control. But just as a reminder, here is a list of our usual mid-week and additional gatherings but with a reminder (again) that all but one of these are inactive at the moment:

Prayer Meeting & Bible Study — this takes place on a Wednesday evening from 7.30 onwards. Under normal circumstances this would be followed at

approximately 8.15 with the Bible Study but for the time being there will be a prayer meeting only, with no Bible Study until further notice.

Men's Fellowship — The meeting is usually held on the third Tuesday of each month at 7.30pm but, again, is now on hold.

Women's Auxiliary — The WA usually meet every other week on Thursdays at 2.30pm and again, there are no meetings currently.

Boomerang (for school-age kids) & crèche (for little ones) — Runs as part of the Sunday morning service from 10.45 onwards till approximately 12 noon. At the moment this has stopped completely.

Coffee morning — usually Thursday morning at 10am—we are currently considering restarting this at some point in early 2022 — please look out for details.

Focus

Today, as I write, it is the 15th of December. We have not yet reached the Winter Solstice—the shortest day of the year—which usually falls on the 22nd of December. So we are about a week away from the point in the year at which the days will, at last, start to become a little longer and the nights a little shorter. It happens very gradually of course, there is an increase of around two minutes of daylight everyday which is almost a quarter of an hour a week which in turn is about an hour a month. Before we know it, we will be in January, then February and by March and into April when we will have four hours more daylight than we have now and we will all feel better and brighter because of that.

The short days, and the accompanying long hours of darkness that we live with at this time of year are one of the reasons that we decorate our trees with tinsel and shiny things, why we hang lights in our gardens, why we like to put a log or two on the fire, why we light seasonal candles. They brighten the darkness, they light the gloom, they give us comfort, warmth and remind us of a more hopeful tomorrow. It is maybe a reason that holly and ivy are used in such profusion at this time of year too

— they are at their glossy, greenest best at the very point when everything else seems dead, dormant or decaying. They speak of life.

Of course the Bible focuses of this too— in the opening verses of John’s gospel we read *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.* The light in question here is of course Jesus.

At Christmas time we think of Jesus coming to this earth as a baby, born in Bethlehem. And of course the birth of Jesus was foretold many times by the Old Testament prophets and so often, those prophecies relating to His birth describe Him in terms of the light that he will bring. Isaiah calls Him *A light for the nations* (Is.42 v.6) and also says that *He will be an everlasting light* (Is.60 v.20). A Psalm of David says *The Lord is my Light and Salvation* (Ps.21 v.1).

In the darkness of this world, in the darkness of a sin-sick world, a light has come that brings hope for us all. Of course we bring lights and holly into our homes to make our dark December days ‘merry and bright’. But those lights will fade, that holly will lose its shine. But Jesus

is the eternal light, whose ability to conquer darkness will never fade. The verse from John’s gospel that I quoted earlier says, he is *the light and the darkness has not overcome it.* Jesus is a light so powerful that all darkness, all forces of darkness, fade away in His presence.

At Christmas time we often sing ‘and in thy dark street shineth an everlasting light’ - those words act as an annual reminder of the hope that Jesus brought to this earth—but of course the hope is not enough, it is not just a kind of Christmas-y cosiness to be turned on and off when we get to the festive season. The true light that He brings is His gift of salvation—freely given to all men, all women, all children. And it is *that* which drives away the darkness, it is permanent and lasting, it is not something to be packed away after twelfth night with the other decorations or thrown into the compost heap with the holly wreath and ivy crown.

Whether in the depths of winter or the heights on summer, Jesus is the light of world, and he asks for a permanent place in our heart. “Light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings”.

Special Events

Christmas— we will have two Christmas services. The first will be our Candle-lit Carol Service on Sunday 19th December at 6:00pm and the service will be led by Chris

Mayes. There will be refreshments in the school room after this service.

Our second will be an informal Christmas Praise

service on the 25th December at 10:00am.

Please invite friends, neighbours and family to either or both of these special services.

Additional Notices

Wedding Anniversaries – a really special event—or pair of events—took place just a couple of weeks back. Netta and Joe marked their 64th wedding anniversary and on the same day Shona and Alan celebrated their 36th. So in one family 100 years of marriage were celebrated on the same day. The family were able to join together in Joe's care home where Joe was able to meet his great grand-daughter Hope for the very first time. Many congratulations to both couples from all your friends at church.

Thank you—there is a long list of thanks for various recent activities. First of all a thank you to everyone who helped to paint fences around the church over two weekends in late October and thanks to Kathleen and Judie for providing refreshments on both days.

Thanks to Alison (assisted by daughter Lizzie and her friend Amy) who decorated the

Christmas tree in our church which looks absolutely resplendent.

And finally to Ewan, Anne and Alison for setting-up and decorating the church in preparation for the candle-lit carol service.

Website—our new church website has now been up and running for a few months and it can be viewed at risleyimc.com.

If you can, please visit the site—it is packed with useful information and has an extensive photo gallery showing many interesting pictures from the church's history. It is a great new asset for the church and is already helping to publicise our services and activities. One of the features of the website is that it gives details of upcoming events and our schedule of Sunday speakers. So it is updated on a very regular basis to keep everything up-to-date. If you need to know what might be go-

ing on—this is the best place to look.

Just one tip if you do visit the site: it works best when viewed on a laptop or desktop PC, rather than on a phone or tablet. Hopefully any glitches have now been fixed but if you do spot any issues please report them to James so that they can be investigated.

Covid update—following the most recent government guidance, we must change the way we operate in church once again and the rules now state that must wear a mask when seated and circulating but we can sing without masks. Weather permitting will also keep the church ventilated during the services as best we can but clearly that might be a challenge during the winter months.

Finally—earlier this year we

decided to change the charities that we support. We will no longer send donations to Barnabus and the Northeast Helplink is closing. So whilst we will contin-

ue to support Warrington Foodbank we will now also support Warrington Room At The Inn and Warrington Youth For Christ. And in this regard we have received a

big thank you from the Foodbank for our church's donation of chocolate gifts so a big thank you in turn to anyone who gave in support of this recent appeal.

Christmas Quiz

The pictures below each give a visual cryptic clue to the title of a Christmas song. Can you identify them? Answers are provided on the last page. And a big thank you to Ron for sharing this quiz with us.



The Final Word

What Reminds You Of Christmas?

A poem by Ernestine Northover

A holly wreath hung on the door,
Or presents strewn across the floor,
Tall Christmas tree with bau-
bles bright,
Which fill our hearts with such delight.

Carols sung out in the snow,
A Snowman built with eyes aglow,
Crackers pulled, a song to sing,
Candles lit, and bells that ring.

Roasted turkey, which tastes divine,
Rich fruit cake, with an iced design,
No, the most important re-
minder of all,
Is the birth of a babe in an oxen's stall.

The Ideal Gift

The Father Christmas at the local department store was very surprised when a young lady aged about 20 years old walked up and sat on his lap.

Now, we all know that Santa doesn't usually take requests from adults, but she smiled very sweetly at him and he asked "What do you want for Christmas?"

"Something for my mother, please," replied the young lady, sweetly.

"Something for your mother? Well, that's very loving and thoughtful of you" smiled Santa. "What would you like me to bring her?"

Without pausing, the young woman answer, "A mil-
lionaire son-in-law."

The Honest Guest

Just before Christmas, an honest politician, a generous lawyer and Santa Claus all got into a hotel lift. As the lift went up, one-by-one they noticed a £500 note lying on the lift floor.

Who do you think picked up the £500 note, and handed it in at reception?

Santa of course, the other two don't actually exist!

***All contribution and dona-
tions of articles for the
Newsletter are very grate-
fully received***

Picture Quiz Answers:

- 1) White Christmas
- 2) We Three Kings
- 3) Santa Baby
- 4) Away In A Manger
- 5) Nowell
- 6) Silver Bells
- 7) The Little Drummer Boy
- 8) The Twelve Days Of Christmas
- 9) Blue Christmas
- 10) The Night Before Christmas
- 11) Jingle Bell Rock

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Next Newsletter:

There is no fixed date for the next issue currently but the broad target at this point is to publish sometime during the spring.