

Isaiah 9 v.6

Unto us a child is born



RISLEY INDEPENDENT METHODIST CHURCH, FEARNHEAD

Christmas 2023

Greetings



As you may have heard, Anne & I have just become grandparents for the first time. Of course it is a very proud and happy moment for us and we are thrilled to welcome our new grandson into our family.

Of course at this time of year, the birth of any baby is a reminder of the wonderful story of the first Christmas when our Lord and Savior was born in circumstances that were humble, even dangerous. But they were also wondrous, glorious and awe-inspiring.

Perhaps it is that mix of so many threads, so many aspects, that makes the story so compelling, and perhaps why it is retold over and over again

throughout the world as we reach this time of year.

It is a wonderful story but we must be careful not to just think of it as a favourite tale. It may be closely linked to happy memories, it may evoke warm feelings, but it's not merely a story. It marks the most important birth in all of human history. It marks the point when God's great New Covenant was made possible.

The New Covenant did not come into being until later in Jesus' life but even so this was the prologue to the main event.

And the main event was the good news, the gospel, that God's love was available to anyone who came to Him in obedience and asking for forgiveness. Jesus died on the cross of Calvary to take the punishment for all the sins of the world, And because of His sinless perfection He rose triumphant from the grave and then ascended to heavenly places where He reigns forevermore.

The angels at that first Christmas declared "Good news to all mankind, this day is born in the City of David, a Saviour who is Christ the Lord"

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Special points of interest:

- *Christmas service times*
- *How not to do your gift shopping*
- *Try our Christmas quiz*
- *Padgate House visit*
- *Kisses for tinsel*

A Saviour— so called because He came to save. He came to save you and me.

This Christmas, we must not just look upon the baby in the manger, but come face-to-face with the glorious Prince of Peace, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus

Christ. I pray that you will meet with Him amongst all the festivities this Christmas.

On behalf of our church I would like to take this opportunity to wish each one of you, "A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year".

May the year ahead be a year of Service for our Lord Jesus Christ. May God bless you.



Visiting Preachers

The preachers for our services are:

28th am—Stan Kinsey

December

3rd am—Chris Mayes

10th pm—Phil McDermott*

17th am— Chris Mayes

17th pm— James Tobiasen

24th pm—Chris Mayes

25th am—Chris Mayes

31st am— Lester Atherton

January

7th pm—David Okell

14th am—Phil McDermott *

21st pm—Philip Gleave*

February

4th pm—Pauline Smith

11th am—Frank Pemberton *

18th pm—Peter Gleave*

25th am—James Tobiasen

Morning services start at 10.45, evening services at 6.00. The one exception is the Christmas Day service which will start at 10:00am.

We will have only one sacramental service during December which will be on the 10th. See the Additional Notices for details of the Christmas & New Year services.

What's On

Our current schedule of mid-week meetings and other activities is listed below. Although this is the view at the time of writing, please pay attention to the weekly notices for any changes or further updates:

Bible Study—our current study course is called

'Grow Your Life With Christ' but we are taking a short Winter break and will resume in the Spring. When they start again the meetings will be on a Tuesday evening at 7:30pm, The study course follows a guide book so if you would like to follow the course in

your own time, then please speak to Lester as there may be spare course books available.

Coffee morning & lunch -club— The coffee morning runs on Thursdays from 10am—12noon and is followed by a light lunch from noon until

1:30. It is completely free though donations are gratefully accepted. There will be no coffee mornings on the 21st and 28th December

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.

This means that the next few occurrences will be on the 17th & 31st December, 14th & 28th

January etc.

Prayer Meeting—

this takes place on a Wednesday evening from 7.30 onwards.



Focus

It **struck me** recently that despite the impact that Jesus had on the world, at the time of his birth, virtually nobody knew about him. Consider this – that the most important and significant birth in all history, was known about by maybe a dozen people and no more. There was of course Mary and Joseph, there were the shepherds and the wise men (although we don't know how many of either of them there were), we know that Mary's cousin Elizabeth – and presumably her husband Zechariah – also knew. We know that the innkeeper was told of Mary's pregnancy and no doubt knew that the birth occurred in the stable shortly after their arrival. Herod was told of the expected birth by the wise men and of course his advisors would have been brought into that conversation. And that is about it. I'm sure that Mary's and Joseph's friends and families also knew but we have no record of those and of course the sharing of the news amongst them may have been limited given the unusual circumstances of Mary's pregnancy.

But no matter how many people knew about this, for such an ep-

ochal event, it is a surprisingly small and in some ways underwhelming audience. It is possible of course that the amazing events that occurred may have attracted attention from other people. The star that the wise men followed would have been seen by anyone who looked into the night sky, guests at the inn may have known that a young mother had had her child in the stable, it is even possible that the glorious angelic choir was seen by more people than the shepherds – after all any sudden manifestation of such supernatural wonder would be bound to attract some observers. But when all is said and done, considering that this is the very beginning of a whole new chapter in human history, it is a pretty small sample of the human race that is made aware of the dawn of this new age.

So why were so few included? Why was the news broadcast to such small groups of people? And why would someone who posed such a threat to the young child (Herod) be told about the news?

Well we know that despite the fact that these people were very clearly aware of the birth, in most

cases they were asked directly, or instinctively felt, that it was the right thing to do to keep this news under wraps. Joseph and Mary were individually spoken to by angels and in both cases they remained silent and went about their business discretely and quietly. The wise men were asked to go home via a different route and not meet with Herod again. Only the shepherds seemed unable to contain their excitement – they spread the news far and wide.

Why is this so? Well the obvious answer is that it was perhaps part of God's great plan that he did not want the rich, powerful and potentially dangerous to know about the baby at this early stage in his life on earth. It was news that was broadcast to the ordinary people by the ordinary people (the shepherds).

But if we look at the whole of Jesus's life on this earth then maybe we begin to see the full picture. It was not until Jesus was baptised in the Jordan when he was much older that he became empowered by the Holy Spirit and was able to embark on His ministry. So for around thirty years the Son of God was living



on this earth as an ordinary, vulnerable human being and it was only when he was filled with the Spirit that He was

transformed from being the son of a man with ordinary natural abilities into The Son of Man, filled with the power of Almighty

God, able at last to fulfil His ministry.

But now of course, seeing the full picture, we know that because of His ministry, and because of His death & resurrection, and then because of the work of the apostles, the good news of the Messiah has become known throughout the world. It is a big contrast with that tiny number of people who were first told the news. What a testament to the great power of the Holy Spirit in building up the church! What an amazing demonstration

of the power of Almighty God to build up His people from the most modest of beginnings.

We often say that the birth of Jesus brought hope and light to a dark world, and perhaps looking at such a modest start in life, we see another aspect of that light and hope. The Saviour of the world has come and although He arrived as a helpless babe with little fanfare, he reigns now at *this* Christmas time as a Mighty King, The Prince Of Peace. What a glorious Saviour!

Special Events

This year our Carol Services will be as follows: on the morning of Sunday 17th December at 10:45 we will have our Family Carol Service (with a special nativity performance from the children). This service will be lead by Chris Mayes.

On the same day at 6:00pm James Tobiasen will lead us in worship at

our Candlelit Carol Service and as usual there will be refreshments afterwards.

We will have an evening service on Christmas Eve, Sunday 24th and again Chris will lead that service.

On the 25th— Christmas Day— we will have a

Christmas Praise service at 10:00am.

Finally on New Year's Eve Lester will take the pulpit in our morning service at 10:45am.

Last but not least, we will be visiting Padgate House for a short carol service on Wednesday 20th. If you are able to join us please be there for 6:30am.

Additional Notices

Church Meeting—the next church business meeting is scheduled for the 20th February but please note that, as this will be the Annual General Meeting, we will need to have the year's accounts audited and confirmed before the meeting can go ahead. So at this point the date

is provisional only, please listen out in the weekly notices for final confirmation of the date and time.

Some great news to celebrate— First of all we'd like to offer many congratulations to Peter and Marjorie who reach the amazing milestone of their 70th wedding anni-

versary on 12th December. (yes! seventy—that's not a misprint).

Talking of large numbers, Kathleen will be 90 on the 30th of December. Many congratulations on reaching such a great milestone. Happy

birthday!

And on to Anne and James who have just become grandparents for the first time and Kathleen and Winifred who have, of course, become great-grandparents (Kathleen for the

first time) as Georgia has given birth to baby Rocco (8lb 4oz). Congratulations to the proud parents Georgia and Sam as well of course!

A huge thank you to everyone who supported the Christmas

Fayre in any way—whether donating, crafting, stall-holding, refreshment making, setting up, clearing down, spending, or simply visiting. We raised an astonishing £659. A record as far as we can remember... And that number keeps on rising.

Christmas Quiz

We have a festive quiz for you. Multiple choice with the answers at the bottom of page 6.

1. In one of The Good Life Christmas specials, Margo's Christmas is ruined when her tree arrives and it is six and a quarter inches too short. Where was it ordered from:

- A—Fortnum & Mason
- B—An un-named location
- C—Harrods

2. In Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol, which is the first ghost to visit?

- A—The Ghost of Christmas Past
- B—Ebenezer Scrooge
- C—Jacob Marley

3. The 1977 Christmas number one single was Mull of Kintyre. What was the official name of the recording artist:

- A—Paul McCartney
- B—Wings
- C—Paul McCartney & Wings

4. In the Vicar Of Dibley, Geraldine is invited to numerous Christmas dinners and feels it would be impolite to refuse the hospitality – how many Christmas dinners does she eat in one afternoon?

- A—Three

B—Four

C—Five

5. What is the name for a female turkey:

- A—Poll
- B—Hen
- C—Poult

6. Channel 4's perennial Christmas favourite The Snowman is famous for its song Walking In The Air but who sings the song in the actual animated film:

- A—Howard Blake
- B—Peter Auty
- C—Aled Jones

7. Cliff Richard has had two Christmas number one singles, Which pairing names those two number one singles:

- A—Mistletoe & Wine / Saviour's Day
- B—Mistletoe & Wine / The Lord's Prayer
- C—The Lord's Prayer / Saviour's Day

8. The 1987 Coronation Street Christmas special focused on a farewell party for a long-term resident who was relocating to a new area. Was it:

- A—Hilda Ogden

B—Bet Lynch

C—Elsie Tanner

9. According to the children's song When Santa Got Stuck Up The Chimney, his beard was black, and his nose was tickling too but what did he have in his sack:

- A—Toys
- B—Soot
- C—A bird's nest

10. Mary's Boy Child has been a Christmas number one hit in the UK twice but who has NOT had a Christmas number one in the UK with that song:

- A—Johnny Mathis
- B—Harry Belafonte
- C—Boney M

11. The real title of the poem that begins with the words 'Twas the night before Christmas is:

- A—The Night Before Christmas
- B—A Visit From St. Nicholas
- C—To All A Good Night!

12. According to the Bible how many kings visited the baby Jesus?

- A—Three
- B—the number is not specific
- C—Four

The Final Word



The Mean Shopper

On Christmas Eve, Mr. John Smith thought it would be nice to buy his wife a little gift for the next day. Always careful with his money, he thought long and hard about what that present might be. Unable to decide, our hero entered his local department store and in the cosmetics section he asked the woman behind the counter,

“I’d like to buy some perfume for my wife”

She showed him a bottle costing £80.

“Too expensive,” muttered Mr. Smith.

The young lady returned with a smaller bottle for £50.

“Oh dear” John groused, “still far too much.”

Growing rather annoyed at Smith’s meanness, the sales assistant brought out a tiny £10 bottle and offered it to him.

John became really agitated, “What I mean”, he whined,

“is I’d like to see something really cheap.”

So the sales girl handed him a mirror.

The Four Stages of a Man’s Life

You believe in Santa Claus

You don’t believe in Santa Claus

You dress up as Santa Claus

You look like Santa Claus!

Cheap At The Price

Jennifer was a pretty 16 year old girl. In the week before Christmas she went to the local garden centre, and was trying to decide which of the many types of tinsel she would buy. Finally, she made her choice and asked the spoty youth who was manning the counter. “How much is this gold tinsel garland”.

The lad pointed to the Christmas mistletoe above the counter and said, “This week we

have a special offer, just one kiss per metre”.

“Wow, that’s great”, said Jennifer, “I’ll take 12 metres”.

With expectation and anticipation written all over his face, the boy measured out the tinsel, wrapped up the garland, and gave it to Jennifer.

She then called to an old man who had been browsing through the Christmas displays and said, “My Grandpa will settle the bill.”

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Next Newsletter:

To be published in the Spring as soon as there are sufficient articles to fill a standard issue. Please send in contributions to James.

Christmas Quiz Answers

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|----|---|----|---|----|---|-----|---|
| 3. | B | 6. | B | 9. | B | 12. | B |
| 2. | C | 5. | B | 8. | A | 11. | B |
| 1. | B | 4. | A | 7. | A | 10. | A |