

Isaiah 9 v.6

Unto us a child is born



RISLEY INDEPENDENT METHODIST CHURCH, FEARNHEAD

Christmas 2024

Greetings



I can guarantee that every year, at some point as we approach Christmas, I will see it, on cards, on decorations, on candles... just about anywhere: **Peace On Earth.**

We all wish for peace, don't we. For ourselves, for our friends and families, for our nation and on the international stage. Especially during this last year or two when there has been so much warfare.

And I can also guarantee that at some point whilst the 'Peace On Earth' text is shared so much, I will also hear somebody at some point complain that it never happens. "They always say peace on earth, but there's never any peace, there's nev-

er any end to all this conflict" is typical of the sort of comments that are banded about. And to an extent I understand why and to a large extent it is true. As I said, we all wish for peace.

So why then does it not come? Why is there such suffering? Why are conflicts escalating? Why are new wars starting? After all it was announced by the angels at that first Christmas a very long time ago.

I cannot offer an explanation for each and every case but I do know this. That if we look back at what the angels actually said, we are

missing the first part, the most crucial part. The full proclamation is this: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will to all men".

When was the last time, in seeking peace, that any of our leaders glorified God. When was the last time that any of us did that? In glorifying God we recognise that He is greater than us all, we recognise that He deserves our praise and worship. In doing that we will perhaps recognise that our own worries and anxieties are not so important.

So if we wish for peace and goodwill

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Special points of interest:

- *Christmas service times*
- *How does that song go?*
- *Try our Christmas puzzle*
- *Padgate House visit*
- *Sunday school memories*

this Christmas, let us remember that before all else, glorifying the name of Almighty God, glorifying the name of his precious Son, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, in all things, is the key that might unlock that peace and good-

will.

On behalf of our church I would like to take this opportunity to wish each one of you a peaceful festive season, 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.

James



Visiting Preachers

The preachers for our services for Christmas and the New Year are:

December

15th pm—Ian Hunter *

22nd am—Chris Mayes

22nd pm—James Tobiasen

25th am—Chris Mayes

29th am—Lester Atherton

January

5th pm—Ken McDermott

12th am—Chris Mayes *

19th pm—Christine Ormerod *

26th am—Frank Pemberton

February

2nd pm—Phil McDermott

9th am—Ron Povey *

16th pm—Pauline Smith *

23rd am—Lisa Green

March

2nd pm—Roger Stone

9th am—James Tobiasen *

16th pm—David Okell *

23rd am—Kathy Till

30th pm—David Grimshaw

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 just finished in November. We will start another in the spring—likely March/April kind of time. When they start again the meetings will be on a

Tuesday evening at 7:30pm, The study course follows a guide book and we have a great time studying the course together but if you would like to follow the next course at

home, then please speak to Lester when the next series is announced.

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. The last 'normal' coffee morning of the year will be on the 12th December but on the 19th there will be a final event which will combine a shorter coffee morning with a carol service. The first coffee morn-

ing of the New Year will be on the 9th January

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 12th & 26th January and 9th & 23rd February and so on.

One Sunday each month the Boomerang will have their Bible Crafts session

open at all primary school age and under.



Prayer Meeting—this takes place each Wednesday evening from 7.30 onwards. There will be no Prayer Meeting after 18th December until the second week of January.

Focus

Focus is a little bit different this time round. Recently a new article was added to the church website, written by James, describing his memories of the Sunday School. But of course not everybody has access to the website so here, in a slightly shorter version, is that article for you all to read. It is just James's memories so it might not be 100% accurate but many of you will have similar recollections of our Sunday School. Of course many of our readers will not have attended the Sunday School at Risley but it may trigger similar memories of your own upbringing or simply be an

interesting read. Whatever your experience, we hope you enjoy this trip down 'memory lane'...

In my early years the Sunday School Superintendent was Miss Jane Cook ("Auntie Janey"), on the surface, a fearsome woman; thin, angular usually wearing her hair in an iron grey Marcel wave, presumably unchanged from the 1920s, and a cardigan in some drab shade of brown or green. Her "rod of iron" presence offset by the altogether more genial assistants – Nellie Turner, Gertie Hughes, May Houghton and others (all know as Auntie...).

The format of the Sunday School session was more or less set in stone: on arrival we would walk to the front and present our 'Star Card' to Auntie Gertie - perched like an amiable bank clerk over her high lectern - who would check our name and then, with the kind assistance of an older girl, would print an inky blue star against the relevant Sunday in the card to show that we had been in attendance for either the morning or afternoon session. Little did we know back then but there was a second entry of our attendance made in the actual register which would then be used to count up our appear-



ances for the year in preparation for the annual Prizegiving.

Once all of the children were

in the main School Room, they would be seated: the tots on little individual wooden chairs at the front, older children on the benches further back – boys on the left, girls on the right. Once we were all settled into our places there would then be the singing of “choruses”, simple child-friendly songs about Jesus and heavenly aspirations. Most of them, now I think about them again, really a throwback to some Edwardian view of childhood and Christian thinking rather than of any great interest or relevance to the children of the 1960s and 70s. But nonetheless, their words still echo down to me today (“Deep and wide, Deep and wide, there’s a fountain flowing deep and wide”, “Listen to my tale of Jonah and the whale, way down in the middle of the ocean” or “Climb, climb up sunshine mountain”).

Once the singing was finished there would be a run through the Lord’s Prayer and then it was off to our individual classes. Again apart from the very youngest, I think we would be separated into Boys and Girls classes and then further

divided by age. Each class with its own teacher. Of course Bible Stories were the basis for all of these lessons but there would also be the occasional excitement of an activity to enliven things: some painting or drawing, maybe the making of a decoration at Christmas or Easter. I do not really remember too much about those classes in all honesty, maybe more so when I was a little older – although now I think about it, given the layout of the church building back then, there was not the room for so many individual classes – perhaps some of them were pretty full!

Once the classes were over we would go back again to the main School Room where there would be a final song or two, a closing prayer and then it was time to go. Some children would, of course, walk home by themselves, some would be collected by parents. This was a great time to be left waiting because now, with a little more freedom, we would revel in playing ‘shove penny’ – two children, one sat at either end of a bench, taking it in turns to push a coin along the groove in the middle of the bench with just the right level of speed and momentum in order to get the penny to drop through the slot at the opponent’s end of the bench. Dropping the penny through the slot

counted as a goal. We would play with great competitiveness, hoping against hope that our parents would not appear to collect us before a great victory had been won.

The Sunday School year was marked by four great events. The annual Prizegiving, the May Sermons (also known as the Sunday School Anniversary), Walking Day and The Christmas Party. There is already plenty of information on Walking Day elsewhere on this site so here we’ll concentrate on those other three instead.

The first of these was the Prizegiving. The attendances counted up through the weekly register were classified into a first, second or third class prize. With a possible attendance of 104 marks (for a child that attended morning and afternoon Sunday School every week of the year) the bench was set pretty high. But all children were given a prize – usually a book. Each would include a nameplate stuck inside the front cover to confirm who the book had been presented to, what class of prize it was and how many marks had been achieved. Prizegiving was usually pretty early in the year – presumably as soon as all of the previous year’s attendances had been tallied up, the books chosen (usually, I would guess, from the Bible Bookshop on

Bridge Street in Warrington), the name plates typed up and matched with the appropriate books.

The next of these special occasion was the May Sermons – so-named, I would assume, because it was a Sunday (in May!) when there were three church services rather than the usual two plus afternoon Sunday School, and because it was a significant day in the church's calendar there would be a guest speaker who would deliver three separate sermons, one in each of the three services. But because this was also the Sunday School Anniversary, the children of the Sunday School would take centre-stage and participate in all three services, although perhaps only the older children in the evening service. The main focus for the Sunday School scholars though was the afternoon service.

My earliest memory of the Sunday School Anniversary service was of being asked, along with all of the other children, to carry in a bunch of flowers (oh, the embarrassment!) along the left-hand aisle of the church, handing over the blooms at the front so that they could be placed in a huge vertical frame which, by the time all of the children had made their contributions, would be overflowing with a glorious floral display. From there the children would continue

to their seats which were in one of two places – the choir stalls or a wooden platform which would be erected especially for the day between the pulpit and the altar rail.

The children would then go about their performance – singing a series of songs as a choir, interspersed with a number of individual children delivering a 'recitation' – a short Bible verse of or simple homily which had been learned by heart. The "Anniversary Practices" which prepared the children for this performance would run on mid-week evenings for a number of weeks in the run-up to the big day.

I think by the time I was seven years old or thereabouts, the practice of the flower parade and display had stopped and also the concept of the May Sermons by around 1980. But the Sunday School Anniversary service celebrations continued for many more years and was still going strong well into the early 2000s.

So that brings us to my final memory – the Sunday School Christmas Party. Prizegiving evokes memories of grey February days, and Anniversary of bright May afternoons, but my recollections of the Christmas Party are, as you might expect about dark nights, the warm yellow glow of the ancient lighting, the paper chains, the glistening tree

decorations and so much more. As I recall it (and I may have mis-remembered), on arrival we would be sat down for the party tea – all the usual childhood favourites – there may have been savoury stuff but it's the jelly and cakes that linger in the memory. After the tea there would be games – all the classic childhood favourites – pass the parcel, London Bridge is falling down, Farmer, Farmer and many more. When little legs would begin to weary we would be sat down on the floor. Auntie Mary would take to the piano and we would have a sing-song of the many Christmas favourites, Jingle Bells, Rudolph The Red-nosed Reindeer, Away In A Manger and so on. But then! What was that? A banging on the door! Who could it be? The cry would go up: "Let him in, Uncle Ron!" So Uncle Ron would go to the door and with pantomime-ish drama would shout out "Shall I let him in, children?" To be met with a deafening chorus of squeals and appeals. And who should it be but Father Christmas himself...

The impossible, nail-biting wait would then begin. Will my present be first out of the bag? The huge sack of presents would be lugged in and Father Christmas would take his seat in front of all of the children sitting (though now only *just* managing to

sit) on the floor. Auntie Janey (now much more indulgent than she was in her customary Sunday demeanour) would stand at the side to help with the naming and identifying of the children as their presents were drawn out from the sack. Each child's gift was drawn out, their name announced and the child, either boldly or timidly (depending on their temperament and age) would

come forward to claim their first Christmas present of the season.

With the last of the gifts dispersed (some put to one side for the children who were unable to attend, ready for them when they next come to the Sunday School) there would be one last song and then it was time to go home but only

after it was checked and double-checked that Father Christmas had got away safely with no prying eyes looking for the sleigh. The only thing that would make the evening complete was to emerge into the cold dark night to find that snow had started to fall. It didn't happen very often but when it did... what a magical thing for a young child!

Special Events

This year our Carol Services will be as follows: on the morning of Sunday 22nd 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.

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

Christmas Praise service at 10:00am.

And last but not least, we will be visiting Padgate House for a short carol service with the residents on Thursday 19th December. If you are able to join us there for an hour or so, please be there for 6:30pm.

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 cele-

brate—we'd like to offer many congratulations to Alan & Shona's daughter, Alice, who has just got engaged to Niall. The announcement was made on 19th October—best wishes and many congratulations to Alice and Niall from everybody at church.

And big congratulations to Sandra Percival who recently celebrated her 80th birthday. Happy birthday Sandra!

A huge thank you to everyone who supported the Christmas Fayre in any way—whether by donating, crafting, stall-holding, refreshment making, setting up, clearing down, spending, or simply visiting. We raised an astonishing £435—or at least this was the total we'd arrived at on the day following the Fayre—with aftersales and further donations it may well have risen still further. Thanks everybody!

New Activities. During December we will welcome two new groups into the church who are going to be using the schoolroom facilities for their own activities. The Fearnhead Friendship Group will meet on a Wednesday afternoon—this is a local women’s organisation and many of our congregation are already members. And on a Thursday, following on from our regular coffee morning and

lunch, the Padgate Heritage Society will be meeting, again in the afternoon. Of course both groups would be very pleased to have you join them.

Attention all pensioners! As you will know, the government recently announced that only those pensioners in receipt of pension credits will be eligible for the winter fuel allowance and this means that many

people who normally rely on that payment to help them pay their energy bills may be left short this winter. If this might be your situation, please speak with Chris, James or Alison and we will try to support you – with absolute confidentiality - to either apply for the pension credit or to provide a way to access additional money to help with the energy bills.

Christmas Quiz

CHRISTMAS WORD SEARCH



SANTA CLAUS
REINDEER
NORTH POLE
SLEIGH

CHRISTMAS
ELF
GIFTS
CANDY CANE

TREE
JOLLY
ORNAMENT
STOCKINGS

The Final Word



Open All Hours

It was just before Christmas and the magistrate was in a happy mood. He asked the prisoner in the dock, 'What are you charged with?'

The prisoner replied, 'Doing my Christmas shopping too early.'

'That's no crime', said the magistrate. 'Just how early were you doing this shopping?'

'Before the shop opened', answered the prisoner.

A Poem To Help You Remember How Many Days Are In Each Month

Thirty days hath September,
April, June and November.
Unless a leap year is its fate,
February hath twenty-eight.
All the rest hath three days more,
Excepting January,
which hath six thousand,
one hundred and eighty-four.

How Does That Song Go...?

One Christmas, a mother asked her young daughter if she could remember the names of two of Father Christmas's reindeer.

"Rudolph and Olive," the young girl said.

"Rudolph and Olive?" asked the mother. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, mummy, Rudolph and Olive. Like in the song."

"The song?" asked the mother. "What song?"

The girl sang, "Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer, had a very shiny nose. And if you ever saw it, you would even say it glows. Olive the other reindeer...."

A few jokes

I bought my son a refrigerator for Christmas. I can't wait to see his face light up when he opens it.

I saw this bloke and he was shouting out, "Lambs for sale – were £10, now £5." I thought, that's sheep at half the price.

I went to the hospital. The doctor said, "What happened?" I said, "A row of books fell off the wall and landed on my head." He said, "You've only got your shelf to blame."

Remembrance Of Things Pasta (a poem by Brian Bilston)

She blew her fusilli,
my pretty penne,

when she found me watching
daytime tagliatelle.

Je ne spaghetti rien,
I responded in song,

but she did not linguini
for long,

just walked out
without further retort:

a hard lesson to be tortellini,
orzo I thought.

And so here I am
on my macaroni

and now my days
feel cannelloni.

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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.