

Isaiah 9 v.6

Unto us a child is born



RISLEY INDEPENDENT METHODIST CHURCH, FEARNHEAD

Christmas 2025

Greetings



Christmas is, of course, a joyous and special time of the year, but it can also be a time of difficulty for many people. And it was with the most profound sadness that we learned this week that our dear friend and longest-serving church president, Ron Percival has gone to glory.

Ron had been suffering from failing health and mobility for a number of years now and that had limited his ability and opportunities to join us at the church that he loved and served so dearly but it was a joy to see him on the occasions when he was able to attend a Sunday service or the Thursday coffee morning.

It is incredible to think of all of the lives that Ron must have touched over the years in his various roles in our church, as president, preacher, Sunday School teacher, choir member, Men's Fellowship supporter, 'Risley Reveller', trustee, organiser of countless trips and social events, official at christenings, weddings, funerals. All of them carried out with a love for his Lord & Saviour and for the people who have attended this church. How he found the time and energy when he was also working in his day job, bringing up his family along with Lorna, officiat-

ing at Rugby League matches, sitting as a magistrate...

We should be thankful for Ron's life and service and whilst we offer sincere and deeply felt condolences to Alison, Jeff and all of the family, we can also celebrate a life lived long and well and be sure in the knowledge that Ron is now in safe-keeping with his beloved Saviour.

Of course there will be sadness at this loss, but Ron loved Christmas, he loved our Christmas services. So as we enter into the Christmas period, we should not lose sight of the joy, of the good news that comes with a new

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Special points of interest:

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- *Some Christmas Crackers*
- *Try our Christmas puzzle*
- *Padgate House visit*
- *Wonders in woodcarving*

life, a baby born in a stable who was Christ the Lord, the Saviour of mankind.

“Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Son of Righteousness!”

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.



Visiting Preachers

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

December

7th pm—Christine Ormerod

14th am—Tracey Reeve *

21st am—Chris Mayes

21st pm—James Tobiasen

25th am—Chris Mayes

28th am—Lester Atherton

January

4th pm—David Okell

11th am—David Lawrinson *

18th pm—Andrew Hunter *

25th am—Stan Kinsey

February

1st pm—Stuart Hunter

8th am—James Tobiasen *

15th pm—Ron Povey *

22nd am—Chris Mayes

March

1st pm—David Grimshaw

8th am—Jennie Wakefield *

15th pm—Pauline Smith *

22nd am—Lisa Green

29th pm—Peter Gleave

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 14th. 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 most recent study course 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 coffee morning/lunch of the year, on the 11th December will be a Christmas celebration. On the 18th there will be no coffee morning but attendees are going out for lunch together instead. The first cof-

fee morning of the New Year will be on the 8th 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 11th & 25th January and 8th & 22nd 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, which considers a little-noticed aspect of our church: the wooden carvings that adorn our pulpit and altar table. Whether you've ever noticed or considered them before or not, here are a few thoughts about them... we hope you enjoy reading about them...

In In most of our Sunday services I sit on the front pew where I operate the laptop and overhead projector. Of course this means I'm also sat almost as close to the pulpit as it's possible to be.

Over the years that I have been doing that I have spent a fair bit of time looking at our pulpit (as well as listening intently to the sermons, of course!). I wonder if you have ever looked at it in any detail... it is a fairly simple design but it has a couple of features that are quite remarkable and which I would guess that most people have never considered in any detail, and maybe some people will have never even noticed. All around the front and sides of our pulpit are wooden panels – probably pine wood - and along the top of those panels are no less than twenty small floral designs, each one cut from a small

block, possibly of oak wood, about three inches square. The remarkable thing about them is that each and every one of them is hand-carved and every single one is different to the next. Just below the pulpit we also have a small wooden altar that serves as our communion table. And this also has flowers carved into it. There are just three of those, they are larger than the small flowers on the pulpit and unlike their smaller companions, these are more or less identical to each other.

And I have started to wonder about them, to ask questions about them. So I started to do a bit of research and I think

it's maybe worth reporting what I've found and sharing my thoughts on that. So here it is, I hope you enjoy it...



As we all know, our place of worship is an Independent Methodist church. This means that we are in the broad category of churches called 'non-conformist'. Non-conformist churches are generally those that do not belong to the established mainline churches such as the Church of England or the Roman Catholic church. A typical feature of many non-conformist churches is that their main meeting space is usually a simple 'barn' style construction – essentially a simple, rectangular box with a sloping ceiling and roof. The reason for this is that they were (and continue to be) designed in this way as a kind of reaction against the opulence and richness of many Anglican, Catholic or Orthodox churches. Non-conformist churches were designed with few distractions, kept as simple as possible, to ensure that the congregation could focus on “the worship

and the word”. And our church certainly follows this pattern, it is a barn-style space with very little embellishment. But that lack of decoration makes me consider the carved flowers on the pulpit even more, because when almost everything else is so simple, they seem to take on a greater kind of significance.

It's probably also worth us considering one other thing in the way our church is designed and decorated. Our current church building was constructed in 1910 and that was right in the middle of the period when the most popular design style in this country was that of the *Arts & Crafts* movement. This started in Britain in the 1880s and was broadly an attempt to make things that were “useful, simple and beautiful”. This approach was adopted largely as a reaction against the often useless and elaborate novelty of so many of the items displayed at the famous Great Exhibition of 1851. The years following the Great Exhibition saw many young designers and artists working in new ways, but with an eye very firmly fixed on the natural world. Most famously William Morris took this approach with his fabrics and wallpapers. Although the movement started in the 1850s, it only really took hold by the 1880s but from then it extended pretty much

all the way up to the 1920s. So our church building, having been erected in 1910, has a number of features that are very much in keeping with that Arts & Crafts style. It is also a style which was used in furniture and house design, painting, architecture, sculpture and so on. And those lovely little flower carvings on our pulpit, and those larger ones on our altar table absolutely scream “Arts & Crafts” in their style and appearance. I should be clear – our church is not built in the Arts & Craft way but it does contain a few features that are most-definitely influenced by that style



In some ways non-conformist churches and the Arts & Crafts movement are natural partners for each other. The leading lights of Arts & Crafts held certain principles very highly and brought them to bear in all of their work. Amongst them were a focus on the importance of building community, an emphasis on sin-

cere individual commitment to a task rather than mass production, a love of natural forms such as vines, flowers and so on, which were a reminder of life and fruitfulness. They favoured natural materials which chimed with the non-conformist values of simplicity and honest-



ty. In other words there were numerous reasons why Arts & Crafts contributions to non-conformist churches might have been recognised and valued.

Of course we have no idea who the wood carving artist was who made those pulpit and altar adornments in our own church (although it might be possible to research that of course) and we have no idea what intention he or she had (other than to get paid perhaps) and it might even be impossible to say exactly what flowers they are supposed to be. But we can make some guesswork. You can see photographs of some of the carvings within this article

and you may have your own views on which flower species they remind you of... I think I can see roses, maybe forget-me-nots, lilies, St. John's wort, potentilla... but who knows. Some of them may even be fruit rather than flowers. Are there grapes there? Olives? Acorns? It is entirely possible that they may be all works of imagination rather than being based on real fruit and flowers. The only ones we can name with any certainty are those on the altar tables which are unmistakably lilies.

We might also ask "Why flowers? Why fruit?". Why not more recognisable Christian symbols such as the cross, or a fish, or a dove? Well one possible answer is that the flowers do not represent anything other than simple decoration. But it is also possible that they do tell us something further... in the Victorian and Edwardian eras, flowers were a language all of their own. To give someone a flower was not just to give a floral gift, the flower itself had a meaning and the language of flowers was so well known then that flowers could speak volumes to the recipient. Today we often think of roses as a reminder of love, white lilies as signifying death, but in general we now only hold a very low level of knowledge

of that floral language. But back then an iris represented hope, daisies symbolised innocence, ivy stood for faithfulness, thistles for earthly sorrow, poppies for peace and rest, and so on and so forth. Many of those meanings also had a further level of symbolism in the light of the Christian faith too. For example the rose speaks of the blood of Jesus, the passion flower of his suffering, jasmine for the gifts of God, tulips for forgiveness and so on.



As a kind of side note, some of you may remember that in addition to those that we have on the altar table, our old banner also included lilies in its design – another reminder of that floral language so popular back in the late 1800s and early 1900s. I mentioned in the previous paragraph that the lily had a particular association with death but that was not all. It also symbolises innocence, purity, rebirth - and therefore in a Christian context, resurrection.

We are now more than a century on from when those small wonders were created for the decoration of our pulpit and altar. We can only wonder if they also have a small sermon of their own to share with us, reminding us perhaps, through that la f our Lord and Saviour, of the gifts and grace of our loving God.



But whether they do tell us a story or not, I'd encour-

age you to take a minute or two, now and again, to enjoy and appreciate their wondrous, miniature beauty. Created with love, skill and great craftsmanship, a small act of worship in itself.

Special Events

This year our Carol Services will be as follows: on the morning of Sunday 21st 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 18th December. If you are able to join us there for an hour or so, please be there for 6:30pm.

Additional Notices

Christmas Postbox—as always we will have the Christmas postbox in church for you to share Christmas cards with other members of the congregation. A few things to note — firstly the postbox will be open for the last time on the morning of Sunday 21st. After that you will need to distribute your cards yourself. Secondly, if you are posting cards into it, please put the full name on the envelope—you might know who Doris or Dave are but if that is all you put on the envelope, it's not easy for the sorters to

guess who the intended recipient should be. So first name AND surname please. And finally, please only post cards to the postbox for people who will attend the church—we cannot pass them on to people that we do not see.

Some news to celebrate— first of all congratulations to Shona and Alan Lowe who have recently celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary on (of course!) St. Andrew's Day, 30th November.

And we'd also like to offer congratulations to James & Anne's elder daughter, Georgia, who has got engaged to Sam. The announcement was made on 24th October—best wishes and many congratulations to Sam & Georgia.

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 amount of money—almost £500 in total. Thanks everybody!

Remembrance—back in November we had a our usual service of Remembrance and the children from Boomerang contributed to the service with some special items that they had created in their Bible Crafts sessions; you may have read about it in the latest edition of the Connexion magazine. Anyway, here are some photos to show the great work that they had done.

Church Meeting—the next church business meeting is



scheduled for the 24th 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.

A Christmas Message

The Christmas story shared with in chapter 2 of Luke's gospel is more than a familiar seasonal reading—it is a declaration of hope spoken into ordinary lives. Luke's account begins not with royalty or spectacle but with a young couple, weary from travel, arriving in Bethlehem with no place to stay. Into this humble setting, "a Saviour, Christ the Lord" is born. The

contrast is intentional: God comes not to the powerful but to the lowly, showing that His love reaches into every circumstance, even those limited and marked by poverty, fear or uncertainty.

One of the most striking elements in Luke's account is the role of the shepherds. They were ordinary labourers, overlooked and living on the margins. Yet they are the first to

hear the angelic announcement: "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people." The message of hope is not reserved for a select few—it is for *all*. In visiting the manger, the shepherds become witnesses to a truth Christians continue to proclaim: God enters human history to bring salvation, peace, and renewed purpose.

The angelic proclamation of “peace on earth” is not a sentimental wish. It is the promise of reconciliation between God and humanity through Jesus Christ. In Christian faith, this peace is not merely the absence of conflict but the presence of God’s restoring love in the world and in the human heart. Christmas becomes the moment heaven touches earth, offering a hope that suffering, injustice, and despair do not have

the final word.

The humble birth of Jesus also reveals the nature of God’s kingdom. Luke presents a Saviour who rules not by force but by self-giving love. This hopeful message continues to inspire Christians to live with compassion, generosity, and courage—reflecting Christ’s light in a world that longs for renewal.

Ultimately, the Christ-

mas story in Luke 2 invites believers to look beyond the surface of life’s challenges and see God at work in unexpected places. It affirms that hope is not wishful thinking but a person—Jesus—who steps into human history to bring joy, peace, and redemption. In the quiet of the Bethlehem manger, Christians find a hope strong enough to sustain them and gracious enough to embrace the whole world

A Festive Puzzle

There are twelve clues in the first box. Each clue has a one word answer. Write your answers in the second box. Then take the first letter of each answer and add them to the 12 smaller boxes below.

Those twelve letters will make an anagram of something associated with Christmas. Rearrange the letters to find the word. Good luck!

Answers on page 9.

1 – First name of A Christmas Carol author _____ Dickens

2 – Type of house you might see at the North Pole

3 – “We Three _____” - a popular carol

4 – They grow on a reindeer’s head

5 – These plays are performed in schools at this time of year

6 – Boxing Day is also celebrated as this saint’s day

7 – Principal character in A Christmas Carol _____ Scrooge

8 – Childhood home of Jesus

9 – Red-nosed reindeer?

10 – Santa Claus is also known as _____ Christmas

11 – A name given to Jesus that means “God With Us”

12 – Classic Christmas ballet, The _____

1 – _____

2 – _____

3 – _____

4 – _____

5 – _____

6 – _____

7 – _____

8 – _____

9 – _____

10 – _____

11 – _____

12 – _____



The Final Word

Christmas ‘To Do’ List

A poem by Brian Bilston in the form of a list of things to do...

- delay • defer • equivocate
 - make some tea • procrastinate
 - look at phone • stroke the cat
 - readjust the thermostat
 - dawdle • dither • hem and haw
 - eat mince pie • chew my jaw
 - write a card • spin on chair
 - play six games of solitaire
 - take a break • make a brew
 - review my list of things to do
 - eat mince pie • paper scrunch
 - stroke the cat • have some lunch
-
- prioritise new tasks to shirk
(more cups of tea + less housework)
 - look at phone • spin on chair
 - eat mince pie • loiter • stare
 - consider shopping • have quick doze
 - rest mince pie on bridge of nose
 - stroke the cat • take a break
 - write a card • eat some cake
 - spin phone • mince cat • stroke tea • wallow
 - write To Do list for tomorrow



Christmas Crackers

A few jokes to make you smile, or cringe...

My Christmas decorations are inflatable. I’m forever blowing baubles

Where does Father Christmas go for a break after Christmas? Santa Parks.

What is his favourite pizza? One that is deep-pan, crisp and even.

Which author is known for stealing trainsets from under Christmas trees? Nick Hornby

I had a haircut at Christmas. All the trimmings.

I threw some snow at my neighbour, she didn’t catch my drift.

What’s a dog’s favourite carol? Bark, the herald angels sing.

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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.

8—Nazareth

9—Rudolph

10—Father

11—Emanuel

12—Nutcracker

This gives you the letters C, I, K, A, N, S, E, N, R, F, E and N.

And those twelve letters can be

Puzzle Answers:

1—Charles

2—Igloo

3—Kings

4—Antlers

5—Nativity

6—Stephen

7—Ebenezer