

CORNERSTONE

The Magazine of
WITNEY CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

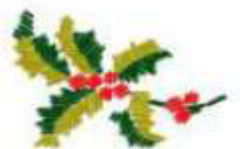


Christ Jesus is the chief cornerstone.

In Him the whole fabric is bound together, as it grows into a temple.
dedicated to the Lord (Ephesians 2:21)



December 2021 & January 2022



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It is now the last week in November, and, unlike this time last year, we are not in a Lockdown scenario, and thankfully therefore our churches are still open

As I look back over the last 12 months, I don't think anyone would have imagined what a profound impact COVID would have on our lives. I think we all hoped that it might be short-lived and that we would be able to return to our normal way of lives quite quickly. That has not been the case, as in Europe and other places around the world, and indeed the UK, cases and sadly deaths have been rising, but the UK seem to be better equipped to cope this winter with the high uptake of the vaccines. However, and as stated this time last year, I am sure that many of you, like me, have been frustrated that there are still people who do not wish to follow advice and be vaccinated. However, since the new variant, Omicron, has been discovered, the vaccination queue opposite our church over the last week has been long each day which is good

Unlike last year, and at this moment in time, we are able to meet up with family and friends and share the Christmas message of the love and peace that God intends for them, through his Son Emmanuel, the baby born in Bethlehem.

Jesus Christ is born! God is with us, now and forever

Once again, I hope this Christmas & New Year edition of the magazine will remind you that you are not forgotten by God, and that as Christians, we are praying for you at this difficult time.

New Advent in 2 minutes video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eC0FGQLBp7w>

So, on that note, I now turn to some of this month's contents: Pat Brent gives an update from Starfish Malawi; Lesley Barter, once again, gives us the Deacon's Letter; there is the continuation of Ken Lee's Bible Study; Pip Cartwright gives us the growth of WCC and some articles have been extracted from Parish Pump, to name but a few

Many thanks for those who have contributed for this edition, but would encourage anyone to consider submitting article(s) for the next edition by either:

E-mail: terrypowlesland@uwclub.net

jacquipowlesland@uwclub.net

or, just plainly written on paper, which can be typed up

The next 2-monthly edition, covering February & March is due on **Sunday 6th February 2022**

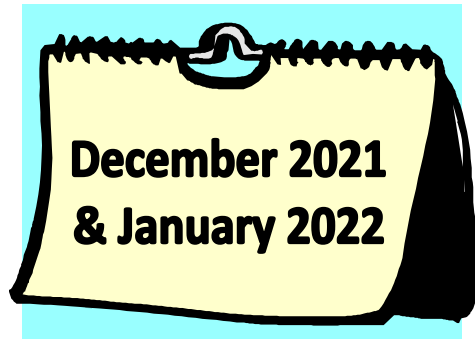
Your Editor



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Reflections during COVID-19 pandemic

The weekly services will start at 10.30 am but you will be able to join at 10.15

Dec

5 th	am	Rev Judi Holloway	Advent 2
	pm	David Kinchin	Communion
12 th	am	Nanna Blackman	Advent 3
19 th	am	Carol Service	Advent 4
24 th	11.15pm	Rev Judi Holloway	Midnight Service
25 th	am	Rev Judi Holloway & Deacons	Lesley Barter & Jacqui Powlesland
26 th	am	Rev Oliver Kinchin	High St Methodist Church

Jan

2 nd	am	No Service	
	pm	Nanna Blackman	Communion
9 th	am	Dr Walter Riggans	
16 th	am	Rev Elaine Kinchin	Communion
23 rd	am	Rev Judi Holloway	
30 th	am	Yvonne Campbell	Congregational Federation General Secretary

Feb

6 th	am	Rev Michael Rolton	
	pm	Rev Elaine Kinchin	Communion

Rotas

WELCOMING TEAM

Dec	05	Lesley Barter
	12	Janet Hayes
	19	Pat Smith
	25	Jacqui Powlesland
	26	Lesley Barter
Jan	02 pm	Lesley Barter
	09	Beryl Cartwright
	16	Joan Currie
	23	Pat Brent
	30	Janet Hayes
Feb	06	Pat Smith
	13	Joan Currie



FLOWERS

Dec	05	Pat Brent
	12	Christmas Tree
	19	Christmas Tree
	25	Christmas Tree
Jan	02	Christmas Tree
	09	Joan Currie
	16	Janet Hayes
	23	Jacqui Powlesland
	30	Judi Holloway
Feb	06	Beryl Cartwright
	13	Rita Hayes



SUNDAY COFFEE

Dec	05	Pat Smith & Pat Brent
	12	Sue Birdseye & Claire Woodward
	19	Terry & Jacqui Powlesland
	26	tba
Jan	09	Elaine Kinchin & Clare Ellis
	16	Pat Smith & Pat Brent
	23	Sue Birdseye & Claire Woodward
	30	Terry & Jacqui Powlesland
Feb	06	Elaine Kinchin & Clare Ellis
	13	Pat Smith & Pat Brent



THURSDAY COFFEE

Dec	02	Judi Holloway & Jean Hodgson
	09	Beryl Cartwright
	16	Mince Pies & Carols
	23	No Coffee Morning
	30	No Coffee Morning
Jan	06	Beryl Cartwright
	13	Pat Smith
	20	Judi Holloway & Jean Hodgson
	27	Beryl Cartwright
Feb	03	Pat Smith
	10	Judi Holloway & Jean Hodgson
We would be extremely grateful for other people to join		



SOUND SYSTEM

Dec	05	Nanna Blackman
	12	Terry Powlesland
	19	Nanna Blackman
	25	Terry Powlesland
	26	tba
Jan	02 pm	Terry Powlesland
	09	Terry Powlesland
	16	Terry Powlesland
	23	Nanna Blackman
	30	Nanna Blackman
Feb	06	Terry Powlesland
	13	Nanna Blackman



For ALL the Rotas, every effort has been made to meet individual circumstances.
However, if the dates are not convenient for you, please change with someone else

Dec	06	Sue Birdseye
	07	Charlotte Hathaway
	16	Layla Holloway
	25	Preston Holloway
	29	Cecily Lau



Feb	04	Elaine Beechey
	08	Pat Brent

Jan	02	Benjamin Esapa
		Joseph Esapa
		Margaret Esapa
		Gwen Mee
	07	Brian Bennet
		Storm Wallace
	13	Anthony Beechey
	24	David Kinchin

Deacon's Letter

Dear Friends

As we go into Advent – a time of waiting and preparation – it feels as if we have spent the best part of the last two years waiting and anticipating. And fearing the worst. This time, however, we know exactly what to expect and it is the most amazing and incredible gift. A gift that keeps on giving, too. We are offered a free pass into the afterlife if we just admit to our frailties and acknowledge that Jesus Christ was, and is, the Son of God. He has paid the price for us. Surely that is something to bring joy to the world this Christmas season.

It doesn't absolve us from a duty to take stock, however. What has gone well and what could we improve on? It is all too easy to focus on what we CAN'T do rather than what we COULD do. Let's make a New Year's Resolution to take a few risks.

Experiment with a few new ideas. Have a few new ideas. What kind of a church are we? What is special about us? If we can't think of anything then we might as well admit defeat and go to one of the other churches in Witney. Why do we come to church at all? If it isn't feeding our spiritual need, what would we like to change/add? We are going to look at our mission in January, as a preamble to invigorating our search for a Minister.

Let us use this special season to relate our faith to our daily life. Make it into a real season of goodwill. This past year has put a strain on family

relationships – either by too much, or too little contact. Take the opportunity to mend fences where relationships need repair. Reach out to anyone you know who is struggling with depression or loneliness (and that too has become an epidemic this last year). You don't need to be physically active to be a good listener.

We have so much to celebrate. Our Church Family is still intact and feels closer than ever. 'Tis indeed the season to be jolly, but let us also be thoughtful and thankful. May God bless us, everyone and take us into 2022 loving Him with heart, soul and mind - and our neighbour as ourselves.

We don't have to do it all on our own - try the spirit that is alcohol-free.

God keep you and send a very blessed Christmas and New Year to you all.





PRAYER LETTER No 200

Hope and Light

Advent reminds us of the promises of God.

There is such desire for **Hope and Light** in our troubled and dark world with wars and threats of wars, disease, Covid, refugee crisis's as millions of people hope for a better future.

In Old Testament times God gave Isaiah the prophecy (Isaiah 7:14) that a Virgin would give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel 'God with us' that is: Jesus Light of the World, see New Testament John 1:4.

As we wait and reflect during Advent we can still hope and pray for a better more compassionate world.

Reflect on the following prayer and hymn that the words may challenge us and help us in our everyday lives by showing the '**Light of Jesus**'

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it. (John 1:5)

Advent God,
meet us as we face the darkness of our world,
that we may embrace you in the shadows and move out to greet your light.

**Dispel our fears,
increase our hope.**

Enlighten us as we search for truth amongst the clamour of war,
that we may have the courage to proclaim peace and determination to seek justice.

**Dispel our fears,
increase our hope.**

Embolden us to cry out in the wilderness,
that we may find a voice to disarm power and a way to challenge prejudice.

**Dispel our fears,
increase our hope.**

Guide us as we seek to make straight your paths,
that we may guard against self-righteousness and look to you for help.

**Dispel our fears,
increase our hope.**

Move us as we reach out to those in need,
that we may respond with urgency and wait with patience.

**Dispel our fears,
increase our hope.**

Challenge us with your promise of salvation,
that we may put aside all fear and proclaim the hope of liberation.

**Dispel our fears,
increase our hope,
and grant us peace.**

Amen.

Annabel Shilson-Thomas

But those who do what is true come to the light ... (John 3:21)

Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
light for the world to see.

Chorus:

Christ, be our light!
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your church
gathered today.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice.

Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
shared until all are fed.

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
walls made of living stone.

Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
making your Kingdom come.



Bernadette Farrell

May God Bless you this Advent, Christmas and into the New Year

Every Blessing,

Beryl

Please note that for up-to-date prayer requests contact Beryl (703717)

The following article, written by Elaine Kinchin, reflects on a recent training day, and is entitled:

Continuing Ministerial Development

Rev Judi Holloway and I want to thank you all heartily for paying the princely sum of £5 per head to send us off for a day of Continuing Ministerial Development. We were chauffeur-driven to Southam Congregational Church and, with some trepidation, we found its back door. We were worried that we were letting ourselves in for five academic hours – instead it was “bring your common sense”, here are some ideas that might work in your church settings and a few that you probably would never dream of trying.

The idea behind the day, led by Dr Walter Riggans, Congregational Federation’s Learning and Development Manager, is that every church is made of people who are different. Not just obvious differences like age and gender and personality but other preferences. For example, you will have noticed that when I use a YouTube clip during a service, the singers are allowed one repetition only, then Nanna or Terry, at my instigation, fades the music out. That is because my preferred spiritual style is word based. My logic is that we have sung those words to God once and repeated them, so let’s move on. But someone with an emotion-centred style of spirituality is caught up in the moment and I have wrenched them from it!

Others have a symbol-based style, which is not just icons and incense but includes those symbols we all relate to – bread and wine! Some folk feel they connect best

with God through action – serving coffee, working in a charity shop, arranging flowers. You will feel more drawn to one of these styles than the others but the question worship leaders/pastors/ministers need to ask is: does how I lead worship suit as many people as possible, or only those like me. (I wonder if that is why we tend to be drawn to the way certain churches worship – because, without knowing it, they suit our preference...)

So, the next few times that Judi and I lead worship, you might notice that we have a song or a visual item that you think is not something we would normally choose. It might suit you; it might not. So please let us know.



The following article, written, Canon Paul Hardingham, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and considers 2022, and is entitled:

Looking to the New Year

The month of January is named after the Roman god Janus, who is depicted as having two faces. As we look back on a difficult year dominated by the pandemic, how should we look forward to 2022 with fresh hope? The apostle Paul writes: *‘But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.’* (Philippians 3:13,14).

Firstly, to make a new start, you need to ***forget the things which are behind***. Paul

saw himself as an athlete running for Christ and purposely not looking back. He refused to allow his past sins and difficulties to define who he was. By God's grace, he no longer saw himself that way. The same can be true of ourselves, as we confess our sins and failures to receive God's forgiveness and new life.

Secondly, we need to **focus on the things that lie ahead**. The athlete is entirely focused on winning the race and gaining the prize. Like Paul, we have to be single-minded in making Jesus the focus of everything we do. How can we go deeper in our prayer life and Bible reading this year? What will it mean to better serve Christ in our workplace and neighbourhood, or family and children?

Paul looked forward to the day when he would stand before God, who would say 'well done, good and faithful servant'. In light of all that Jesus had done for him, Paul wanted to give his very best to Jesus. As we stand at the beginning of this New Year, let's ask ourselves, 'What can I do this year that will help me bring glory and honour to God?'



The following article, written by David Pickup, a solicitor, has been extracted from Parish Pump and considers the year ahead, and is entitled:

A New Year's Resolution from Micah

Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my

transgression...? He has shown you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you: To act justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:7-8)

I quite like olive oil; not the Popeye character but the cooking ingredient. Although I am not sure what I would do with even one river of oil, and I have nowhere to put a ram.

Still, this is one of my favourite Bible passages, and it is an ideal one for lawyers. It sums up in a very simple but helpful way what true religion should be. That makes it a good verse to start the year. The message is simple: God does not want empty promises or lip service, but our real devotion, from our heart.

What does it mean for us?

Do justly - Be honest and open in our dealings with others this year. Be dependable. We should say when things are going wrong and be appreciative when they go well. Be fair in our dealings, whether at home or at work or in church. Keep confidences and never pass on gossip.

Love mercy - Give people the benefit of doubt, do not take advantage of others and do not always criticise or complain. Accept apologies and explanations where we can, and be generous.

Walk humbly - Quietly get on with things. Do not make a big show of what we do.

Lastly, we are *required* to do these things. They are not options or choices but requirements. Like many requirements in the Bible, they are simple to understand, but not always simple to do. Happy New Year.

From a Teacher

Yesterday, I shut down class about 5 minutes early and told my students I wanted them to just sit and talk to one another. Several of them immediately opened their laptops and began navigating to their favourite computer game

I said, 'No, no laptops. I want you to have face-to-face conversations right now'

After a collective groan went up, I observed something both wonderful and alarming. For the next few minutes, a couple of tables came alive with conversation. They looked at each other in the eyes and talked with great enthusiasm and interest. It was beautiful to watch and listen to

However, many students were deflated. They did not know what to do without some sort of entertainment from a device. A couple of them put their heads down and avoided eye contact with anyone. I went round the room to those students and tried to engage with them. Some of them muttered a few words, but most didn't know what to do

I share this story as a wakeup call for parents, grandparents and guardians. It's tragic to me that a large percentage of today's youth do not know how to have a real conversation, but it's not their fault. It is our responsibility as adults to lead by example and hold our kids accountable. Unplug every day, talk and listen to your children. Getting lost in a device does not help them to cope with, and overcome, the things they are going through; mentally, emotionally and spiritually. All it causes is isolation and depression. They need relationships; they need you



The following article written by Revd Peter Crumpler, a former communications director for the C of E., has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

How to beat the internet

Churches across the country are now squaring up to the same challenges – and opportunities – that many local shops and businesses have faced for years.

It's all about the internet, and how it changes everything.

In the pre-Covid world, services were held in churches, and people went to them. Or not, but throughout the lockdowns, most churches went online. Services were recorded or streamed from church buildings, kitchens, lounges or even, sheds.

Some looked amazingly slick and professional. Most simply reflected the gifts and technical skills that the church could muster.

The move online brought other changes. Local people dropped in online to high-profile churches in the UK or overseas. Worshippers from around the world started 'attending' services across Britain.

People who had not attended church for years, or not at all, came across services online and were surprised at the variety on offer. They joined online services at different times to when they had been available live – and some watched while drinking coffee in bed.

Those who through disability had not been able to attend services could now join online alongside those who used to go, physically, each week.

But now, as post-Covid normality largely returns, many churches are facing tough decisions about their online offerings.

Do we go back to services only being held in church? Or do we continue with online offerings as well? Where technically possible, the answer must be yes – to keep going both online and in church.

Yet if churches want to encourage more people to come through our doors – and we do – we need to look at what's on offer. That means working on the warmth of welcome and the quality of worship and practical teaching.

More importantly, it's about bringing people into the presence of a God who loves them, affirms them and wants the best for them. It's about being part of a community of people who are seeking to follow God, who fail, but go on trying.

It's about church as a place where people can feel welcomed, at home, safe, and valued. A place where they are known and loved.

And, when all that is in place, it beats anything the internet can offer.



The following article, written & submitted by Pip Cartwright, was correct when first published in July 2006, and is a continuation from the last edition, and is entitled:

The Growth of WCC: 1964-1967

In February 1964 it was announced that the Minister, the Rev. R Dewes, had accepted a calling to the pastorate at Westfield Independent Church, Bradford, and was to move in April and a Farewell Social was arranged.

It was at this time that the Welch Way site offered to the Church for a possible

redevelopment was lost and a Garage was built there instead.

During March 1964 Neale Hayes was born and later christened, Roger Honey was married and Mr and Mrs Pitts celebrated their Golden Wedding. In September Mrs Honey and Mrs Collis were appointed Deacons. Sadly, Mr Graham Wheeler and Mr A Souch (the Church Organists for many years) died. 100 new Congregational Praise Hymn Books were purchased and Mrs Honey purchased an Organ Copy in memory of her father, Mr Souch. The Sunday School outing in July visited Stratford-upon-Avon.

In November the Rev. Stuart Duren BA, BD, agreed to accept the duties as a 'weekend pastorate' until June 1965. The Duren family was welcomed and later in January (19th) 1965 they celebrated the birth of their son, Paul.

Having lost the Welch Way site, the Oxon District Council offered a new plot for the Church Redevelopment at a cost of £6,000. The situation was discussed and Mr Collis thought that the site was not suitable and especially at such a high cost. It was during this time that the Church site valuation was agreed by Mr Foster-Taylor and advice was given.

In June the Junior Church had an outing to Billing Aquadrome, near Northampton and in July the Church said farewell to the Rev. Duren and his family. The Rev. Duren presented a picture of Christ to the Church. That picture still exists and is to be found in the Church Lounge.

In December 1965 Mr A. E. Sellman, who had been Church Secretary since 1945 suddenly died and his office was shared between several Deacons.

During 1966 the Church was without a Minister and, although the Rev. V. C. Plasket from Aston was called, he did not accept. Once again, the Church looked

towards Mansfield College, Oxford for help and Mr Stephen Haine accepted to be Student Pastor.

The option on the £6,000 site expired and so the Church decided to drop the 'relocation' idea. However, Mr Foster Taylor suggested alternative ideas, one of which was to develop the Church on its present site with business premises underneath. The Church Meeting unanimously agreed to follow this idea and research such development on the High Street.

In September, I believe Mr Bill Wright became Church Secretary and, it was at this time, in September 1966 that the Cartwright family (Pip, Beryl, Fiona and newly born Penny) arrived in Witney. Pip took up the post of Head of Geography and Geology at Burford School but lived in Davenport Road, Witney (where they still live today).

1967 was a relatively quiet year. When Stephen Haine graduated and was called to Grange Church, Reading, his position as Student Pastor was taken by Dr Peter Johnson, another Mansfield College Theology student, who was already a Geology graduate and, coincidentally, had been a member of Pip Cartwright's 'home' Church in Northampton.

The Communion Table and three Chairs, which we still use today, were given to the Church in memory of Mr A. E. Sellman. The Chairs were made by Mr Tom Smith for £5 each. Church membership totalled 40 in number and the question of Church Redevelopment seems to have been put to one side.



The following article written by the Ven John Barton, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

What a Christmas

The Bethlehem manger, shepherds, wise men, Jesus, Mary and Joseph – it's all so familiar to older people, who are shocked to hear that younger generations may be hazy or ignorant of them. Aren't they part of everyone's education?

Yet the first Christmas was restricted to just a few. What 21st Century Christians proclaim as the most significant event in history began in a remote corner of the Roman Empire, without the pomp and publicity we associate with kingship and power. What modern media have called 'The Greatest Story Ever Told', escaped everyone's attention in first century Palestine.

This year, Christmas is going to be a busier celebration than last year, but probably not yet back to the normal fuss we usually make each December. The streets will be crowded, but shops may struggle with supplies. Parties will take place, but many people will feel reluctant join in. Family gatherings are allowed again, but the vulnerable may hesitate. Christmas services will be held, but as singing has the potential for droplet and aerosol transmission, music will be muted this year. A Christmas without many carols!

Many will struggle to hold their 'usual' Christmas. Yet God does not neglect us. This may be the very opportunity to rekindle or deepen our faith in what really matters about Christmas. Away from the hordes, perhaps completely alone this Christmas, we may sit quietly and allow our heavenly Father to draw near to us. We may picture Mary inviting us to gaze with her at her Son, born to save us from our sins. In the silence of our imagination, we may join the chorus of

angels announcing His birth to the shepherds:

“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom His
favour rests.”

It was that chorus which inspired an American Minister, Edmund Sears, to write the Christmas hymn, ‘It Came Upon a Midnight Clear’. Sears, troubled by the world’s turbulent history and failure to hear the Christmas message, was himself recovering from a breakdown. Written in 1849, his words have a timeless ring about them:

Yet with the woes of sin and strife
The world has suffered long;
Beneath the angel-strain have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not
The love-song which they bring;
Oh, hush the noise, ye men of strife,
And hear the angels sing.



The following article has been submitted by Pat Brent, and is entitled:

Starfish Malawi

At last the contents of our container have arrived in Malawi, due to the large ship being wedged

in the Suez Canal our container was diverted to South Africa where it was off loaded and left on the quayside.

Sometime later it was picked up by MSC "Gina" and taken to Beira in Mozambique. Then transported overland to Malawi and then in a series of smaller trucks to Salima now all the items from UK are being distributed.

Two new teachers, trained in special needs have arrived at the school, paid for by the Malawi government.

They are helping to put the final touches to the classrooms, furnish them and order equipment. This all takes considerable time and patience when you don't have Mr. Google or Amazon!!

In November Malawi recorded 0 deaths from Coved 19 which is really good news.

The Hope Clinic now has a bore hole to supply fresh water to the patients and doctors a great blessing to them.

The children at the school are taking part in Health Walks around the area to impress on them the need to wash hands regularly

especially before preparing food and after using the toilet. The toilets are kept clean by the children, using the bush is now discouraged.

Litter is a problem, they don't have bins just a pit dug in the ground and when it is full it is burnt.

The bush and the animals living there are a constant source of danger and infection.

Life in Malawi is hard but a lot better than it was due to the constant support of friends in the UK and around the world.



Our donations to Starfish are all used for the benefit of the community around Salima, the school and the hospital.



The following article written by Tim Lenton, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

The day Mikhail Gorbachev resigned

Just 30 years ago, on 25th December 1991, Mikhail Gorbachev resigned as President of the Soviet Union, and the next day the Soviet Union was officially dissolved. The remaining Soviet republics became independent states.

Mr Gorbachev had wanted to keep the Soviet Union together, and his policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika* had been part of this, together with his friendship with Western leaders. He later accused the West of "provoking Russia" and said the USSR collapsed in 1991 because of "treachery" from within.

He said: "We were well on the way to a civil war, and I wanted to avoid that. A split in society and a struggle in a country like ours, overflowing with weapons, including nuclear ones, could have left so many people dead and caused such destruction. I could not let that happen just to cling on to power. Stepping down was my victory."

The former superpower – an empire described as "over in the blink of an eye" compared to the longevity of earlier empires, such as the Roman and Persian – was replaced by 15 independent countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

Earlier, a coup by hardliners had been resisted, thanks to Mr Gorbachev's refusal to submit and the failure of the army and police to take orders from the coup leaders. Parliament leader Boris Yeltsin had appealed to the patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church to condemn the coup, and he responded by anathematising those involved in the plot. (Anathema is an extreme form of ex-communication.)

Since then, Orthodox Christianity has been thriving. In 1991 about two-thirds of Russians claimed no religious affiliation. Today, 71 per cent of Russians identify as Orthodox, and President Vladimir Putin appears to support this.



Bible Study

In this edition, and with permission from Ken & Marjorie Lee's family, and in memoriam to Rev Ken Lee, a series of Bible Studies, written by Ken and first submitted back in 1999, will be re-produced and is entitled:

MEANDERING IN MARK

"Meander" means "To wander deviously or aimlessly". Perchance this is not too accurate a description of these studies; it is hoped that they are not too devious nor totally aimless. However, the term "meander" is used to indicate an approach which takes its time, stops as needful to let a thought, an idea, an insight develop - all with the purpose of seeing what the Lord has to say to his people. May He speak, and to Him be the glory.

20. Mark 7: 24 - 8:10

Jesus is now pictured by Mark as leaving Galilee and moving into areas which were very largely populated by Gentiles. The itinerary which Mark describes as being followed is bizarre. First Jesus is pictured as going to Tyre (v 24), a distance of some 50 kilometres north-west of Capernaum. The area, though still containing a residue of descendants of the northern tribes of Israel, was dominated by a Gentile culture. From there he is said to have travelled via Sidon, some 30 kilometres north on the coast of the Great Sea, "towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis" (v 31). The region of Decapolis was a predominantly Gentile populated region to the south-east of the Sea of Galilee. The principal road route to it from either Tyre or Sidon would have involved journeying back to the region of Capernaum and then down the west coast of the Sea of Galilee, crossing the River Jordan near the southern end of that sea and hence into the Decapolis. While such a journey would have been possible, it does seem unlikely that Jesus would have been able to undertake it

without his being recognized during his passage through Galilee and being called upon to teach or heal. Mark here, as in other places in his Gospel story, displays his ignorance of the geography of Judaea and Galilee and the surrounding regions as he brings together in a continuous narrative events which took place at different times on different journeys of Jesus. These events have in common the fact that they took place in Gentile territory and so they serve to illustrate the openness and faith of Gentiles in contrast to the sceptical and legalistic approach of the Scribes and Pharisees which Mark had just recorded.

So we have Jesus pictured in Gentile territory.

Initially Jesus appears to have been alone as Mark makes no mention of his disciples. It is, however, always dangerous to assume that a person or persons are not present simply because they are not mentioned. Here the disciples just do not feature in Mark's narrative until they are suddenly introduced as being present with Jesus at 8:1. Jesus arrives in the region of Tyre and seeks seclusion in a house. Is it a desire to be alone, to have time to think and to pray which has brought him to this Gentile place? We do not know. Whatever the reason Jesus had for coming to this place, Mark records, "He could not escape notice." We may wonder why. What was there about Jesus that made it impossible for him to escape notice? Had news of him indeed reached this Gentile place? Or was there something about his very appearance, his presence which raised a hope in the heart of a woman whose daughter was possessed of an unclean spirit? Mark gives us no clue. He merely says that this woman heard about Jesus and came and bowed at his feet. She came as a suppliant, begging. That must have been hard for her, for as a Syrophoenician she came from a proud and ancient race. But she was a mother, a mother begging for wholeness for her daughter. Before the need of her child, all pride of race and religion counted for little.

Jesus must have seen all this as she knelt at his feet; his heart must have gone out to her and yet his reply to her pleading seems to be one of almost total rejection. "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

Perhaps it is the term "the dogs" which hits us most strongly, particularly when we recall that dogs were not pets but rather hunting animals or scavengers of the streets. Jesus seems here to say that the Gentiles are of less import than the Jews, that they must wait for the good news, the good things which he has to offer until the Jews have been fully satisfied. Such an understanding was indeed common in the Early Church where, for example, the Apostle Paul can write to the Romans concerning the Gospel, that "it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." (Rom 1:16). Perhaps Jesus was testing this woman to see what was the nature of her faith. She is in no way put off by what he says but responds readily calling Jesus "κύριος", a title of respect variously rendered as "sir" or "lord". She accepts the term "dogs" without umbrage, and takes it up wittily by referring to what dogs do, they scavenge for the crumbs which the children drop from the table. Her plea is obvious: "What you have and are giving to the children is so abundant, that there are crumbs enough to spare to cleanse my daughter." Such was the great faith of this woman! Jesus responds, as he always responds to such faith, by granting her plea. He tells her that her daughter is free from the demon which plagues her and he sends her home. Without further questioning, in simple faith she goes home and she finds her child whole.

This story raises the question of what was Jesus' attitude to Gentiles. Was the Gospel which he proclaimed only for Jews, or were the Gentiles to be included? There seems little doubt from Mark's account that Jesus saw his ministry as directed toward his own people, the Jews. They were the people of

God and his call was to bring them afresh to be that people. Yet, as in this story, there are times when Gentiles stake a claim to be included among the people of God. When they do so with actions which show faith, then Jesus does not exclude them. This is what the manner in which Mark tells this story seems to indicate. How much this represents what happened and how much Mark's account is influenced by the situation in the Early Church when Gentiles began to be filled with the Holy Spirit as they confessed faith in Christ as Lord, we cannot tell. Certainly Mark tells the story in such a way as to indicate that there is real place for Gentiles in the Kingdom which Jesus proclaims. Maybe here we have Mark implying that what matters is not whether one is a Jew or a Gentile, but how we respond to the question: "Who, for you, is Jesus?"

To reinforce his claim for a place for the Gentiles in the Kingdom, Mark moves on to a story of an event in the Decapolis. Jesus has arrived in this region and "They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech." Who "they" are is not indicated.

These people are however important for they not only bring the handicapped man to Jesus but they beg Jesus to lay hands upon him. Whether they were simply seeking a blessing for the man or whether they hoped for healing is not told to us. Whatever it was, they came in the faith that somehow meeting with Jesus would make a difference for their friend. With their coming a crowd has been attracted to the spot. Jesus takes the man away from the crowd. That which is to be done is to be done quietly, privately, without a lot of fuss. Jesus then proceeds to heal the man. The technique which Mark describes is typical of healers of that day, the touching of the affect parts, the spitting, the looking up to heaven and the sighing. Not so typical is the word of command, the Hebrew word "Ephphatha", meaning "Be opened". Perchance this is used here by Jesus to indicate the source of his power in that same

God through whom the prophets spoke concerning the unstopping of the ears of the deaf and the tongue of the speechless singing for joy (Isa 35:3-6). Following the action of Jesus this man is not recorded as singing, but as speaking plainly. Having met with people who cannot speak plainly but can still sing one may see plain speaking as the greater blessing. No doubt for this man the singing for joy followed later!

So this second Gentile healing is accomplished. The man presumably returns to his friends and to the crowd who are overwhelmed by the wonder of it all. Jesus tells them to tell no one else about it but he might as well have tried to stop a forest fire single handed. The crowd takes up a refrain: "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak." Such words, echoing the Hebrew prophet, seem strange from a Gentile crowd but, unless Mark has got his location completely wrong, such it must largely have been. If Mark is correct in his location both this story and the story which follows, the story of the feeding of four thousand people, must be concerned with a largely Gentile crowd.

Mark introduces his new story with words which have a measure of ambiguity: "In those days when there was again a great crowd without anything to eat." The "in those days" seems to refer to the time frame of the previous stories, and hence to their geographical location. However the word "again" may indicate a different crowd from that referred to in the earlier story or it may be referring to the fact that once again Jesus is faced with a crowd which has nothing to eat. If this be so, the solution to that problem is the same as that for the feeding of the five thousand (6:37-44). Jesus tells his disciples to give the crowd something to eat. The parallel with the previous story is very close, even down to the inability of the disciples to rise to the challenge which Jesus presents to them. This has led many commentators to affirm that the two stories

are simply variant accounts of one particular event. So they may be, but why should Mark include in his relatively short account of the Good News of Jesus two versions of the same event? Possibly he would do so in order to show that the Kingdom which Jesus proclaimed is meant not simply for Jews but for Gentiles as well. Certain differences between the two stories are indeed symbolic.

The five thousand were fed with five loaves, symbolic of the five books of the Law, while the four thousand are fed with seven loaves - thought by some to symbolise the seventy nations into which the Gentile world was traditionally divided. Further at the feeding of the five thousand, twelve baskets of remnants are collected, recalling the twelve tribes of Israel whilst the four thousand only leave seven baskets of remnants. So, were there two occasions of feeding of the multitude by Jesus, one in a Jewish venue and one in a Gentile venue or has Mark given two slightly different accounts of the same event, setting them in different venues in order to emphasise his belief in the universal relevance of the Gospel?

As on so many occasions in his Gospel record, Mark leaves us with questions, questions as to what actually happened. Meanwhile Mark moves his story on, once again using the word "immediately". There is a sense of urgency, of moving towards a climax. There is also a continuing mystery for Mark records that Jesus and his disciples went by boat to the district of Dalmanutha. It seems likely that Mark got the name completely wrong for no one has ever been able to locate Dalmanutha, except for some Pharisees looking for an argument. And still the question hovers over the whole story: "Who do you say that this Jesus is?"



The following series written by Rev Dr Herbert McGonigle, a former Senior Lecturer in Historical Theology and Church History at Nazarene Theological College, Manchester, will take a Bible event and a historical anecdote to bring us a word of help and support & encouragement in these difficult days, and is entitled:

1. There's more with us than with them!!

We begin the New Year with a Bible event from 2 Kings and an anecdote from Birmingham.

For a number of years, the king of Syria had tried to capture the prophet Elisha. (The story is found in 2 Kings 6:11-19). Elisha always knew what the Syrians were planning, and revealed their plans before they could be carried out. Finally, the Syrian armies surrounded Elisha in Dothan.

When Gehazi, Elisha's servant, woke up and saw the encircling Syrian armies, he was terrified. But Elisha prayed, 'Lord, open his eyes.' When Gehazi looked again, he could hardly believe what he saw. All round them were horses and chariots of fire. The armies of heaven were protecting them! And Elisha encouraged him. "Don't fear, there's more with us than with them!" Immediately the Syrians were struck with blindness and Elisha and Gehazi escaped.

Often, we need to ask the Lord to *open our eyes*. When our strength has failed and faith is weak, we're apt to think that God has forgotten us. But He hasn't! He is near and only our dimness of vision prevents us from seeing His great presence and power and provision. Fear not! Trust God! Believe His Word! There's more with us than with our enemy!

In the early 1950s a well-known department store in Birmingham, England, wanted to extend its premises. Close at hand was an ideal site but it belonged to the Quakers whose Meeting House had been there for well over 200 years. The department store wrote to the Quakers, offering to buy the site. They said, "We will give you a very good price for the land. In fact, we'll send you a blank cheque. Please fill in whatever sum of money you think appropriate, and we will honour it." Four weeks passed and there was no reply, then five weeks, then six weeks.

Finally, a letter arrived from the Quakers. It thanked the department store for their generous offer but declined to accept it. "Our Meeting House has been here for almost 250 years," they explained, "much longer than your store. We have no wish to sell our property. However, if you would agree to sell your site to us, we are very interested in buying it. We will give you a very good price for it. Just state your selling price and we will honour it." The letter was signed 'Cadburys.' The department store thought they were dealing with a small congregation of Quakers. Instead, they were dealing with the Cadburys' empire. Cadburys could have bought the department store twenty times over!

When our enemy the devil attacks us, by ourselves we are weak and feeble. But when Christ dwells in us by His Spirit, we are mighty! The devil is no longer attacking us; he is attacking the Captai of our salvation – and the devil cannot win! There's more with us than with him! As we go through 2022, be *encouraged*. With Christ we are more than conquerors!



Wordsearch for December

Christmas is nearly here! Two thousand years ago the Jews were longing for the coming of their Messiah. The Old Testament had promised that when He came, He would preach good news to the poor, bind up the broken hearted, proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, comfort all who mourn and to bestow on His people a crown of beauty instead of ashes. Jesus did all those things. He was and is the Son of God, and whoever has seen Him has seen the Father. Whoever believes in Him will have the best gift of all – His Spirit within them, which gives them eternal life.

Messiah	Favour	Comfort
Broken	Prisoners	Mourn
Heart	Freedom	Seen
Bestow	Crown	Beauty
Ashes	Whoever	Son
Darkness	Father	God
Longing	Thousand	Jesus



December 2021&
January 2022

The following article, written by Revd Canon Paul Hardingham, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

Advent

Waiting is not popular in our culture, when so much can be obtained simply at the press of a button! Advent, when we wait for the coming of Christmas, is also an opportunity to learn what it means to be waiting for the promised return of Jesus. He says: *'It's like a man going away: he leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. Therefore, keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back'* (Mark 13:34-35).

We live between Jesus' first and second comings and this parable reminds us of the need to watch and wait, as disciples living faithfully for Him. It reminds us of two kinds of waiting: *passive* and *active*. Imagine you're at the railway station, awaiting the arrival of a train. On the platform a man is asleep, as he thinks there is plenty of time before the train arrives. He is *passively waiting*. There is also a small boy on the platform who is excited about the train coming. He can't sit still and constantly looks down the track to see if the train is coming. He is *actively waiting*, for he expects the train to arrive at any moment.

Advent gives us a choice: *how will we wait for Jesus' coming?* Passive waiting doesn't require much attention on our part. We can live our Christian life pre-occupied with our own concerns, rather than looking to God. However, active waiting involves an eager expectation, as we await Jesus' return or simply look to him coming to us today. All we want is to be found faithful as His disciples. There is nothing more important than being ready to meet our Master!

The following article, written by Rev Dr Herbert McGonigle, a former Senior Lecturer in Historical Theology and Church History at Nazarene Theological College, Manchester, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and looks to Psalm 23 as the New Year begins, and is entitled:

The reality of faith in God

As we enter this New Year of 2022 even the most devoted Christians can't ignore the uncertainties we face. The whole world was caught up in the persistent spread of Coronavirus. It is shaking national economies and causing untold stress and harm. Many people fear that their lives and families will never be the same again.

Almost daily the news has been gloomy and economic experts say the situation is the worst in living memory. How do we, as Christians, react to all this? What do we trust in? Has God something to say to us in these days?

An answer may be found in a well-loved passage from the Bible – Psalm 23: 'The Lord is my shepherd ...He restores my soul ...he leads me ...I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.'

But in the middle of this lovely psalm there are three reminders that Christians are NOT exempt from the realities of life. The psalmist speaks of 'the paths of righteousness', 'the valley of the shadow' and 'the presence of my enemies.'

The mention of 'the paths of righteousness' is a reminder that we are called to love the Lord and live our lives in *righteousness*. The wonderful promises in this psalm come with a condition; they are given to those who determine by God's grace to live righteously. And that must be our first resolution for 2022.

The 'valley of the shadow' may refer to death, but generally the reference here is

wider. It means all those occasions when fear and sorrow and heartbreak and loss come to even the best Christians.

Then there are our 'enemies.' Originally that probably meant those wanting to kill the psalmist. For us it may be the seduction of old temptations, the fears that paralyse us and the memories of sins that still haunt us.

The psalmist is a realist! As Christians we live our lives in the real world! We are not floating on cloud nine; we are rooted in a fallen world and surrounded by temptations and sins and infirmities. Any day, pain, an incurable disease, even death itself, may come to us or to those we love. How do we face these realities?

Psalm 23 has the answer. If we, by God's grace, will walk in 'the paths of righteousness,' then all the promises are ours! The Lord will be our Shepherd. He will lead us by the still waters; He will restore our souls, prepare a table for us in the wilderness, protect and guide us with His rod and staff and, at the end, bring us into the house of the Lord forever. Let's make Psalm 23 our charter of faith for 2022!



The following article by Revd Peter Crumpler, a former communications director for the C of E, has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

'Truth is under attack' BBC chief tells church service

Truth is under attack like never before, BBC director general Tim Davie told a special church service in London.

Speaking at the annual commemorative service for journalists, held at St Bride's, Fleet Street – the journalists' church – Tim Davie declared: "In the disinformation age, truth is under assault like never before. Those who stand up for it most strongly have never been more targeted."

He welcomed the recent award of the Nobel Peace Prize to journalists, Maria Ressa and Dmitry Muratov, "for their fight for freedom of expression" in the Philippines and Russia.

Mr Davie explained: "We know that the physical risks faced by journalists no longer come solely from the front line. Reporters all around the world face escalating dangers, increasing levels of harassment, and ever more subtle modes of intimidation."

He said that in March, the BBC's Beijing correspondent, John Sudworth, had been forced to leave China as "a result of pressure and threats from the authorities." Over the summer, the BBC's Moscow correspondent, Sarah Rainsford, had been expelled from Russia after more than 20 years of reporting. These moves, he said, "were almost unthinkable just a few years ago."

Tim Davie told the service that journalists share key beliefs: "that truth is the foundation of democracy, that power must be held to account, that those who abuse that power must be exposed, and those who are the victims of that abuse must be given a voice."

He added: "More than anything else, what truly brings us together as a family is the compassion and care we have for our colleagues in peril right around the world, and for their families."

Canon Alison Joyce, Rector of St Bride's said: "The world has never been in greater need of good journalism, and we have never had more occasion to be reminded

of the human cost of good journalism than we have today.

"It is our privilege to honour the memories of all those journalists; photographers; film crew; and their support staff, and all who work freelance in the industry, who have lost their lives this past year and to remember in our prayers those who continue to work in situations of immense personal risk in the pursuit of truth.



STAR

At a rehearsal for a Sunday school Christmas tableau, the teacher carefully lined up four little 'cherubs'. Each carried a huge cut-out letter. As they stood side by side, the letters would spell out "STAR". A slight mix-up occurred, and those present in the church auditorium nearly fell out of their pews as the four little performers took their places – in reverse.

Split

A professor was lecturing his physics class. "If molecules can be split into atoms and the atoms split into electrons, can the electrons be broken down any further?"

"I'm not certain," replied one of his pupils, "But a sure way to find out would be to post some of them in a Christmas package marked 'fragile.'"

Snowmen

Two snowmen were standing next to each other. One said to the other: "Can you smell carrots?"



Wishing you all a Merry
Christmas and a

