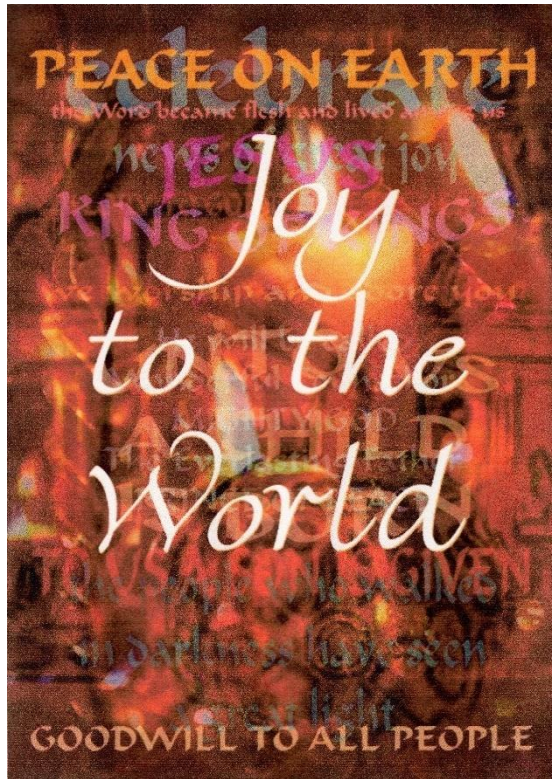


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Bromsgrove
Methodist
Church
and Centre



December 2023 –
January 2024

**Bromsgrove Methodist Church and Centre: encouraging,
supporting and developing followers of Jesus Christ and
sharing God's love in the wider community**

REGULAR SERVICES and KEY CONTACTS

SUNDAY

1 st	9.00 am	Holy Communion
	10.30 am	Morning Worship
2 nd	10.30 am	Morning Worship
3 rd	10.30 am	Morning Worship
4 th	10.30 am	Morning Worship

- Holy Communion at one 10.30 am service each month
- Holy Communion at 6.00 pm once a month
- Special Services as arranged.

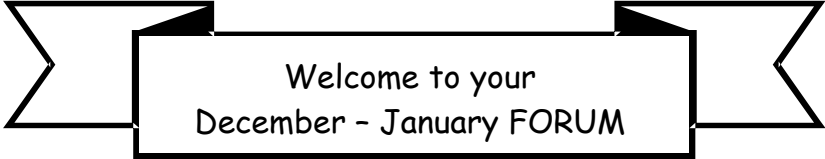
Please see the Centre Pages for full service details

Minister: Revd Peter Powers
10 Johns Close, Studley, B80 7EQ
Tel: 07941 328155

Centre Office: 19 Stratford Road
Bromsgrove, B60 1AS
Tel: (01527) 835843

Room Bookings: e-mail: bromsgroveroombookings@gmail.com

Find out more at www.brommethcentre.org.uk



Welcome to your
December - January FORUM

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Material for FORUM to the Editor, Jim Buchanan, c/o Centre Office
or email:les.jim42@btinternet.com

*Opinions expressed are those of the writers and do not necessarily
represent the views of the Church at any level*

There is room a clear reading of the Bible stories about the Nativity

Perhaps like me, you have been struggling to find 'truth' in all the media reporting and governmental posturing through the crisis in the Holy Land and ongoing in Ukraine too? Every storyteller 'takes sides'. It is an inevitable human trait. Walking the path of truth, especially historically, is pretty much impossible. Similar challenges face us in our reading of the Bible. We cannot help but bring our own life experiences and history to our encounter with the pages of scripture. It takes the discipline of the disciple to read the text again and discover what it actually offers us...

The most detailed and influential account of the birth of Jesus Christ is found in the Gospel of Luke. But Luke's account, as well as being much more informative than the one we find in the Gospel of Matthew, is the version of events which does the most to strain readerly credulity.

We'll follow the Gospel of Luke as that has proved to be the dominant and most influential version of the Nativity story, though in my analysis we will touch upon some of the differences between Luke and Matthew. Before we have a closer walk through the story though, it is important to read through the early verses of the two versions.

Most of the details associated with the birth of Jesus in the popular imagination come from Luke, not Matthew. Neither Luke nor Matthew makes any reference to the time of year at which the birth of Jesus takes place, and the date of 25 December was only decided as the traditional date for Jesus' birth many centuries afterwards, sometime in the fourth century. The fact that Luke's account refers to shepherds tending their flocks at night is more likely to suggest spring lambing season than the winter, when sheep may well have been confined to a livestock pen or corral. Nor did any of this happen in 'the year zero': 'BC' may mean 'before Christ' and 'AD' stand for 'Anno Domini', or 'the year of our Lord', but the historical Jesus is widely thought to have been born in around 4 BC as we count the years.

But enough of such details which don't appear in the biblical accounts. What about those details that do appear?

Matthew's account gives the impression that Joseph and Mary lived in Bethlehem before moving to Nazareth sometime after Jesus was born. This straightforward explanation allows Matthew to fulfil the prophecy, which stated that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem and would be a descendant of King David, but also make sure Jesus was living in Nazareth shortly afterwards. We'll leave aside another problematic matter, namely the prophecy stating that the Messiah would be descended from the 'stem of Jesse', i.e., the father of David, while Matthew goes to some lengths to prove that Joseph – who wasn't Jesus' biological father – was descended from Jesse. Surely, it's Mary's pedigree that's important?

But clearly Luke wasn't as concerned as Matthew with finding a literary device for placing the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. Instead of simply saying 'Joseph and Mary lived in Bethlehem, Mary had Jesus, and they moved to Nazareth', Luke invents a convoluted and highly improbable story involving a tax levied on everyone living under Roman occupation, which involves every single individual travelling back to the city of their birth. Why can't they be taxed in the current city where they live, and state their hometown when they complete the census? Why did everyone, even heavily expectant mothers like Mary, have to make the difficult journey, which, for Mary, would have involved a journey of some 70 miles, while pregnant. Even with the 'little donkey' of the popular song to bear her, that's a long way to travel when your waters might break any minute.

But in a way, raising such questions misses the point that, despite its absurd premise, it is the account given by Luke which has become the dominant narrative detailing the birth of Jesus Christ. Perhaps there is something to be said for the story's focus on the hardships that attended the birth of the most important person in the birth of our faith. And, of course, there are the humble surroundings in which he was born. We all know these details: arriving in Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph find there is no room at the inn, so Mary ends up giving birth to Jesus in a stable among the animals.

But in fact, even Luke makes no mention of these details. He simply tells us that the newborn Jesus was laid 'in a manger' having been wrapped 'in swaddling clothes'. He does tell us there was 'no room for them in the inn' which seems pretty clear, but there's a translation issue.

The Greek word 'kataluma' can be translated as 'inn' but also as 'guest room', and it's more likely that the Gospel writer was thinking of the latter thing rather than a commercial tavern. It might then be reasonably assumed that Mary and Joseph were staying with relatives during their return to Bethlehem.

There is no historical evidence for Augustus' census or 'tax' of the Roman world; the Bible makes no mention of when Jesus was born; and the idea of Mary and Joseph being turned away from an 'inn' is probably the result of an error in translation. But the Luke version of the Nativity is the fullest account of Jesus' birth that we find in the Bible, and for me, and perhaps for you as you read my letter this time around in the FORUM magazine, an inspiring story about the difficult circumstances in which the Jesus, the Messiah was brought into the world.

As we mark Christmas in 2023, with the hope that the Peace of the Christ-child might fall again upon the hills and valleys and cities of the Holy Land, and upon the people and places of Ukraine, let us make room for the actual telling of the story offered to us by the Gospel writers, alongside the rather more magical Christmas story that the world has inherited and sadly ignores after 25th December.

Every Christmas blessing, Rev. Peter

When the song of the angels is stilled

When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,

the work of Christmas begins:

to find the lost,

to heal the broken,

to feed the hungry,

to release the prisoner,

to rebuild the nations,

to bring peace among the peoples,

to make music in the heart.

Howard Thurman (1899-1981)



Fashion flourishes for refugees

A sell-out fashion show at Bromsgrove Methodist Centre raised nearly £1700 for a refugee support group. The event is a major fund-raiser for BRWR, a charitable organisation that provides friendship and help to around 200 refugees living in the twin towns.

The show attracted a crowd of around 170 people, with the ticket revenue representing a substantial contribution to the annual running costs of the group which offers refugees a range of help negotiating the British way of life, from befriending to practical support and financial assistance. Asylum seekers are also provided with free English language lessons.

Thirteen volunteer models, mostly Ukrainian refugees, strode the catwalk at the Centre, which kindly provided the hall and other facilities for free. The show was followed by a discount clothing sale including the outfits showcased by the models.

The organising committee was delighted with the turnout:

“It was brilliant to see the hall jam-packed full of people supporting the important work that BRWR volunteers do,” said Jenny Jones. “The generosity of the audience and the church will allow us to continue to extend the hands of help and friendship to refugees and asylum seekers as they seek to create new lives in our communities.”

The 2023 vintage of Refujuice, the support group’s other main fund-raiser, will soon be on sale. The apple juice will be produced once the gleaning has taken place over the next few weeks.

For more information about BRWR, visit www.brwr.uk



BROMSGROVE
METHODIST CHURCH

Christmas Craft Fair

SATURDAY 2nd DECEMBER

10.30 am - 12.30 pm



Gifts



Cards



Decorations

Wooden crafts



Ceramic gifts

Mosaics

Jewellery

Toiletries



Bacon Butties

Refreshments



and more....



Winter Solstice

This year the winter solstice will fall on Friday 22nd December.

A Midwinter festival has been a part of life since pre-Christian times.

When the hours of daylight are fewest, the warmth of the sun weakest, and life itself seemingly at a standstill, our ancestors, the pagan peoples of Europe and Western Asia, kept festival by lighting bonfires and decorating their buildings with evergreens.

Perhaps they believed that the dying sun could be enheartened by fire, and the life of the buried seed assured by the presence of evergreen branches.

With the advent of Christianity, the Spring gods became identified with Christ, and the birthday of the sun with the birthday of the Light of the World. The early church father Tertullian did not approve of Christmas decorations:

*“Let those who have no light in themselves light candles!
You are the light of the world, you are the tree ever green....”*

But by the time of St Gregory and St Augustine, four centuries later, this had changed. Pope Gregory instructed Augustine not to worry about harmless outward customs, as long as the right God be worshipped through them.

And so many Anglo-Saxon customs were never discarded, but simply endowed with a new significance.

By 1598 one John Stow of London wrote how:

‘Against the feast of Christmas, every man’s house, as also their parish churches, were decked with holme, ivie, bayes, and whatsoever the season of the yeare afforded to be greene.’



THE WELCOME COFFEE SHOP

What we have achieved over the last year

There has been training for all volunteers. We now have over 20, and 2 more in training. We have updated all processes and record keeping in line with current food safety requirements and managed to get a 5* ratings from the Environmental Health Officer. We have also tried to update the eating and drinking area by using the blue chairs and replacing the table cloths. We have also changed the name to the Welcome Coffee Shop (chosen by the Girls' Brigade) and put up a new sign and menu boards.

We Initiated "Souper Mondays" and opened for longer to serve soup and a roll, which proved popular. We have developed a cake rota so that we always have at least one homemade cake on offer. Last winter, Thursday also became a "Warm Space", which created a lot of interest on Facebook, but didn't really bring in any new people, which was our intention. The Coffee Shop is also open now on alternate Saturdays and does a good trade serving the people at CAMEO and the wider community.

We have seen more people using the Coffee Shop over this year. It is usually a buzzing place now with good conversations and new people dropping in as well as regulars. The chatty table has proven popular and gives a place for those who would like to talk to someone can sit and be assured of a warm welcome. We have had the Stroke Association meeting fortnightly, Talking God once a week and the Community Police officers come in once a month for an open surgery.

Over the year the takings have almost doubled, which we are thankful for, but it is really the people that matter. Our overarching aim is to provide this, as our Mission Plan:

TO CREATE A CHRIST CENTRED, AFFORDABLE, SAFE AND WELCOMING PLACE FOR THE CHURCH AND THE WIDER COMMUNITY TO MEET TO ENGAGE WITH EACH OTHER AND TO ENCOUNTER GOD'S LOVE

***AIMS: To provide good quality food at reasonable cost
To support church folk and give a place to meet and chat
To engage with the wider community
To offer hospitality as an outpouring of our Christian heart
To offer an opportunity to talk about and get to know God
To show God's love through care for one another and for our community***



Next steps

Our aim in the coming year is to develop Thursdays, which still remains a quiet day in the Coffee Shop. Following on from the survey I circulated, most people felt that a Dementia support group and a film club would be the best way forward.

I have done more discernment with members of the church, the Coffee Shop customers and the wider public and there is a feeling that there is a need, for those living with memory change and their care partners, for more opportunities to socialize and find support. As a result, I have been joined by a further 9 (and growing) volunteers to start planning for a new Welcome Dementia Support Group. The aim of the group is to create a safe space for anyone coping with memory change and their care partners to meet together for a time of fun, chat and companionship. We also plan to include times when we can talk about God and to also celebrate Christian festivals throughout the year.

Our plans are well under way. A few of the volunteers have done some training, which will be cascaded down to the rest of the team over the next few weeks. We have been gathering the support of other agencies such as the *Alzheimer's Society* and *Age UK*. We have also been visiting other similar groups and collecting ideas and resources to begin to plan a programme of activities for the year. We have also been considering our building and how we can make it more dementia friendly. It is proving difficult to find the right day and time to run the group, but we are working on some options and will hopefully be in a position to give out further details very soon.

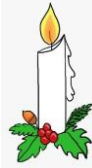
We are very excited about the year ahead. Thank you to all who help in some way to make the Coffee Shop happen and for those who come in and support us. Please keep doing what you're doing!

If you would like to get more involved with what is happening in the Welcome Coffee Shop, please contact me on **07884 191101** or email churchcommunityandoutreach@gmail.com

Sally Meredith



CANDLELIGHT CAROL SERVICE SUNDAY 17th DECEMBER, 6.00 pm



A traditional service of
Lessons and Carols



MINCE PIES AND CAROLS WITH LIVE MUSIC AT THE CENTRE



The Stewards invite you to join us on Monday,
Tuesday and Wednesday,
18th, 19th and 20th December.
10.30am until 12.30 pm



Come along and enjoy the festive atmosphere

CHRISTMAS EVE

Morning Worship 10.30 am

Holy Communion 11.30 pm

CHRISTMAS DAY Worship 10.30 am

Come and join the celebration!



CHRISTMAS POST REMINDERS

- The last collection is on **Sunday December 10th**, to give time for cards to be sorted and collected.
- Please post only cards that people will be able to pick up themselves
- Please give generously to Action for Children. Thank you!



90 years of broadcasting the Royal Christmas Messages

This year we shall have our second Royal Christmas Message from King Charles III, thus following a tradition that spans three generations.

It was 90 years ago, on 25th December 1932, that the first Royal Christmas Message was broadcast on radio. King George V addressed the nation live from Sandringham. A quarter of a century later, on 25th December 1957, the Christmas message by Queen Elizabeth II was televised for the first time.

King George V had been asked to broadcast a Christmas message in 1922, but at the time he felt that radio was for entertainment, and therefore not suitable. Ten years later, after a visit to the BBC, he was persuaded otherwise, and agreed to do it as part of the inauguration of the new Empire Service (now the World Service).

The time chosen was 3pm because it was the best time for reaching most countries in the Empire. In fact, the first message started five minutes late and lasted only two and a half minutes, but it made a massive impact and established itself as a regular Christmas Day event.

Edward VIII never delivered a Christmas broadcast. There was no Christmas broadcast in 1936 or 1938 although King George VI did broadcast a Christmas message in December 1937 to thank his subjects for their support during the first year of his reign. He reintroduced the tradition in 1939 initially using it to encourage people during the Second World War.

Queen Elizabeth II broadcast her first Christmas message in 1952, again from a room at Sandringham, and five years later agreed that her Christmas message could be televised live. She proved to be a natural broadcaster.

As times changed, in 1960, the message was pre-recorded from Buckingham Palace, which meant that it could be sent to Commonwealth countries for broadcast at a local convenient time.

However, the 3pm UK broadcast continued every year except 1969, when the Queen wrote a message instead, believing that the Royal Family had received enough exposure with the TV documentary Royal Family, which had aired in the summer. However, the tradition was resumed the following year.

The Christmas message is now also available each year as a podcast and can be seen through Facebook and YouTube.



King George V
1932



King George VI
1937



Queen Elizabeth II
1952



King Charles III 2022



Sunday Flowers

The following list indicates the names of those who have contributed to the cost of Sunday flowers during December and January.

December

3rd Linda Ashworth
10th Diane Knowles
17th Ann Taylor
24th
31st Chris Roberts

January

7th Jean Wiseman
14th Jill Palmer
21st Margo Rutter
28th Pam & Pete Gale

Worship at the Centre

December 2023

3rd Church Anniversary

9.00 am

Holy Communion

Revd Brian Mason

10.30 am

Morning Worship

Revd Peter Bates

10th 10.30 am

Holy Communion

Revd Peter Powers



6.00 pm

Boys' and Girls' Brigades Carol Service



17th 10.30 am

Morning Worship

Deacon Janet Thomas

6.00 pm

Candlelight Carol Service



24th 10.30 am

Morning Worship

Revd Anne Smith

11.30 pm

Christmas Eve Communion

Revd Peter Powers

25th 10.30 am

Christmas Day Worship

Deacon Janet Thomas

31st 10.30 am

Morning Worship

Mrs Linda Ashworth

January 2024

7 th	9.00 am Holy Communion	Revd Alan Bidnell
	10.30 am Morning Worship	Local Arrangement
14 th	10.30 am Covenant and Communion	Revd Peter Powers
21 st	10.30 am Morning Worship	Mr John Webb
28 th	10.30 am Morning Worship	Mr James Knott



Christmas

Carols sound throughout the land
*H*eralding a special birth
*R*ejoicing from Heaven's realm
*I*mmanuel comes to bless earth.
So in the town of Bethlehem
*T*he Saviour Jesus gently lies
*M*ary rocks the tiny child
*A*s angels serenade the skies.
*S*hepherds told the story
*D*ivinity will now reside
*A*s He who ruled in Heaven
*Y*et Lord of all comes as a child.

The Covenant Service



Sometimes described as the “jewel of Methodist worship”, the annual Covenant Service is an important marker of the new year. It is an opportunity to consider our commitment as disciples of Christ and dedicate ourselves afresh to that task.

But where did the idea come from?

The idea of Covenant was basic to John Wesley’s understanding of Christian discipleship. He saw the relationship with God in Covenant as being like a marriage between human beings (both as a community and as individuals) on the one side and God in Christ on the other (cf. Ephesians 5.21-33).

His original Covenant Prayer involved taking Christ as “my Head and Husband, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, for all times and conditions, to love, honour and obey thee before all others, and this to the death”.

Wesley recognised that people needed not just to accept but also to grow in relationship with God. He therefore emphasised that God’s grace and love constantly prompts and seeks to transform us, and so we should continually seek and pray to grow in holiness and love.

Wesley saw the need for some regular ceremony which would enable people to open themselves to God more fully. He looked for some means of helping them to hear God’s offer and challenge ever more deeply, and to allow God to prompt and enable them to respond.

In 1755 Wesley created a form of service adapted from the works of Joseph and Richard Alleine. These works came from the Puritan tradition of pastoral and spiritual guidance. Wesley therefore insisted that the Covenant Service be located in a framework of pastoral care, preaching and guidance.

This framework dealt with the corporate needs of a particular society of Christian disciples, and within that with the needs of individuals within that group. It therefore linked personal devotion with corporate worship.

There would be a series of meetings about the Covenant involving sermons, explanations and exhortations. An invitation would then be issued for “those as will” to come to the Covenant Service. After a day’s ‘Retreat’ for people to prepare themselves in prayer, fasting, reflection and self-examination there would be the Covenant Service itself.

This would be held in the context of the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Wesley thought that this Sacrament brought into the realm of experience and made real all that was said in the Covenant. He therefore urged Methodists to pay it the highest regard, to put it at the centre of their spiritual life and to share in it frequently.

The process did not end with the Covenant Service. People were encouraged to continue to work out the implications for their lives of the fact that their relationship with God had been renewed in and through Christ. It was accepted that people might find this difficult to do without help, and might ‘backslide’. There would therefore be further pastoral guidance offered to both groups and individuals in the weeks that followed the service.

Each January we return to this tradition and make our commitment over again.

Wednesday Meeting Point

Programme for December and January



Wednesday December 6th Police Community Officer

**Wednesday December 20th Christmas Nibbles/
Hat Game**

Wednesday January 3rd Channel Islands Cricket

Wednesday January 17th Lunch Out

We meet at 7.30 pm in Room 6. All are welcome.

 **HYMNS WE LOVE** 

O little town of Bethlehem - Philips Brooks (1835 - 1893)

*O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light;
the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.*

*O morning stars, together proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the King, and peace to all the earth!
For Christ is born of Mary; and, gathered all above,
while mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of
wondering love.*

*How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven.
No ear may hear his coming; but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him still the dear Christ enters in.*

*O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
cast out our sin, and enter in; be born in us today!
We hear the Christmas angels the glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel!*

COMMENT (Biography courtesy of Wikipedia):

Philips Brooks was born in Boston, Mass., into a family of clergymen, and three of his brothers were also ordained. He served many years as rector of the Episcopal church of the Holy Trinity, Philadelphia. Two years before his death in 1893 aged 57, he was elected Bishop of Massachusetts. During the Civil War he opposed slavery and preached an eloquent sermon on the death of Abraham Lincoln.

This well-known carol reminds us that, as prophesied, Jesus was born in the City of David, Bethlehem, thus the reference to "the hopes and fears of all the years being met" that night.

The second stanza speaks of stars proclaiming the birth (elsewhere we read/sing about the Star of Bethlehem); and "while mortals sleep the angels", gathered all above, "keep their watch of wondering love."

Brooks continues in the vein that silently, without fuss, possibly the greatest event in history was unfolding - the gift by God to us of his Son. No ear can hear his coming, but if "meek souls will receive him, the dear Christ enters in". Amazingly, that is all we have to do - invite Jesus into our lives, and he enters in, and will never leave or forsake us.

The last verse speaks of Immanuel, meaning literally "God with us"; and that is what Christmas celebrates; the coming of the Christ, born of Mary, becoming one of us; coming down, in order to raise us up. Let us with meaning sing "Cast out our sin, enter in; be born in us today - come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel".

Happy Christmas!

JOHN WEBB

Six Little Stories

Once all the villagers decided to pray for rain. On the day of prayer, all the people gathered, but only one little boy brought an umbrella.

That is faith

When you throw babies in the air, they laugh because they know you will catch them. *That is trust*

Every night we go to bed without any assurance of being alive the next morning, but we still set the alarm to wake up. *That is hope*

We plan big things for tomorrow in spite of zero knowledge of the future. *That is confidence.*

We see the world suffering but still, we get married and have children. *That is love*

On an old man's shirt was written a sentence: "I am not 80 years old; I am sweet 16 with 64 years' experience." *That is experience.*

Have a happy day and live your life like these six stories.

**Remember, good friends are the rare jewels of life:
difficult to find and impossible to replace!**

Submitted by Meryl Davies

Three Other Wise Men

by Rt Revd James A. Simpson*

One Christmas Eve in San Quentin prison, almost as a gesture of sarcasm, the prisoners hung socks outside their cells.

Unlike previous governors, the newly appointed governor responded. The prisoners' gesture seemed infinitely pathetic, so he despatched prison officers to purchase whatever fruit and chocolate they could get at that late hour. Shortly after midnight each sock was filled. Writing later of that incident, one of the prisoners, Donald Lowrie, said, 'This was the nearest thing to the Christ-Spirit that I saw at San Quentin.'



Johann Oberlin who lived in the 18th century was the Protestant minister of Waldach in the mountainous district of Alsace. One bitter December day while returning from a neighbouring village across the snow-covered mountains, he suddenly took ill.

He knew he must press on for many had frozen to death through sitting down to rest. He had not gone far when he collapsed.

On regaining consciousness, he found himself in a little hut gazing up into the rugged face of a stranger who was giving him brandy. The stranger, who had obviously carried him to the hut, stayed with him until he was stronger. Then he accompanied him to Waldach. Oberlin wanted to repay his kindness, but the man would take nothing. He would not even tell Oberlin his name. 'Pastor, when you tell me the Good Samaritan's name, I will tell you my name'.



I recall a man coming to my home in Glasgow and handing me a beautiful book. He explained that he had overheard a conversation in the local bookshop concerning a family where one of the boys was desperately keen to get this book for Christmas, but which his mother had admitted she could not afford. Anxious to remain anonymous, and to avoid the mother any embarrassment, he wondered if I would deliver the book.

'When you give, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that giving may be in secret.' Jesus also said, 'Whoever hears these words of mine and acts upon them, I will liken unto a 'wise man'.

The striking characteristic of these three wise men - the prison governor, the rugged man of the mountains and the Glaswegian - was their compassion, which expressed itself in doing good secretly. Lloyd Douglas (an American Clergyman and author 1877-1951) was right to describe such anonymous giving as a 'magnificent obsession'.

**[Rt Revd Simpson was Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1994.]*

What The Donkey Saw

No room in the inn, of course, and not that much in the stable,
What with the shepherds, Magi, Mary, Joseph, the heavenly host,
Not to mention the baby using our manger as a cot,
You couldn't have squeezed another cherub in for love or money.
Still in spite of the overcrowding, I did my best to make them
feel wanted.
I could see the baby and I would be going places together.

It may be Christmas, but does it meet Health and Safety?!

The Rocking Song

Little Jesus, sweetly sleep,
do not stir; We will lend a coat of fur,
We will rock you, rock you, rock you,
We will rock you, rock you, rock you:



Fur is no longer appropriate wear for small infants, both due to risk of allergy to animal fur, and for ethical reasons. Please lend little Jesus a nice cellular blanket instead, or perhaps micro-fleece material. Please note, only persons who have been subject to a DBS check and have enhanced clearance will be permitted to rock baby Jesus. Persons must carry their disclosure with them at all times and be prepared to provide three forms of identification before rocking commences.

While Shepherds Watched

While shepherds watched
Their flocks by night
All seated on the ground
The angel of the Lord came down
And glory shone around



The Union of Shepherds has complained that it breaches health and safety regulations to insist that shepherds watch their flocks without appropriate seating arrangements being provided. Therefore benches, stools and orthopaedic chairs are now available. Please note, the angel of the Lord is reminded that before shining his/her glory all around she/he must ascertain that all shepherds have been issued with glasses capable of filtering out the harmful effects of UVA, UVB and Glory.

We Three Kings

We three kings of Orient are
Bearing gifts we traverse afar
Field and fountain,
moor and mountain
Following yonder star



Whilst the gift of gold is still considered acceptable – as it may be redeemed at a later date through such organisations as ‘cash for gold’ etc, gifts of frankincense and myrrh are not appropriate due to the potential risk of oils and fragrances causing allergic reactions.

A suggested gift alternative would be to make a donation to a worthy cause in the recipient’s name or perhaps give a gift voucher.

Also, we would not advise that the traversing kings rely on navigation by stars and suggest the use of a satnav which will provide the quickest route and advice regarding fuel consumption

How Father Christmas got where he is today

One person you are bound to run into this Christmas season is Father Christmas. These days he seems to frequent shopping malls and garden centres. If he looks tired, just remember that he has been around a long time and gone through a lot of transformations.

Father Christmas wasn't always the red-suited, white bearded star of the retail trade that he is today. He began life as Nicholas, born way back about AD260 in Patara, an important port on the southern coast of what is now Turkey.

When his parents died and left him a fortune, Nicholas gave it away to the poor. He became a bishop of the nearby city of Myra, where he almost certainly suffered persecution and imprisonment at the hand of the Roman Emperor Diocletian.

Nicholas was a serious theologian: he was a participant at the First Council of Nicaea, which formulated the Creed which we still say today. He even, reportedly, slapped another bishop over the exact nature of the Trinity.

Nicholas died in Myra about AD343, but the stories of his generosity and kindness were just beginning. One enduring tale tells of the three girls whom he rescued from certain prostitution by giving them gold for their dowries. When the father confronted him to thank him, Nicholas said he should thank God alone.

In the UK, Nicholas became the basis for Father Christmas, who emerged in Victorian times as a jolly-faced bearded character. Meanwhile, Dutch and German settlers had taken him to America with them as Sinter Klaas and Sankt Nicklas.

It was in America that Nicholas received his final two great breaks into real stardom. The first was when the Rev Clement C Moore, a New York Episcopal minister, turned from his life-work of writing a Hebrew/English lexicon, to write a fun poem for his children one Christmas. His 'The Visit of St Nicholas' is now universally known by its first line: *'Twas the Night Before Christmas'*.

From Clement Moore we discovered that St Nicholas is round and pink-cheeked and white-bearded, and that he travels at night with sleigh, reindeer and a sack of toys on his back. It was Clement Moore who also revealed that St Nicholas enters houses down chimneys and fills children's stockings with toys and sweets.

So how did we find out that Father Christmas wears red?



That was the US Coca-Cola advertising campaign of 1931, who finally released the latest, up-to-date pictures of Father Christmas: wearing a bright red, fur-trimmed coat and a large belt.

These days, it is good that Father Christmas uses reindeer and doesn't have to pay for petrol. In order to get round all the children in the world on Christmas Eve, he will have to travel 221 million miles at an average speed of 1279 miles a second, 6,395 times the speed of sound. For all those of us who are already exhausted just rushing around getting ready for Christmas, that is a sobering thought.



If you enjoy knitting, crochet and chatting, you would be very welcome to our group which meets in the Coffee Shop on Tuesday mornings between 10am and 11.30. Bring your own handiwork or knit for a charity.

Lizzie Dovey

HUMOUR CORNER

If you like the appalling jokes in Christmas crackers, you'll like these....

What's the expression on an auctioneer's face?

For bidding

Why is it dangerous to have a nap in a railway carriage? **Because the train runs over sleepers**

When is longhand quicker than shorthand?

When it's on a clock

Why can't Christmas trees knit?

Because they lose their needles

Christmas present for Dad? **December is the month when the children begin to discuss what to get Dad for Christmas. Some insist on a shirt; others a pair of socks, and the argument always ends in a tie.**

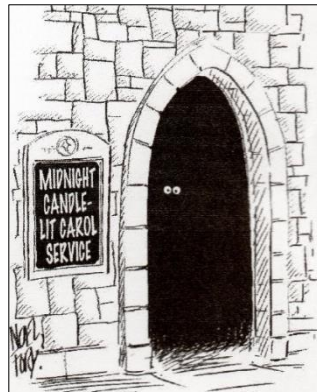
Tweets from Biblical Characters

Noah: "Patent these two inventions of necessity which I came up with at sea **Pooper-scooper & earplugs"**

Adam: "Seems like everyone's all about high fibre.

Me, I plan to eat LESS fruit next year."

David: "Done fighting lions and Philistines. **Taking a safer job playing my harp for the King. #Can'tLose."**



"Does anyone have a light, please?"



Another chuckle from Saga magazine!

Collected by Sean Wiseman

"That Gormley kid is such a show-off"

Chris Roberts will not be distributing Christmas cards this year but will instead donate to Charity.

Chris wishes everyone at Bromsgrove Methodist Church a Blessed Christmas and a very Happy 2024



And Finally

I hope that you have enjoyed reading this festive edition of FORUM. My grateful thanks to all who have contributed this time and to those who have helped produce and distribute the magazine. A particular huge **THANK YOU to Janet Henderson** who continued to work her technical magic despite dealing with the aftermath of Brian's recent heart attack.

The next edition of FORUM will cover the months of February and March with the deadline date for items being Sunday 14th January. Please send your contributions to me by e mail (les.jim42@btinternet.com) or leave written items in the FORUM folder in the Church office.

As we approach our celebration of the birth of Jesus, Lesley & I wish all of our readers a very Merry Christmas and a Happy, healthy and peaceful New Year together with the hope that we will have less road closures in and around Bromsgrove in 2024.





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CHURCH ACTIVITIES AT THE CENTRE

MONDAY

6.00 pm Girls' Brigade

TUESDAY

10.00 am Toddler Group
10.00 am Knitting Group

WEDNESDAY

6.00 pm Boys' Brigade Anchor Boys
6.45 pm Boys' Brigade Juniors
7.45 pm Boys' Brigade Company/Seniors
7.30 pm Meeting Point (1st & 3rd)

SATURDAY

10.30 am CAMEO (1st & 3rd)

During the week other groups and organisations run activities at the Centre too. See the noticeboards for information.



THE WELCOME COFFEE SHOP

Monday to Thursday 10.30 am to 12.30 pm

Saturday (1st & 3rd) 10.00 am to 12 noon

Closed on Friday





*A Happy, Healthy and
Peaceful New Year
to all our readers*