

Weoley Hill Church News

*Unto Us
a Child is Born*



December 2019

From the Minister's study—
Christmas and Red Robins

As I write it is late November and many of us have already bought the Christmas cards we want to send to family and friends. It is interesting how we choose to buy these Christmas cards. Many of us buy cards from particular charities we want to support, and we know that these charities benefit a lot from our Christmas purchases. However, I am sure that when we make our choice, we also look at the picture on the Christmas cards. Our taste varies, of course, but the picture has to be somehow meaningful or attractive, to convey the message of Christmas, adding an image to the wish of a peaceful, blessed and (hopefully) merry Christmas.

I like the traditional nativity scenes but preferably drawn or painted in a more contemporary style or in an unusual setting. I also like the pictures of the wise men travelling on their camel following the star to Bethlehem. And cards with stars, candles, a Christmas tree, angels and bells, a snowy landscape with a church (which evokes for me Christmas as I experienced it in my youth)....they are unmistakably Christmassy!

But cards with a picture of a red robin, now those I like particularly too! Why? Because they remind me of a story that was read to me as a child and which made a lasting impression on me. It is the story of "Robin Redbreast" by the Swedish writer, Selma Lagerlof, the first woman writer to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1909. (She is best known for her children's book, "The wonderful adventures of Nils")

As the story goes....It happened at the time when our Lord created the world, when He not only made heaven and earth, but all the animals and plants as well, at the same time giving them their names.....At that time it happened one day when our Lord...painted the little birds, that the colours in our Lord's paint pot gave out, and the goldfinch would have been without colour if our Lord had not wiped all His paintbrushes on its feathers.....Our Lord sat there, big and gentle, and planned and created all day long, toward evening He conceived the idea of making a little grey

bird. "Remember your name is Robin Redbreast," said our Lord to the bird, as soon as it was finished. The He held it in the palm of His open hand and let it fly.

As the story goes, Robin Redbreast is wondering why he was given this name, when he has no single red feather. God tells him that he has to gain his red breast feathers himself. Years go by and the little robins still have only grey breasts, even though they had hoped that their love, their singing or the courage in their hearts would have reddened their breasts. Then, one day, Robin Redbreast witnesses the spectacle of three men being crucified, the one in the middle so gentle, so loving, so beautiful. He has a crown of thorns and the little bird notices that blood is trickling down his brows. The bird feels compassion and plucks up all his courage and flies to the Crucified One to draw out the thorn which has embedded his brow. As he did so a drop of blood fell on its breast and it spread and coloured all the breast feathers....And ever since, red robins have red breast feathers!

And so the red robin reminds me that while we celebrate Christmas, the birth of Jesus Christ, the cross is already looming in the distance. The red robin reminds me of the dangerous, unjust and death-dealing world in which Jesus was born and, for which, or rather because of which, he died. And it reminds me that, like the Christ-child when grown up, there are many who lovingly, compassionately and courageously stand up for justice, work for peace and reach out to those who are in need even at personal risk and expense. But, above all, the red robin reminds me of God who "created" us all with many differently coloured "feathers" and who sent us Jesus to teach us how to live peacefully and lovingly within the wonderfully diverse creation that is the world!

With all best wishes for a peaceful, joyful and blessed Christmas!
Leonora



A Prayer for the General Election

Loving God, source of our wisdom and understanding, watch over our country during this time of election. Help us to see how our faith informs our principles and actions.

We give thanks for the right to vote. Help us to hold this privilege and responsibility with the care and awareness it merits, realizing that our vote matters and that it is an act of faith

Guide us through this election as a country and community as we vote for people to represent us and do work on our behalf and on behalf of the community they are elected to serve. Help us to vote for people and policies that will better our community, our country and our world so it may reflect the values Christ taught us.

Help us create communities that will build your kingdom here on earth – communities that will protect the poor, stand up for the vulnerable, advocate for those who are not seen and heard, and listen to everyone's voice.

We pray for our country that is deeply divided. May we come together for the common good and do as you have called us to do – to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with you through creation.

Help us act out of love, mercy and justice rather than out of arrogance or fear.

Loving God, continue to guide us as we work for peace and justice in the world. We pray for places that are torn by violence, that they may know peace. We pray for communities who are struggling with inequality, unrest, and fear. May we all work toward reconciliation with one another.

Help us to listen in love, work together in peace, and collaborate with one another as we seek the betterment of our community and world.

Guide us in truth and love. AMEN

Advent & Christmas

Sunday 8 December

10.30 AM: *Toy gift service*

Sunday 22 December

5.30 PM: *Candlelight Carol service*

Christmas Eve

4 PM: *Christmas Crib service for families*

11.15 PM: *Christmas Eve Communion*

Christmas Day

11.00 AM: *Christmas Day family worship*

Sunday 30 December

10.30 AM: *Pastorate family worship, carols & readings*



Please suggest readings and carols we don't sing so often!

Personalia

Please remember everyone who is ill, undergoing or recovering from treatment, and everyone who is alone or in difficult circumstances this Christmas.

Please remember people who are mourning someone, especially recent losses.



CHRISTMAS COLLECTIONS

Our December and Christmas collections this year are going to the international not-for-profit charity, 'Send-a-Cow', one we last supported in 2013. This charity was set up in 1988 by a group of farmers who wanted to help families in the aftermath of wars in Africa. They literally sent livestock to the poorest groups with the hope that it would help them overcome the famine and poverty that had been the result, a cow providing both milk and manure for crops. Nowadays their emphasis is on training and information, gender equality... especially for the women who are doing most of the agricultural work, and supporting those families in the seven countries in Africa where they work, so that they can lift *themselves* out of poverty and secure their *own* futures from the land. They typically work for five years with a group and as well as providing seeds and livestock they give training and courses in organic farming, irrigation techniques and other natural resource management but also recognise that health and well being are important so hygiene, conflict resolution, HIV/Aids awareness and gender equality are also discussed. In turn the beneficiaries pass on both knowledge and actual goods so these benefits are spread further. More details are on their website.

Lorraine DaCosta

Neighbourhood News

News and events from other local churches:

Selly Oak Methodist: St Mary's Hospice Choir Carol Concert, Saturday 7 December at 7 PM. Tickets £10 (including refreshments) available on the door.

Weoley Castle: Messy Christmas, 2-4 PM.

Carrs Lane: Panel discussion on '*And forgive us our debts*', *Taking on the system at the root of global injustices and environmental crises*. 17 December, 7.30 to 9.15 PM.

Fiona and Ivor Elvins are organising a **tour of the Holy Land**, 14-23 April 2020. See the leaflet for details.

Reverse Advent Calendars



Have you come across this idea yet? It's one that should appeal to anyone who gets discouraged by the heavy consumerism that takes up so much space this time of year. I've come across two ways of doing it, both with their good points. The first works with an old Advent calendar, especially the type meant to have sweets or coins put in slots: instead of removing a sweet, you add a coin every day, then donate the result to a charity—maybe *Send-a-Cow*, our Christmas charity? Come to that, you could just tape them to a piece of paper or card! The other calls for a cardboard box: you put a packet, tin, toiletry, pair of warm socks, etc, into the box every day and then donate the result to a shelter or foodbank or add it to our City Mission collection. (See the example on the table at the back of the church.)

Besides the benefit to the recipient, this is a good way to remind ourselves of our neighbours' needs.

Cheryl Thornett

FRIENDSHIP GROUP

On Wednesday 13 November we were fortunate to have **Roz McCarthy from the Leprosy Mission** come to talk to us about their work and to show us three short films relating to the people affected by this painful and disfiguring disease. Nowadays the slow-growing bacteria, which can take up to 10 years to develop, can be defeated by a multi-drug combination of medicines which begin the cure from the first day of taking and, with correct usage, can be cleared up by six months or so. The disease is passed in droplets on the breath but after 24 hours of taking the drugs the patient is no longer contagious.

However, the medicine is not always available, the doctors and hospitals may not be local and, in the first stages, the disease may not be diagnosed correctly. A few white patches on the skin could be the first sign but as the disease takes hold the nerve endings are damaged so that a small cut on a foot, for example, is not felt. This can lead to ulceration and eventually to having toes, a foot or even the whole leg amputated. When it attacks the hands, tendons are damaged leading to a clawed fist which would make working on all tasks difficult. Again the loss of feelings can lead to ulceration and amputation of fingers or hands. Sometimes the face is attacked and causes difficulty with eating and/or blindness. All these signs are obvious, and in some cultures leprosy is seen as the result of a sinful act, maybe even in a previous life, and, as the patient may not be able to contribute to the family income, they are at first shunned and isolated and even thrown out of their home. In some cases even having a family member with leprosy will lead to other family members being isolated, refused schooling or work or even being allowed to use public transport.

The first film was of the hospital at Perulia, West Bengal where they have been in desperate need of an outpatients department where up to 300 patients *per day* are treated. There was no privacy for assessment, counselling or treatment, not enough sanitation and no up-to-date equipment. Recently money has been given to build a large new block

with all these facilities. A similar hospital in Kathmandu, Nepal was extensively used following the earthquake in 2015 when many crush injuries not related to leprosy were treated thanks to the dedicated staff.

The next two films showed the effects of having leprosy on two women, one in Danja, South Niger, the other in India. Both had painful ulcers on hands and feet but they also had the added pains of being abandoned. The first was looked after by her very young granddaughter, who was not allowed to go to school because of this, and the other had been abandoned by her husband. Both needed help to regain confidence and self-worth, and both were helped to get the rights of housing and medication to which they were entitled. Up to 2018 it was legal in India for someone to be divorced for having leprosy but this has now changed.

The films were very moving and all showed just how much work is done by the Leprosy Mission both in the physical aspects of dealing with the individual's disease, and also the mental support, counselling and advocacy to establish their self-confidence. A collection raised a donation of £70.30 from a group of just 16. Many thanks to all.

Our next meeting will be the 'High Tea at the (nearly) Ritz' on **Wednesday 11 December**, when we hope to serve cakes and sandwiches and of course tea or coffee to all those members and their friends who wish to attend for the final meeting of 2019. Please note we will start serving at **3 PM** and plan to finish around **4.30 PM**; there is a *suggested* donation of **£5 per person** to cover costs if possible. Come along to this meeting even if you have been unable to attend any of the others as this is open to everyone, not just church members, and remember there will **not** be a meeting in January.

Lorraine DaCosta



WEOLEY HILL UNITED REFORMED CHURCH PRAYER DIARY

For it is by God's grace you have been saved through faith. It is not the result of your own efforts but God's gift so that no-one can boast about it.

Ephesians 2:8-9

	Church members	Topical prayers
WK 1: 1st- 7th Dec	Margaret Shiner Vida Southall & Carys	Those in Iran suffering from recent shortages & from freedom of speech. <i>Bryony Rd</i> <i>Mimosa & Tamarisk Closes</i>
WK 2: 8th- 14th Dec	Kumar & Gini Tambyraja	For the work of agencies like <i>Send-a-Cow</i> that help communities to become more self-sufficient. <i>Shenley Fields Rd & Iris Close</i>
WK 3: 15th - 21nd Dec	Gordon & Cheryl Thornett David & Kathleen Upton	The future of Hong Kong and the protesters. <i>Erica & Gorse Closes</i>
WK 4: 22nd- 28th Dec	Barbara & Philip Viney Rachel Wakeman	Our Christmas services and those in many places where it is not a national celebration. <i>Bournville Gardens</i> <i>Bryony House</i>
Wk 5: 29th Dec- 4th Jan	Michael Walpole Kathleen Wood	Church leaders in Cuba who have suffered intimidation or violence. That Communist control over Christian activities is relaxed. <i>Abdon Ave, Holdgate Rd</i> <i>Tugford Rd, Wierbrook Close</i>

NOTE: As always, please feel free to send any feedback on the 'Prayer Diary' and specific prayer requests that you would like to include in future lists to Sue Beeby.