

MOTTINGHAM METHODIST CHURCH MESSENGER December 2021



For unto you is born this day in the city of David a
Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

Luke 2 vs 11



THE CHURCH
IN THE MIDDLE OF THE VILLAGE!



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!

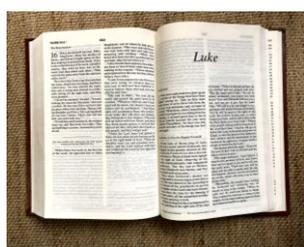
Many will struggle to hold their 'usual' Christmas. Yet God does not neglect us. This may be the very opportunity to rekindle or deepen our faith in what really matters about Christmas. Away from the hordes, perhaps completely alone this Christmas, we may sit quietly and allow our heavenly Father to 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."

John Barton



CHRISTMAS AND ST LUKE'S GOSPEL

It is to St Luke's wonderful gospel that many Christians turn as the year draws to a close and Christmas approaches, for it is to St Luke that we owe the fullest account of the nativity.

Luke alone tells us the story of Mary and the angel's visit to her, and has thus given the Church the wonderful Magnificat of Mary.

Luke alone tells us the story of Simeon's hymn of praise, thus giving us the wonderful Nunc Dimmittis. Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace : according to thy word.

Luke alone tells us the story of how the angels appeared to the shepherds and how the shepherds then visited the infant Jesus. What makes it so amazing is that Luke was not a Jew! The man who wrote the fullest nativity story, and indeed more of the New Testament than any other single person, was a Gentile!



ADVENT - MORE THAN WAITING FOR CHRISTMAS

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!

Adapted from Paul Hardingham



DECEMBER CHURCH ACTIVITIES

Sunday December 5th & 12th at 2.30pm: Informal worship, bible study, prayer and fellowship led By Deacon Maureen Spinks'.

Wednesday December 1st and 8th at 12.30am: Community Lunch in the Church Hall.

Sold out: Wednesday December 15th: Community Lunch Christmas lunch.

Sunday 19th December at 2.30pm: Carol Service by candlelight led by deacon Maureen Spinks.

Friday 24th December at 2.30pm: Christingle Service led by Deacon Maureen Spinks

Christmas Day at 10.30 am: Celebrating the birth of Jesus led by Deacon Maureen Spinks.

NOTE: There will be no service on Sunday 26th December.



DECEMBER CHURCHES TOGETHER IN MOTTINGHAM ACTIVITIES

St Edward's Fair: Saturday 4th December from 11am to 4pm, with Mottingham Community Association, Chislehurst Rotary and Big Local.

Crisis for Christmas Carol Singing: Saturday 11th December at 11am on the Green at St Edward's.

Community Carol service: Thursday 16th December at 7.30pm at St Andrews Church.





A CHRISTMAS GIFT

It's not easy getting the right Christmas present for others, especially in these uncertain times. However, the Magi's gifts were entirely appropriate and help us to understand God's gift of Jesus to us.

'On coming to the house, they saw the child with His mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.' (Matthew 2:11). These were the expensive kind of gifts that visitors from the east would bring: gold, frankincense (a plant gum resin used in incense) and myrrh (another resin used in perfumes).

Who is He?

Gold is a gift for a king. In Jesus, we see a king in baby clothes. The worship of the wise men was costly, not only in terms of their gifts but for their lives.

Why did He come?

Frankincense was used by the priests in the temple in offering sacrifices. Jesus, as the ultimate priest, is the one who came to bring God and man together. He could do this because He is both divine and human.

What did it cost Him?

Myrrh was used to embalm the dead. This gift reminds us that the baby of Bethlehem would die on the cross to give His life for us. The wood of the crib and the cross are the same wood!

What are we going to offer Him this Christmas? Jesus is *Christ*, the king who comes to rule our lives; He's *Lord*, the One who knows what it's like to be human as well as divine; and He's *Saviour*, who enables us to be friends of God.

"At Christmas time, when we receive presents that we don't really need, God offers us a gift we cannot do without." - J John

Paul Hardingham



GOD IN THE ARTS:

The Annunciation to the Shepherds

'In that region there were shepherds keeping watch over their flock'

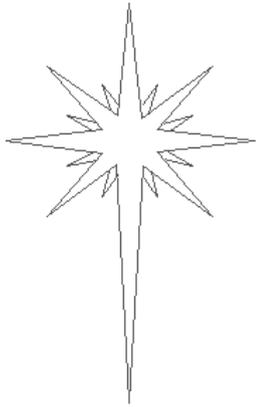
We know little about Sano di Pietro this Italian artist apart from some dates. He was born in Siena in

1406 and died there in 1481. But he has left us a legacy of beautiful and sensitive paintings. As we look at this scene, we see the human details: two shepherds huddled by the fireside with their dog, all three looking up to see the angel, and a spear by the side to ward off thieves and predators. The sheep are safely in their pen, black and white fleeces huddled together for warmth. In the sky the angel appears, bearing an olive branch in one hand and with the other pointing to Bethlehem in the distance.

Jesus in His teaching often turned to the theme of sheep and shepherds, with parables about lost sheep, gates to the fold, and hiring shepherds. Just as the faithful shepherds were prepared to give their lives to protect the flock, so Jesus the Good Shepherd gave His life for the world - a death that would bring the peace and reconciliation shown in that olive branch held by the angel. At this Christmas time we rejoice with the heavenly host to proclaim the birth of this Prince of Peace and we commit ourselves to that work of peace and shepherding. Howard Thurman wrote these words:

'When the song of the angels is stilled...
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 people,
to make music in the heart.'

Adapted from Michael Burgess



SURPRISING CHRISTMAS STORY!

Some people like surprises. The pleasant ones, anyway!

When we look at the Christmas story, it is full of surprises. Mary didn't expect to be chosen by God to give birth to His Son. Joseph was surprised and shocked that his fiancée was pregnant. The couple thought they would start married life together in Nazareth, but political circumstances forced them to go to Bethlehem and then into Egypt.

The Bethlehem shepherds were surprised and frightened by the heavenly choir and an angel with a marvellous message. Later, they rejoiced at seeing the Saviour - a new born baby in a manger. The Wise Men were surprised to see a unique star, and so they followed it all the way to Jerusalem. They thought a royal birth would be in a city and in Herod's Palace. They were surprised again, to be redirected to a remote village called Bethlehem. Herod too was surprised that a new king had come, and felt his position and authority were being threatened.

What is most surprising is that God had planned the coming of Jesus thousands of years before it happened. Prophets had told of His coming and their hearers were waiting for Him to appear. But still they were surprised when the Messiah came, for He did not come as a conquering hero but as a suffering Servant.

Jesus came to save people from their sins. He came to restore a broken relationship and bring His people to a glorious Home. The biggest surprise? It was also done for you and me!

Lester Amann

CHURCH CONTACTS



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