

CONTACT

*THE MAGAZINE OF THE SOUTH ESSEX
METHODIST CIRCUIT*

ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS 2024



Sharing the 'good news' that is happening across
the circuit and in our local communities

A Pastoral Letter from the Super's desk..

*'There's a hush of expectation, and a quiet in the air;
and the breath of God is moving in the fervent breath of prayer:
for the suffering, dying Jesus is the Christ upon the throne,
and the travail of our spirit is the travail of his own.'*

STF 188 'There's a light upon the mountains'

Advent thoughts....

At Advent I wish all things would slow down to allow the 'hush of expectation' to gradually build up but almost always that time of anticipation, of 'what-is-to-come' seems to fly by so quickly. In the secular world around us this is largely taken up by preparations for the annual frenzy of celebration and consumption which seems to begin earlier each year (or am I being a Scrooge?). I believe I spotted my first fully bedecked Christmas house sometime in October and the sharp neck flex I did as I stared in amazement almost landed me in trouble, as I was driving at the time! Even within church life I find that Advent is quickly eclipsed by busy preparations for special services and events to celebrate the big event of Christmas day, barely allowing time to sit and reflect.

Advent is a season that invites lingering. As darkness falls earlier, and temperatures drop it is a time to burrow deep into Scripture seeking meaning from the proclamations of the prophets which foretell the coming of God. A time to pause and contemplate what patterns or similarities there may be between our times now and those times of old. And a time to savour with a thrill of excitement because from our vantage point we know how that time of waiting ends.

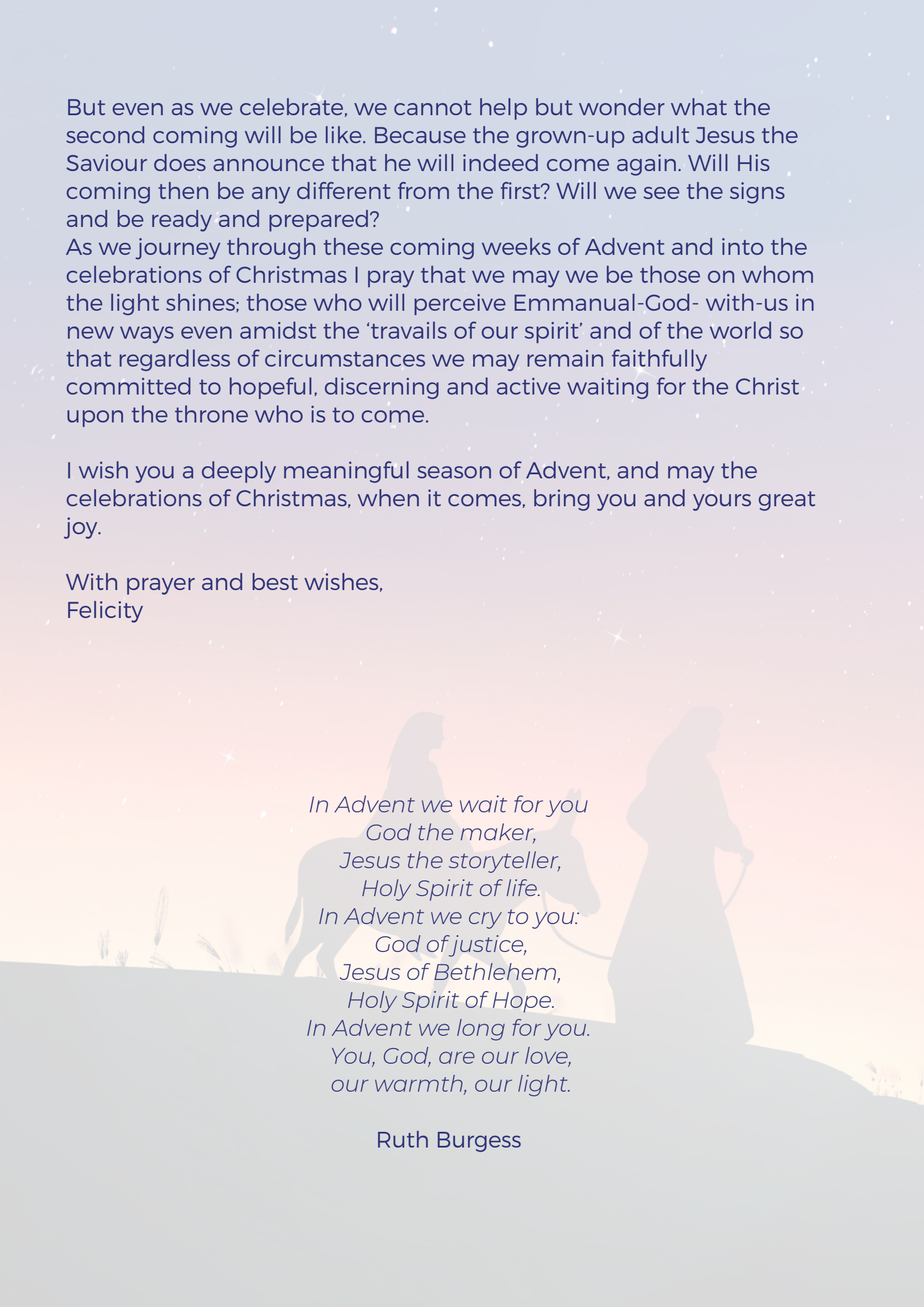
We know that the long foretold and long-expected Saviour does come. Emmanuel God-with-us comes, in the midst of an unimaginably difficult and dispiriting time, long, long ago. Slipping into our world quite unnoticed – seemingly a helpless, vulnerable baby without any fanfare whatsoever. Nothing at all like what was expected and yet 2,000 plus years later it remains our most prized celebration.

But even as we celebrate, we cannot help but wonder what the second coming will be like. Because the grown-up adult Jesus the Saviour does announce that he will indeed come again. Will His coming then be any different from the first? Will we see the signs and be ready and prepared?

As we journey through these coming weeks of Advent and into the celebrations of Christmas I pray that we may be those on whom the light shines; those who will perceive Emmanuel-God-with-us in new ways even amidst the 'travails of our spirit' and of the world so that regardless of circumstances we may remain faithfully committed to hopeful, discerning and active waiting for the Christ upon the throne who is to come.

I wish you a deeply meaningful season of Advent, and may the celebrations of Christmas, when it comes, bring you and yours great joy.

With prayer and best wishes,
Felicity



*In Advent we wait for you
God the maker,
Jesus the storyteller,
Holy Spirit of life.*

*In Advent we cry to you:
God of justice,
Jesus of Bethlehem,
Holy Spirit of Hope.*

*In Advent we long for you.
You, God, are our love,
our warmth, our light.*

Ruth Burgess

LINFORD METHODIST CHURCH

Cathy Beckwith

Many of you will know we have lost a few members in recent years and we are looking for new ways to attract new people to our church. We had a very well attended 'Saints and Superheroes' event for children during half term. We had lots of mini Supermen, Wonderwomen, Spidermen and some adult ones too! I attempted to do my best impression of St. Cecilia and encouraged the children to make music, by one means or another. Other activities included making Superhero masks, making a puppet dragon to remember our patron saint and planting crocus bulbs, so to remember that something that is laid to rest will eventually spring into life once more!

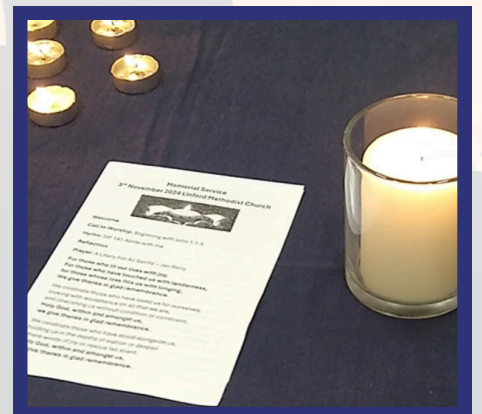
On November 3rd we held our first Memorial service for the Thurrock area to remember our dearly departed family members and friends. Candles were lit for each person and there was an opportunity for the congregation to light a candle for someone not mentioned. This event was well attended and maybe will become a fixture in our Church calendar.

As Advent is upon us, we are in the midst of our Christmas planning. Our thriving Toddlers' Group will be having their Christmas parties - the dates to be arranged with Father Christmas according to his availability. We have around 30 children who come once or twice a week to these groups on Tuesday and Thursdays during term time. They are accompanied by parents, grandparents, carers and child-minders.

We would like to welcome these families to our services on Sundays but a Sunday morning doesn't seem to be a good time for them. This year we are going to hold our Carol service, including the retelling of the First Christmas, at 4pm. Maybe families will find that a better time to come, especially as there will mince pies and other festive fare afterwards!

We are joining our C of E neighbours, St Catherine's, on December 29th in St Francis Hall, Linford. We hope to meet together every time there are 5 Sundays in a month.

Normal service will return on Epiphany Sunday, January 5th, with a service led by Maureen McPherson.



DID YOU KNOW..?

CHRISTMAS EVERGREENS

Maureen McPherson

- In the ancient cultures well before Christianity, evergreen branches were arranged around the entrances during the winter to act as a reminder that Spring would return and to symbolise eternal life.
- The Romans used pine branches to adorn the temples dedicated to their Sun God - Saturn. It was thought that he was weak during the Winter and the evergreens encouraged him to regain his strength.
- Christmas trees date back to the 16th century when German Christians decorated a pine tree inside their home to represent God had sent His Son, Jesus to give us eternal life. Martin Luther is credited with decorating his tree with candles to symbolise Christ the 'Light of the World.'
- In the 12th century many towns cut a large pine tree and planted it in the town square to represent the tree of 'Good and Evil.' A play about the Garden of Eden and Adam and Eve was performed to teach people about 'original sin'. It was often decorated with apples and a snake.
- The tradition to have a fir tree in the house began in the USA in 1776. General George Washington defeated the German Hessians during the War of Independence. The story goes that Washington's troops crept into the German camp and removed their tree. After the war many of the German soldiers remained in the USA and shared the tradition of a decorated Christmas Tree.
- Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria imported the German tradition by having a large tree cut down from the Windsor estate and brought indoors. They decorated it with candles, gingerbread sweet biscuit, and marzipan angels. Children from London were invited to come to the castle and look at the tree.

Hush the Noise

Advent Challenges

Sun 1st December Hush the Noise and Join the Song. Attend church today either online or in person.	Mon 2nd December Hush the schedule. Sit down with your calendar and block off a 3-hour slot for yourself.	Tues 3rd December Hush the consumerism. Ring a friend and agree not to swap gifts this year.	Wed 4th December Hush the noise. Find a quiet space. Spend 15 minutes listening to the silence.	Thurs 5th December Avoid shops or watching TV ads and spend no money today. Thurs 12th December	Fri 6th December Hush the love song. Write a card of encouragement to yourself. Think what you would write.	Sat 7th December Hear the love song. Learn Psalm 117. Even if you forget it in a week learning helps us take it in.
Sun 8th December Hush the Noise and Join the Song. Attend church today either online or in person.	Mon 9th December Hush the hoarding. Donate an item to a charity shop.	Tues 10th December Hush the electronics. Avoid using electronic devices. (Set a period of time that works for you!)	Wed 11th December Hush the noise. Find a quiet space. Spend 15 minutes listening to the silence.	December	Fri 20th December Hear the love song. Light a candle and watch the flame. How you is Jesus bringing warmth and light?	Sat 14th December Read 1 John 4:7-19 Ponder God's love for you.
Sun 15th December Hush the Noise and Join the Song. Attend church today either online or in person.	Mon 16th December Hush the indulgence. Choose a simple diet today.	Tues 17th December Hush the 'special'. Find a part of your normal routine and try to relish it.	Wed 18th December Hush the noise. Find a quiet space. Spend 15 minutes listening to the silence.	Thurs 19th December Hush the Activities. Do nothing Christmassy today.	Fri 20th December Hear the love song. Ring a friend and share how you're doing. Pray for each other.	Sat 21st December Hear the love song. Read Ephesians 3:14-21. Choose a short phrase to repeat to yourself today.
Sun 22nd December Hush the Noise and Join the Song. Attend church today either online or in person.	Mon 23rd December Hush the hunger. Donate to the local foodbank or another good cause.	Tues 24th December Hush the darkness. Light a Candle. Wait for the birth of the promised Messiah.	Wed 25th December Hush the hushing. Celebrate Christ's birth by singing Christmas carols as loudly as you can.	Thurs 26th December Join the love song. Thank God for any blessings you've received this month.	Fri 27th December Join the love song. Ring someone and thank them for the gifts they bring to your life.	Sat 28th December Join the love song. Share with someone somewhere you have seen God this Advent/Christmas.



Yardarm
Folk Orchestra

Christmas Concert

07 DEC 2.30 PM

**QUEENS PARK COMMUNITY CHURCH,
Billericay, Essex, CM12 0GP**

***Free and unticketed**

With Donations to Support Changing Pathways

ADVENT COURSE

Horndon on the Hill

This year we will be running an Advent Course at Horndon Methodist Church on Monday evenings at 7pm. It has been inspired by the Methodist Church's Christmas Campaign for this year: Hush the Noise and Join the Love Song this Christmas. Each week we will be looking at a different Christmas Carol and asking what its message has to teach us today.

Schedule:

- 2nd Dec: 'It Came Upon The Midnight Clear' – Hush the Noise
9th Dec: 'In The Bleak Midwinter' – When the Joy is Hushed
16th Dec: 'The Angel Gabriel To Mary Came' – Hush the Expected
23rd Dec: 'O Come All Ye Faithful' – Join the Song

We hope you can join us!

Word Scramble: Christmas Carols



Can you unscramble the Christmas Carols?

1. OGD NKGI SLAWCEENS _____

2. KHRA TEH DLHERA ALGSEN GSIN _____

3. O LTLTIE WTNO FO MHEHLEEBT _____

4. DGNI NODG YMRERLI NO GHIH _____

5. YJO OT EHT DWRLO _____

6. NLGJIE LBLES _____

7. WYAA NI A RGMNAE _____

8. EW REEHT GKISN _____

9. KDCE HTE SHLAL _____

10. TESLIN GTNHI _____



ANSWERS
1. GOOD KING WENCESLAS 2. HARK THE HERALD ANGELS SING 3. O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM
4. DING DONG MERRILY ON HIGH 5. JOY TO THE WORLD 6. JINGLE BELLS 7. AWAY IN A MANGER
8. WE THREE KINGS 9. DECK THE HALLS 10. SILENT NIGHT



South Tyneside Council

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ENGLAND



Christmas Services 2024

Horndon on the Hill:

22nd December, 10.30am- Carol Service
24th December, 11.30pm- Christmas Eve Service (led by Maureen McPherson)
25th December, 10am- Christmas Day Service (led by Revd Fiona Smith)

Langdon Hills:

15th December, 5pm- Carol Service (led by Revd Felicity Al-Hassan)
25th December, 10.00 am- Christmas Day Service (led by Terry Sanger/ Gill Sutton)

Trinity

15th December, 4pm- Christingle Service
22nd December, 11am- Carol Service (led by Revd Felicity Al-Hassan)
25th December, 10am- Christmas Day Service (led by Revd Felicity Al-Hassan)

Western Road

- 21st December, 4pm- Family Christingle Service
- 22nd December, 6.30pm- Community Candlelight Carol Service
- 24th December, 1pm-4pm- Christmas Eve Open Church Communion
- 24th December, 8.00pm- Blue Christmas and Tree of Memories Service
- 25th December, 10.00am- All Age Family Christmas Day Service (Led by Revd Moses Agyam)

Christ Church:

22 December, 10.30 am- Carol Service (led by Revd Moses Agyam)
25 December, 10:00 am- Christmas Day Service (led by Revd Trevor Williams)

Queen's Park:

20 December, 11:15 am- Carol Service (led by Revd Moses Agyam)

St Paul's

8th December, 3.30pm- Blue Christmas (Joint Basildon Churches)
22nd December, 4pm- Christingle Service (led by Revd Felicity Al-Hassan)
25th December, 10.00am- Christmas Day Service (led by Colleen Weedon)

DID YOU KNOW..? FATHER CHRISTMAS

Maureen McPherson

Our Christmas card usually show Father Christmas or Santa Claus as a jolly man dressed in red with a sack of toys for the children BUT:

- He originated around the 19th century not as a giver of children's toy but as the merry old man who presided at adult parties. In that era Christmas entertainment focused on the adults.
- The legend of Father Christmas entering a house via the chimney is thought to have originated from the belief that supernatural beings always sneaked quietly into a house by coming down the chimney.
- St Nicholas, the historical illustration was thought to have tossed bags of gold down the chimney to help poor families. The bags are supposed to have landed in the woollen socks hanging on the metal rod in the chimney to allow them to dry. As you can guess this story gave rise to hanging your Christmas stocking on the mantelpiece in the hope of nice surprises.
- In 1821 William Gilley published a short story called 'A New Year's Present' in the booklet 'The Children's Friend'. He introduced reindeer into the Santa Claus tale with a little poem. Later he said that flying reindeer were part of the native American folklore.

*Old Santa Claus with much delight
His reindeer drives this frosty night
O'er chimney tops, and tracks of snow,
To bring his yearly gifts to you.*

- In 1823, the Troy Sentinel published the poem [A Visit From St. Nicholas](#), commonly known as The Night Before Christmas. The poem features eight flying reindeer pulling Santa's sleigh and, for the first time, they are identified by name: Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Dunder and Blixem. The last two were later changed to Donner and Blitzen.

CRACKING UP FOR CHRISTMAS

Festive jokes to make you
giggle, groan, or grin!

<p>What kind of motorbike does Santa ride? A Holly Davidson!</p>	<p>What carol is heard in the desert? Camel ye faithful.</p>
<p>What happened to the man who stole an Advent Calendar? He got 25 days!</p>	<p>What do you get if you eat Christmas decorations? Tinselitis!</p>
<p>What do you get if you cross Santa with a duck? A Christmas quacker!</p>	<p>What's the most popular Christmas wine? "I don't like Brussels sprouts."</p>
<p>Why did Santa's helper see the doctor? Because he had low "elf" esteem!</p>	<p>What do you get if you cross a bell with a skunk? Jingle smells.</p>
<p>How did Scrooge win the football game? The ghost of Christmas passed!</p>	<p>What's green, covered in tinsel and says "ribbet ribbet?" Mistle-toad</p>
<p>Why are Christmas trees so bad at sewing? They always drop their needles.</p>	<p>Why is it getting harder to buy Advent calendars? Because their days are numbered.</p>
<p>Why did the turkey join the band? Because it had the drumsticks!</p>	<p>Why don't you ever see Father Christmas in hospital? Because he has private elf care.</p>
<p>What do you get when you cross a snowman with a vampire? Frostbite!</p>	<p>What did the stamp say to the Christmas card? "Stick with me and we'll go places!"</p>
<p>How does Good King Wenceslas like his pizzas? One that's deep pan, crisp and even.</p>	<p>What do you call a bunch of chess players bragging about their games in a hotel lobby? Chess nuts boasting in an open foyer.</p>

How to engage with your community this Christmas: Tips and ideas for sharing good news over Advent and Christmas

The Methodist Church

Christmas is a 'thin place' – a time when people's minds are more likely to turn to spiritual things; when people are more aware of poverty and injustice; when emotions run high. And it's a time that's just as meaningful for unaffiliated people as for Christians, though the festival means different things to different people. Advent and Christmas offer an opportunity to share good news with unaffiliated people when they are more likely to be open to it.

Five things every church should do

To make the most of the opportunities for sharing good news this Advent and Christmas, make sure you do these five things. For each tip there are easy options and more demanding ones.

1. Review your signage

Take a look at the noticeboard outside your church, along with any other signs or banners around the building. Are service times clearly shown, including Christmas services? Is it obvious where the entrance is? If you have banners or posters with Bible verses, are they in a clear, modern translation? Do they speak of love or of judgement? The first impression people will have of your church community will be conveyed by the outside of your building.

Easy

Order The Methodist Church's Christmas posters from Methodist Publishing, or download digital versions and have them printed yourself locally. Be sure to include the date and time of your main carol service by adding a sticker or having a printer customise the poster for you.

Other ideas

Invest time, effort and perhaps some money updating your main noticeboard. Install a new 'entrance' sign if the way into your church building isn't obvious. Install a ramp and mark out a disabled parking space so that people with disabilities can access your church building as easily as possible.

2. Invite, welcome and follow up

Christmas is hands down the easiest time of year to invite people to church events. A simple service of traditional Christmas carols and Bible readings appeals to a broad range of people who would never usually go to church. If you invite people, they're more likely to come than at any other time of year. A personal invitation is much more likely to be accepted than a leaflet put through someone's door. When people come to a Christmas service, make sure they feel welcome. Think about how you will follow up with people who come to a Christmas service.

Easy

Order packs of The Methodist Church's Christmas postcard and use them to give personal invitations to people connected with your church. For example, invite each person who attends your coffee morning or each member of a group that regularly uses your building. Give out cards that contain the service information, but don't just leave a pile of them out or put them through doors! People are much more likely to respond to a personal invitation.

Recruit some friendly welcomers to stand at the door at your carol service and guide people to seats. Ensure the service leader holds visitors in mind. For example, have them avoid religious jargon and explain clearly what is happening, such as when to sit and stand; whether people are expected to contribute to the offering and where the money is going.

Have a simple card ready that people can use to give you their contact information if they would like to stay in touch – this one is available from Methodist Publishing. Decide who will collect this information and follow up with each newcomer (and, obviously, ensure that you hold the data securely and in line with the General Data Protection Regulation).

Other ideas

Give away 'goody bags' at Christmas services to everyone who attends (no need to single out newcomers). These could include:

- an object to remind people of the message (such as a candle or star);
- a copy of The Methodist Church's Christmas postcard;
- some Fairtrade chocolate;
- an invitation to an event in January or February.

Commit to offering each person who leaves their contact details an invitation to coffee in the New Year.

3. Go to neutral spaces

Some people won't feel comfortable going to a church service, so go to neutral spaces to meet people on their terms. Go to the places where people are gathering and be good news. You could give out The Methodist Church's Christmas postcard at these events. If people don't want to attend a church service, they might read the Christmas postcard at home in their own time, and maybe scan the QR code for more content.

Easy

Get a few people together to go carol singing – in your high street (get permission first), outside your church if it's in an area with high footfall, or consider going door-to-door in the streets near your church. You could have a bucket for charity donations and give out invitations to your carol service.

Other ideas

Some churches have had great success with 'Beer and Carols' services in pubs, perhaps with a Christmas-themed quiz. If you're not comfortable going into a pub, consider offering free gift-wrapping in your local shopping centre or high street (get permission from your local authority before doing this). Some people hate wrapping presents, so you are saving them a job!

4. Share good news

Wherever you are – in your church building or at a stall on your local high street – share the good news of God’s love in Jesus Christ. Have one simple, crystal-clear message of good news. This year our Christmas campaign message is ‘Hush the Noise’ - inviting people to tune out the ‘noise’ of the busy season and listen for the song of the angels.

Easy

Sing a Christmas carol that proclaims good news; give out The Methodist Church’s Christmas postcard and briefly explain its good news message.

Other ideas

Ensure that you have a short, simple message of good news at Christmas services popular with unaffiliated people. Carol services, all-age nativity services and Christmas Eve communion tend to appeal to unaffiliated visitors.

5. Go digital

Whether your IT skills are basic or you’re really tech-savvy, there are lots of options for digital engagement at Christmas.

Easy

If you want to keep it simple, just like, comment on and share the Methodist Church’s Christmas campaign, and have your church congregation do the same.

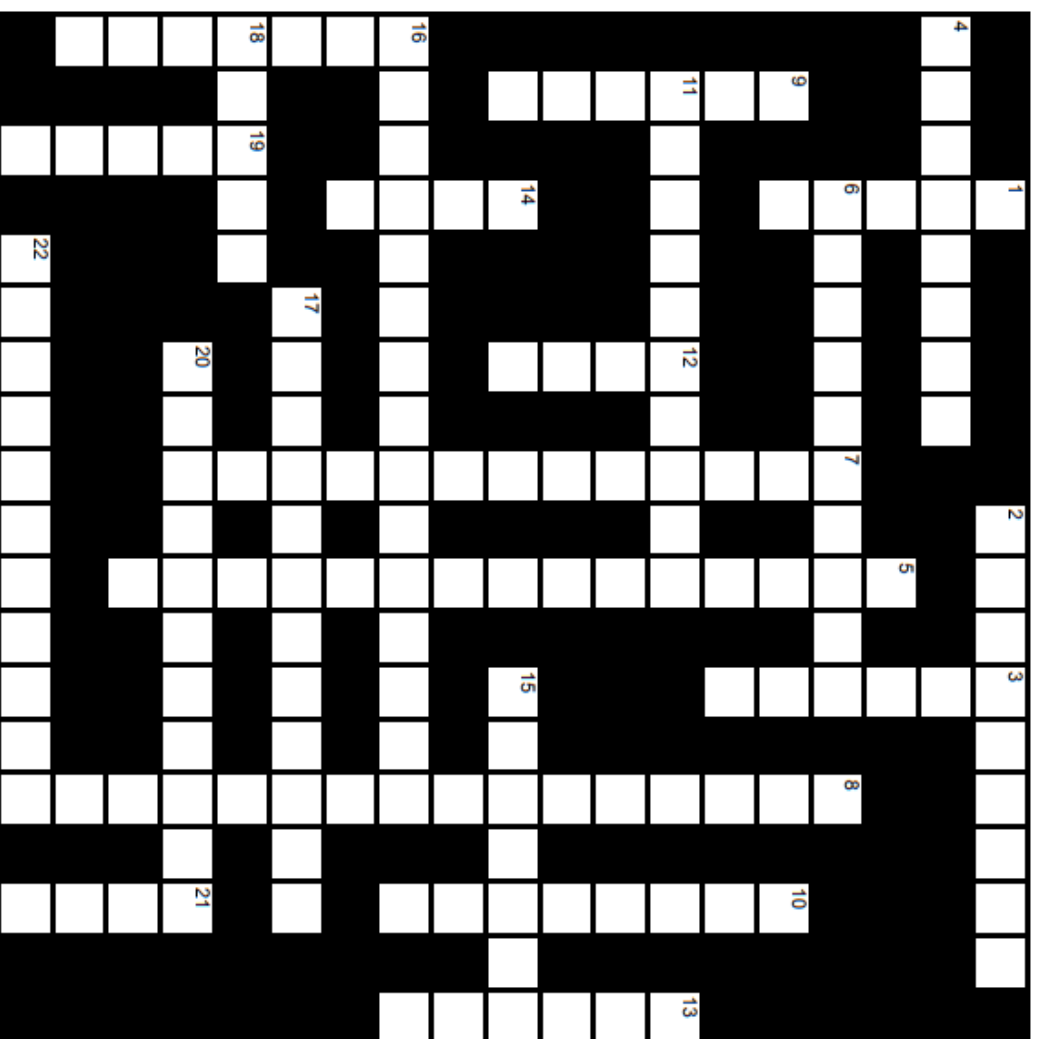
Other ideas

If you are more digitally confident, why not create some inspiring social media posts to put out during Advent? There are high-quality graphics to download and use on this page.

For those with more confidence navigating the digital world, why not livestream a simple carol service late on Christmas Eve? It’s a service that is popular with unaffiliated people, and those who would prefer not to come outside on a cold, dark winter night may well watch from the comfort of their own home.

For ideas and resources to help you make the most of Advent and Christmas, visit <https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/christmasresources/>

Christmas Crossword



Across

- 2 a bush that produces small white fruits. Its branches are often used as a Christmas decoration. (9)
- 4 an old word meaning the period of time around Christmas (8)
- 6 an imaginary man with a long white beard and a red suit who brings presents for children at Christmas:

- 11 a hot alcoholic drink made of wine mixed with sugar and spices, traditionally drunk at winter festivals such as Christmas (6,4)
 - 15 bright and colourful in a way that makes you think of a celebration (7)
 - 16 a traditional meal eaten at Christmas, often consisting of turkey with vegetables, followed by a heavy fruit pudding called Christmas pudding (9,6)
 - 17 the day or evening before Christmas Day (9,3)
 - 18 a traditional song sung at Christmas (5)
 - 20 the birth of Jesus Christ, celebrated by Christians at Christmas (3,8)
 - 22 small lights used for decorating something, especially a tree at Christmas (5,6)
- Down**
- 1 a religious festival such as Christmas or Passover (5)
 - 3 long thin pieces of shiny paper used as a Christmas decoration (6)
 - 5 BRITISH an imaginary old man with a long white beard and red clothes who brings children their Christmas presents (6,9)
 - 7 the period of time around Christmas (13)
 - 8 used as a greeting during the Christmas period, especially on cards (7,9)
 - 9 BRITISH a box or basket of food and drink, sometimes given as a gift at Christmas (6)
 - 10 a friendly message sent to someone on their birthday, at Christmas etc (8)
 - 12 BRITISH a man dressed as an old woman who performs in a Christmas pantomime (4)
 - 13 in the Christian religion, the four-week period before Christmas Day (6)
 - 14 BRITISH a model of the wooden box that Jesus Christ was born in, according to the Bible. Some Christians have these in their churches and houses at Christmas. (4)
 - 16 BRITISH a decorated paper tube that makes a noise when you pull it apart. It usually has a small toy, joke, and paper hat inside and is traditionally used at Christmas. (7)
 - 19 a small brown European bird with a red chest. They are often used as a symbol of winter and are frequently shown on Christmas cards and decorations. (5)
 - 21 an old word meaning 'Christmas' (4)

The next Contact Magazine will be the **Lent and Easter Edition**, in March 2025.

We would be grateful of any submissions, for example pictures of Advent/ Christmas Celebrations, poems, activities, events articles, or anything churches are doing in the run up to Easter.

Thank you!

