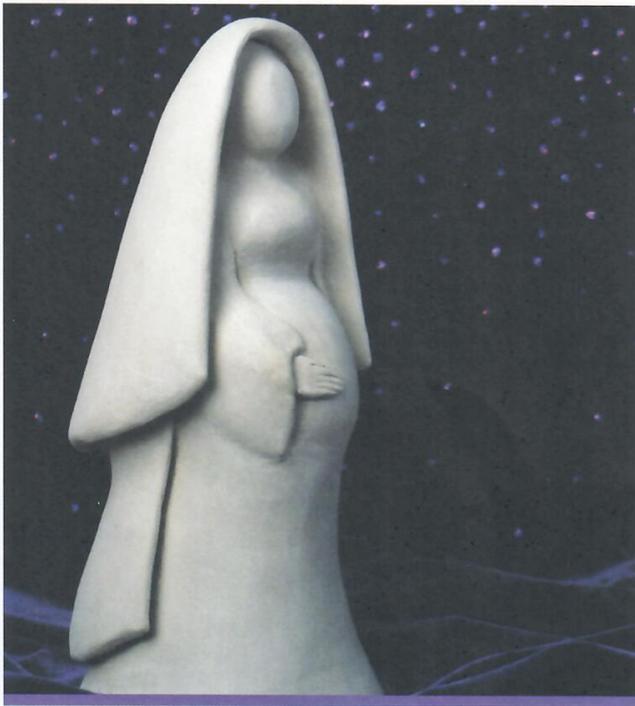


Mothers and sons



Katharine Smith *reflects on* Luke 1:39-45

Our Gospel reading today is a beautiful story in which many other stories are woven together against the backdrop of the great story of God's people Israel. There's the story of Elizabeth, about to bear a child despite her age and earlier inability to conceive; the story of the youthful Mary, whose unborn child is also unexpected and unplanned by his mother. Then there are the stories of John, born to be the messenger who prepares the Lord's way, and of Jesus, whose coming has long been foretold. Just out of sight are Zechariah and Joseph, men and fathers who fade into the background as their sons follow their own destiny.

Central today, though, are the two mothers – women who have

such different experiences of bearing sons, but who both know that those sons are destined in some way to fulfil God's purposes. We don't know if Elizabeth lived to hear John's voice crying out in the wilderness or to suffer the terrible loss of her son, murdered on Herod's orders. We do know that Mary would live to see Jesus dying on the cross, to feel the sword pierce her heart, but then again to know the joy of his new resurrection life.

Today is only about the joy, the excitement and the awe of two women whose children, it seems, already know one another and whose faith led them to say "yes" to God.

All generations will call them both blessed. 🙏

Heavenly Father, as Mary and Elizabeth share their joy in the fulfilment of your promises to them, help us to look forward to the fulfilment of your promises to us, as once again we prepare to greet the birth of your Son into our lives this Christmas. Amen.

Keeping Christ in Christmas

Part 7 – Christmas tree

by Heather Cooke

If you have an artificial Christmas tree, you may have decorated it some time ago. If you prefer a natural one, you may be collecting it this week.

Many people prefer an artificial tree to one that drops needles all over the carpet, while others wouldn't be without the special smell of a real Christmas tree, part of God's creation.

Whatever our preference, when we look at our tree this week, we can keep the Christ in Christmas by thinking of a very special Christmas tree... the family tree of Jesus. Both Luke and Matthew tell us of generations of his family, like baubles and lights on the tree, reminding us vividly that Jesus was both human and divine, born of Mary, yet Son of God.

"Joy, joy, for Christ is born; the babe, the son of Mary". 🙏

“Christmas is fast approaching. And now that Christ has aroused our seasonal expectations, he'll soon fulfil them all!”

St Augustine (AD 354-430), theologian, philosopher and bishop

International Human Solidarity Day

by Caroline Hodgson

Tomorrow is designated International Human Solidarity Day by the United Nations. Solidarity is identified in the UN's Millennium Declaration as one of the fundamental values of international relations in the twenty-first century, "wherein those, who either suffer or benefit least deserve help from those who benefit most".

With this in mind, the day exists: to celebrate our unity in diversity; to remind governments to respect their commitments to international agreements; to raise public awareness of the importance of solidarity; to encourage debate on the ways to promote solidarity for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, including poverty eradication; and as a day of action to encourage new initiatives for poverty eradication.

The UN sees the concept of solidarity as "crucial in the fight against poverty". So why not make solidarity the focus of your prayer this week?

www.un.org/en/observances/human-solidarity-day 🙏

Fourth Sunday in Advent



Good morning and a warm welcome to our Carol Service which is being led for us by Reverend Pauline Crispin. The stewards are John Cornish, Brian Dryden, Jean Peck and Joyce Wild. Refreshments will be served in the hall after the service, so please do stay for a coffee and chat. If you would like to make a donation towards the cost of refreshments, which will go towards church funds, then please put your donation in the bowl on the hatch.

Dates for your diary:

Friday 24 th December	7.30 pm	Christmas Eve Communion Service at Blandford Methodist Church
Saturday 25 th December	10.00 am	Christmas Day Service at the United Reformed Church
Sunday 26 th December	10.45 am	Sunday worship led by Mrs Joyce Wild Please note: there will be no refreshments after the service
Sunday 2 nd January 2022	10.45 am	Covenant Service, to be led by Reverend Pauline Crispin
Wednesday 5 th January 2022	10.00 am	Bible Study
Wednesday 26 th January	10.00 am	Stewards meeting
Tuesday 8 th March 2022	7.00 pm	Church Council meeting

Bible in a year: 19th – 25th December: Jonah 1 – Zephaniah 3 and Revelation 10 - 16

Eric Brown: Eric's funeral will take place at the church on Wednesday 21st December at 4.00 pm. As this is a private funeral with just family attending perhaps we could ask you to pray on the 21st for the family and to remember Eric at this sad time. *Joyce Wild*

Christmas Decorations: As Lunch Club is now not meeting on 4th January, it would be good to get the Christmas decorations down then. Please could volunteers willing to take down the Christmas decorations meet at the church at 10.00 am. *Joyce Wild*

Church family lunch on Sunday 23rd January: Following the morning service on the 23rd January, we have arranged a church family lunch. Mark and Nadia (who cook and oversee the lunch club dinners) have kindly agreed to cook the lunch for us which will be roast beef (or a vegetarian alternative) with all the trimmings, followed by pudding and tea or coffee. Even though we will still be socially distanced, it will be lovely to share fellowship over a meal. The cost of the meal will be £5 per person (with under 10s free of charge). We do hope you will be able to come and join us for lunch on the

23rd and, if so, a sign-up sheet is in the Narthex for you to add your name to help with catering.

Visit to Blandford's baby and toddler group: On Monday morning, 13th December, Joyce and I called into the toddler group which meets in our church hall during term times. Scruffy, the dog, came too. Because of the pandemic it had been two years since Scruffy and I had seen the children. Since then, many who had been there before were now at school and most of the little ones who are now attending the group were not even born the last time Scruffy was there! Therefore, our visit was new to many. The children, parents and child minders sat round as Joyce, Scruffy and I led the singing of 'Away in a Manger' and the first verse of 'O little town of Bethlehem'. Using a knitted nativity set, the Christmas story was shared with the families, with the older children each holding one of the characters.



Finally, on behalf of Blandford Methodist Church, little colourful books telling the Christmas story were given out to each child. Joyce and I chatted with many of the families who were there. All the feedback we received was positive and they were delighted that we had popped in to see them to share this time with them.

Pauline Crispin

Blandford Methodist Church Lunch Club Christmas Dinner 2021: This year it was decided to host two identical Lunch Club Christmas Dinners to accommodate the number of folk who now attend Lunch Club on a regular basis. On Tuesday 14th December, we had the first of our two lunches where 33 diners, including invited guests Colin Stevens (Deputy Mayor), Glenda & Hayden White (Representing the William Willams Trust who annually give a very generous donation to support Lunch Club), Angela Walden (our pianist for the Carol Singing) and Reverend Pauline Crispin, sat down to a scrumptious Christmas Lunch.

The tables were adorned with festive clothes, napkins, crackers, sweets, shloer, jokes, carol sheets and quizzes to keep folk entertained before the delicious meal was served. Mark (who give up his day off and stepped into the breech at the last moment as the regular cook was ill) and his band of merry helpers prepared, served and tidied up after we had all tucked in to a scrumptious homemade Christmas feast which went down a treat. There was turkey or nut roast for the vegetarians, roast parsnips, roast potatoes, stuffing, gravy, pigs in blankets and a selection of seasonal vegetables. Dessert was either Christmas pudding and custard or caramel trifle.

Before coffee and warmed mince pies were served Joyce invited the cook and his helpers to come out of the kitchen for a well-deserved round of applause and some small gifts of appreciation. Also thanked were Angela for entertaining us and Rona, Pat & Brian who offer their services free so that Lunch Club can run seamlessly each week. David who also volunteers will be thanked on Friday as will Nadia the cook and her group of service providers.

After a short comfort break people were invited to retire to the Church where the Shroton Ukulele Band entertained us with a selection of well-known songs rounding the session off with a variety of Christmas favourites.

Each member was given a small gift, Christmas card and Christian tract to take home with them. Everyone seemed to have a great time and the Christmas spirit was definitely in the air. Can't wait for Easter.

Joyce Wild

Summary of Stewards Meeting held on Wednesday 8th December:

Property: With Joyce's involvement in arranging for work to be carried out on the Church's property, and with Chris Ovey being unwell, it was agreed that Joyce would be brought on the Property and Finance Committee with immediate effect. This decision would then be ratified at the next meeting of the Church Council.

Plans for Church Growth: John proposed that we prayerfully consider running an "Alpha Course" in Blandford, to be run from either the Methodist Church or organised collectively by the Blandford Churches, perhaps using the Food Bank coffee lounge at the URC or the Parish Centre as the venue. If you wish to know more then please talk with John.

Friends and Neighbours: It was recognised that the effort needed to prepare and put on an event was hard work on a few shoulders. Therefore, less frequent events would be held with the next event being earmarked for the spring.

Keeping the Church going: A special stewards meeting will be held at 10.00 am on Monday 10th January to look at all the roles required in keeping the Church going and their allocation to Stewards and others. If there is anyone in the Church who is willing to assist the Stewards, then please contact John Cornish.

Giving: The topic of giving to the Church was discussed. It is clear that giving by our members needs to increase in order to protect our reserve funds.

Dates of forthcoming meetings/events:

Sunday 2nd January at 10.45 am: Covenant Service.

Monday 10th January at 10.00 am: Stewards Meeting to plan allocation of duties.

Sunday 23rd January at 10.45am: Morning's service followed by lunch

Wednesday 26th January at 10.00 am: Stewards Meeting

Sunday 30th January: Ecumenical Service at the Parish Church

Tuesday 8th March at 7 pm: Church Council

Prayer: Please can we continue to uphold in prayer those members of our congregation who we know are ill or suffering in some way.

Please continue to uphold in prayer **Chris and Anne Ovey**: Chris is still in Dorchester Hospital whilst Anne continues to cope at home with the help of Joyce and other friends.

If you know of anyone who would like prayer and be mentioned by name in The Link, please let me know (having obtained their permission first to mention them by name).

Day of Prayer: Following on from our ongoing regional conversations, the Chairs of the 5 districts (Bristol, the Channel Isles, Cornwall & Isles of Scilly, Plymouth & Exeter and Southampton) have agreed a Regional Day of Prayer **on Epiphany, 6th January 2022**. The hope is that all those who are part of the life of the Methodist Church in the Region will put aside some time during the day to pray alone or with others.



As our nation - along with the rest of the world - continues to wrestle with the effects and uncertainties caused by Covid19, please will you join us in setting aside some time to pray for all those who:

- have been bereaved by the virus
- are suffering lasting effects from the virus (long Covid)
- are working in the health and other services at a time of demand and uncertainty
- have lost their jobs or businesses because of the restrictions
- are anxious about the future
- are elected to serve this and other nations at this time
- are working hard to find new treatments to tackle Covid-19
- do not have access to vaccines - particularly remembering our global partners
- lead our churches as we seek to discern our mission
- have had their faith challenged and are uncertain about much

And so much more!

Please will you also use the Day of Prayer to ask what you/we are being called to do and be as God's Church is reshaped in these uncertain days? What might you do to pray for our world and everyone in it?

Andrew de Ville, District Chair

Christmas Greetings from Blandford Town Council

Blandford Forum has shown great spirit and determination over the past 18 months. Watching the community come back together has been a pleasure to see.

On behalf of Blandford Forum Town Council, we wish you a joyful and peaceful Christmas and New Year.

*From the Mayor and Mayoress
Cllr Lee Hitchings and Mrs Abi Hitchings,
Arthur, Emilia-Rose and Louie*

Minister:

Reverend Pauline Crispin
(Tel: 01202 883461)

Email: paulinecrispin@yahoo.co.uk

Pastoral Support:

Joyce Wild: (Tel: 01258 454091)