

The child, father of the man

Katharine Smith *reflects on* Luke 2:41-end

I remember that day well and I've often wondered what happened to the boy. Now I know. He's back again. Once more he's in the Temple, questioning and challenging the elders, scribes and Pharisees, attracting attention, amazement and speculation. But not, I think, receiving the same universal approval.

He was only twelve when I first saw him. We knew from his accent that he was from the north but we assumed his parents were still in the city after the Passover. It never occurred to us that he'd stayed behind and they were frantically searching for him.

We were spellbound. Boys of that age can usually recite scripture, they know the commandments and something of the history of our people. But this boy was different. He knew so much more. Even more astounding was the passion, the eagerness and the depth of his interest. This was not a boy who wanted to be a rabbi or a great scholar. This was a boy who had absorbed knowledge of God into his very being and who reached out for more as if his life depended on it.

He was remarkable. I've often wondered what happened to him. Now I know and I remember his name, recognise those searching, piercing eyes and experience once again the power and passion of his faith.

Jesus of Nazareth who are you?

Arguments over precedence have no place in God's kingdom; they sap its strength, drawing us away from striving for equality. To achieve God's vision requires a preference for the least powerful, those who are marginalised, the "non-person", alongside each of us choosing to reject selfish ambition in favour of loving, willing service. 🍷

Boxing Clever

by Caroline Hodgson

In recent years Boxing Day has become associated with sales and sporting fixtures, but you don't have to go back very far to find its origins in charitable giving.

Traditionally it was when the alms boxes – collection boxes kept in churches – were opened and the contents distributed to the poor people of the parish. Later it became the day when the landed

gentry would give gifts (which might be some leftover food from the Christmas meal) to those who worked and lived on their land. Eventually it became traditional for servants to get the day off on Boxing Day, to enable them to celebrate Christmas with their families. Up until World War II it was common for working people who did rounds (such as milkmen) to travel round their delivery places and collect their Christmas box or tip on Boxing Day.

This year, true to the spirit of Boxing Day, why not pray for generosity, compassion and wisdom in charitable giving? 🍷

“We all want progress, but if you're on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; in that case, the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive.”

C. S. Lewis (1898-1963), writer and theologian



Lord Jesus, the Temple was your Father's house, your home. Thank you for inviting us to join you, as your brothers and sisters, in your Father's kingdom. Give us the grace to accept that invitation and to know the joy of belonging to your family. Amen.

St Stephen (c. AD 5-34)

by Caroline Hodgson

Today is the feast of Stephen. But who was this man, traditionally venerated as the first martyr of Christianity?

Stephen is first mentioned in Acts 6 as "a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit". He was one of seven deacons appointed to distribute food to poorer members of the community. In Acts 6:8 we read that Stephen, "full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs". A few verses later we're told that when

some argued with him, "they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke".

Eventually he was accused of blasphemy. At his trial he made an impassioned speech, denouncing those who sat in judgement on him, and was sentenced to death by stoning. But death wasn't the end of his story. His martyrdom was witnessed by Saul. Who knows what impact the experience had? Did it start to soften the hard heart of the persecutor of Christians and begin the process that would lead him to become Paul, tireless worker for Christ?

Even in death, it seems, the Spirit was able to work through this remarkable, faith-filled man. 🍷

Blandford Methodist Church: Sunday 26th December

Good morning and a warm welcome to our morning worship which is being led for us by Mrs Joyce Wild. The steward is John Cornish. There will be **NO** refreshments following the service.

Dates for your diary:

Sunday 2 nd January 2022	10.45 am	Covenant Service, led by Reverend Pauline Crispin
Wednesday 5 th January 2022	10.00 am	Bible Study
Sunday 23 rd January	10.00 am	Morning service followed by lunch in the hall (see below)
Wednesday 26 th January	10.00 am	Stewards meeting
Sunday 30 th January	Time tbc	Ecumenical Service at the Parish Church
Tuesday 8 th March	7.00 pm	Church Council meeting

Bible in a year: 26th December – 1st January: Haggai 1 – Genesis 3 and Revelation 17 – Matthew 1

Covenant Service message from Reverend Pauline Crispin:

Dear Friends

In November everyone from Blandford Church was invited to come along to a 'Healthy Church' discussion morning. It was designed to help folk consider the aspects of our church life which are healthy, and which can be improved upon. A few weeks ago, I wrote in more detail about this.

At the start of the new year Methodist church hold a Covenant service. This is a time to discern our devotion, discipleship, and dedication. In the service the Church joyfully celebrates God's gracious offer to Israel that "I will be their God and they shall be my people".

This relationship primarily involves the corporate life of the community of God's people (i.e. us). It is concerned with individuals within this group.

The Covenant is the means of grace by which we accept the relationship and then seek to sustain it. It is therefore not so much about getting into a relationship with God as it is about staying in it. It is not about acquiring a relationship with God but living within the loving relationship that God has already offered us.

God's gracious offer to us is therefore simultaneously a challenge. If God is committed to us, are we prepared to accept that as reality and commit ourselves in return to God? Even if we do choose to accept it, how can we manage to live out our commitment adequately, frail, and human as we are?

The New Testament suggests that as we join the group of those seeking to follow the way of Jesus, we respond to God's challenge with him and begin to share his relationship with God as Father. Within the group of disciples, this leads to his Spirit bubbling up in us as individuals, encouraging and enabling us to live out our side of the relationship.

The service is a gift not a demand! And God will give you the grace to do it all. You are not alone!

Origins of the Covenant Service

This idea of Covenant was basic to John Wesley's understanding of Christian discipleship.

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.

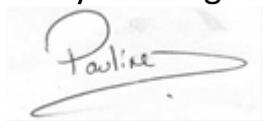
In 1755 Wesley created a form of service. Wesley insisted that the Covenant Service be located in a framework of pastoral care, preaching and guidance.

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, such as bible study and prayer.

Therefore, at our Covenant service the Church Stewards and I would like us all to consider all of this and particularly contemplate on what it means for each one of us as individuals and as a church, which is, of course, the body of Christ. I urge you to make this Covenant service a priority as there is an urgency for Blandford Methodist Church to consider its future.

We hope that the Covenant service will be held on January 2nd 2022.

Every Blessing for Christmas and the New Year

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Pauline". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

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.

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

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).

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