



Heaton Moor United Church

The United Reformed Church and The Methodist Church
working together in partnership



Church Services

Sunday 20th December 10.45 Heaton Moor United Church

Rev. Dr Graham Adams

Duty 1 : Peter Duty 2: Sharon

Zoom Services and Meetings

Sunday 20th December Circuit Service 3:00pm service

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87212246881?pwd=VXpyMzRYV21UZ1ZoYlkc2R4dmV1QT09>

Meeting ID: 872 1224 6881

Passcode: 974333

Wednesday 23rd December Coffee and Prayer 11:00am

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/95327541668?pwd=ekU2QWgzZjVKWTBFTjZsb0tERVQrdz09>

Meeting ID: 953 2754 1668

Passcode: 794265

Wednesday 23rd December Advent Bible Study

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88415953758?pwd=VXpyMzRYV21UZ1ZoYlkc2R4dmV1QT09>

Meeting ID: 884 1595 3758

Passcode: 593070

Joining by telephone

Step 1)

Dial any of the following numbers. If one doesn't work try another and another until you are able to connect:

0330 088 5830

0131 460 1196

0203 481 5237

0203 481 5240

0208 080 6591

0208 080 6592

Step 2)

Follow the prompts you hear on the phone.

You may be prompted to enter 3 different things:

1 -- Meeting ID followed by hash #

2 -- Password followed by hash #

3 -- Participants ID -- You will not have one of these, don't worry, all you need to do is enter "Hash" #

You should then be entered into the service.

Dear Heaton Moor United Church,

Christmas seasons' greetings to you all.

Hope you are doing well. Christmas this year is not going to be the same with the Tier 3 restrictions in place due to the pandemic. Let us pray that we will all have a safe Christmas. We have a Christmas service on the 25th December at Church at 10 am, and those of you who wish to join are kindly book in for a place. The circuit is also offering a special Christmas service on the 25th which is available on the YouTube and you can find it on the circuit website.

There is also a Christingle service offered by the circuit on Zoom on the 24th of December 2020 at 3pm, and if you are interested in participating in it kindly contact the office for a Christingle bag, which contains the zoom details. We will have our final session of our Advent Bible Study on Wednesday, the 23rd December at 7pm, and thank you all for joining in the previous three sessions. On Saturday, the 19th December we have the #Carolsinthecar and you have the details on our website.

Thanks to Graham for leading the service this Sunday at Church, and for making it special as a nativity Sunday. Thanks also to Paul for leading the Good Read online.

Herewith I am sending you the reflection for this Sunday along with the worship resources for your kind perusal.

As we come to the end of this pandemic year, I want to place on record to all your support given to us as staff team. I want to thank our Leadership team, Property group, Worship group, Finance group for their support and co-operation during this year. I also want to thank all our staff colleagues who have been extremely brilliant at work and for working tirelessly in making our church relevant today.

Kindly uphold our church in your prayers as we step into a New Year, asking God to lead us in our mission in our community.

Graham Adams have penned yet another powerful lyric for this Christmas 2020 as Covid Carol, and I want to share these lyrics with you all. The lyrics are written to the tune of "In the bleak mid-winter."

In the bleak pandemic,
breaking what we knew,
much of life was housebound,
so Earth breathed anew.
Birds we had not noticed
showed us how to sing
in the bleak pandemic,
changing everything.

In the midst of trauma
'normal' is revised;

all the world seems stranger;
hugs are sacrificed.
In the bleak pandemic,
work and rest are strained;
many people hunger:
Come, O God, and reign.

In this time of waiting,
helpless as we are,
keeping social distance,
neighbours seem so far;
in our sense of numbness,
ill-at-ease and lost,
God, be born among us;
bear with us the cost.

In the place less stable,
in the cry for bread,
in the midst of trauma,
come, God, make your bed.
In our heart-felt longing,
glimpsing simply this:
in your fragile advent,
peace and justice kiss.

May the joy, peace, hope and love of Christ be with you all during this Christmas and may you all have a peace-filled Christmas and a hopeful New Year. May God grant you the needed peace and happiness.

With warm regards,
Raj
18th December 2020

It's hard to believe it's Friday again - and that this is my last working Friday of 2020. I have had another great week. Last Friday, myself and others took our School Pantry to Mersey Vale school and we gave out food packs to 20 families. We will be doing another food collection before the next half term and a list of food items we need is included later in the newsletter.

- If you have anything you would like included in the weekly notice's please let me know. As always if you have any questions or comments please do not hesitate to contact me.

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TIER 3

VERY HIGH ALERT

FROM 2 DEC

Greater Manchester remains in Tier 3 restrictions. Please continue to follow the guidelines and stay safe. There are special guidelines for the Christmas period which are as follows

From 23 December to 27 December

The safest way to spend this Christmas is with your household or support bubble in your own home. From 23 December to 27 December, you may choose to form a [Christmas bubble](#). To protect you and your loved ones, think very carefully about the risks of forming a Christmas bubble. You should keep your Christmas bubble as small as possible and minimise the time you spend with your bubble.

A Christmas bubble will be able to spend time together in private homes, including second homes and caravans, to attend places of worship, or meet in a public outdoor place.

If you do form a Christmas bubble, do not meet socially with friends and family you do not live with in your home or garden unless they are part of your Christmas bubble.

In all other settings, you should follow local restrictions in the [tier](#) in which they are meeting.

If you choose not to form a Christmas bubble, you should continue to follow the guidance for the tier you are in.



**MONDAY 21ST DECEMBER
ZOOM 6PM**

Nativity Escape Room -the Bible is filled with sound wisdom, great advice . . and **BIG MYSTERIES THAT NEED SOLVING!**
Join this event to solve 4 mysteries to do with the Birth of Jesus.

This event is open to families / individuals and zoom teams

If you are interested please contact JoAnne at community@heatonmoorunitedchurch.org.uk

Office Closure Information

Hi All

This will be the last newsletter you will receive this year. The next newsletter will be on the 8th January.

The office will be closed from the 23rd December until the 4th January.

Linda, JoAnne and Myself will be taking a well earned rest during that time.

Whilst there is no service at Church on the 27th, there will still be a Circuit Zoom service. After the 23rd December the link for services is going to be removed from the Circuit Website. The link will occasionally be changed, to ensure that you receive the link for the service you must subscribe to the Circuit Newsletter. This can be done at : <https://stockportcircuit.us4.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=3e378ab617a88cb0e4fbda1e6&id=ae7e6aef9c>

If you subscribe you will also be sent the Circuit Newsletter and information about the prerecorded Christmas Day service.

If you prefer to use the Worship at Home resources they can found at:
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/worship/singing-the-faith-plus/seasons-and-themes/worship-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>

Keep an eye out for the booking form for January it will be sent out over the next few days.

Have a fabulous Christmas

Sharon



School Pantry

Towards the end of January / beginning of February we will be doing another collection for our School Pantry Project.

This project see's us visiting Mersey Vale School before each half term and providing much needed food for those families who need a little bit of help. The Pantry is open to all families who feel they need and to date we have had a fantastic response.

To the left is a list of items that we are currently short of. If you can help in any way that would be great.

If you would like further information please contact JoAnne on community@heatonmoorunitedchurch.org.uk or 07340 269 354

The vision of the Kingdom of God – Matthew 13

From the start of the Gospels, the language about Jesus (lord, saviour, messiah/king, kingdom, et al) signalled a collision of claims. For his followers, Jesus, in contrast to Caesar, is lord and saviour (these were terms used of Caesar Augustus).

When Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God, he at least implicitly questioned the Pax Romana (the dominance of Rome). To say God's kingdom is at hand implies that Caesar's kingdom is not ultimate.

In rejecting authoritarian leadership, Jesus rejected Rome's politics: "You know that among the Gentiles (that is, the Romans) those whom they recognize as their rulers' lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It must not be so among you" (Mark 10:42).

As Klaus Wengst asserts, with this statement, "Jesus clearly stated that the existing 'order of peace' is based on the oppressive rule of force. That is the way in which Jesus and ... his disciples experience the reality of the Pax Romana.... The alternative which Jesus puts forward shows that he is not resigned.... Peace based on oppressive force is not what Jesus wants."

Jesus spearheaded a revolutionary movement—revolutionary not only in its rejection of the present political status quo, but also revolutionary in presenting an alternative vision for social order. The language of "kingdom" itself indicates that Jesus understood himself to be posing a contrast between his community and Rome.

The first three parables speak of some kind of seed being sown.

1. The parable of the sower (13:1-9, 18-23) – Peace as the growth of the seed in a fertile ground vis-à-vis the grounds of the empire
2. The parable of weeds among the wheat (13:24-30) – Peace as a harvest of the wheat
3. The parable of the mustard seed (13:31-32) – Peace as nesting the birds and spreading the branches for all unlike the Roman empire which doesn't care for the weak.

The fourth speaks of a woman hiding something – (13:33) – Peace as influencing the mix – yeast, least yet the best

The fifth deals with some kind of hidden treasure in a field being discovered (13:44) – Peace is in the joy of finding something unexpected

The sixth discusses a merchant finding a pearl of great price for which he had been searching (13:45-46) – Peace is in search of valuable

While the seventh parable speaks concerning a huge fisherman's net being cast into the sea and out on the end of that seventh parable Christ speaks of a scribe bringing out of his-storehouse or his treasures things new and old: (13:47-50) – Peace is like catching the fish of every kind into the net

What is the purpose of parables? – Jesus replies 13:13 – "The reason I speak to them in parables is that "seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand..."

Questions for reflection:

1. What are the new kinds of empire today? How do we understand the Kingdom of God today in our context today?
2. If you have to write a new parable for today to communicate about the Kingdom of God, how will u do it?

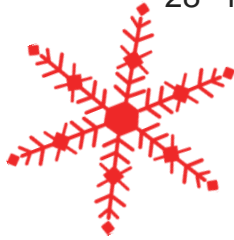
@rajpatta

ADVENT PARTNERSHIP EVENTS

with Greater Manchester South & Cheshire URC

Advent Retreat

28th November 10:30 – 12:00 and repeated at 14:30 – 16:00



Weariness & Wonder

Wednesday 2nd, 9th, and 16th December at 19:30

Meeting ID: 862 4634 9125 Passcode: 024468

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86246349125?pwd=eFJHZXhsZnFON2l5bVJWYURVaG>

Advent Bible Study

Monday 30th November 7th, 14th and 21st December at 10:00

Meeting ID: 893 0699 8422 Passcode: 935820

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89306998422?pwd=eFJHZXhsZnFON2l5bVJWYURVaG>

Messy Christmas Family & Children's Event

20th December at 15:00

Meeting ID: 870 8539 9030 Passcode: 599369

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87085399030?pwd=eFJHZXhsZnFON2l5bVJWYURVaG>

Scratch Carol Service

20th December at 18:30

Meeting ID: 862 4634 9125 Passcode: 024468

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86246349125?pwd=eFJHZXhsZnFON2l5bVJWYURVaG>

Christmas Eve Communion

24th December at 11:30

Meeting ID: 824 7647 3548 Passcode: 528678

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82476473548?pwd=eFJHZXhsZnFON2l5bVJWYURVaG>

Christmas Day Service

25th December at 9:00

Meeting ID: 871 5576 3393 Passcode: 751659

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87155763393?pwd=eFJHZXhsZnFON2l5bVJWYURVaG>

For venues and zoom links please contact Dave Fraser at

davefraser24@gmail.com



DATED EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY

19th December – Carols in the car

Go to www.carolsinthecar.co.uk to purchase tickets and further information

24th December – Circuit Christingle Service 15:00

This year this service will be held over zoom, further details to follow

30th December – Topsy Turvy Coffee Evening 19:00

Happy End of Year Celebrations – come and join the party!
Contact JoAnne if you'd like to attend



6th January – More Than A Good Read

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82881695155?pwd=R3ZSeFQ4U1crMXRTNHBUakxGYldjQT09>

Zoom ID 828 8169 5155

Passcode 714757

J is for Jesus

Look at the candy cane
What do you see?
Stripes that are red
Like the blood shed for me
White is for my Saviour
Who's sinless and pure
"J" is for Jesus
My Lord, that's for sure!
Turn it around
And a staff you will see
Jesus my shepherd
Was born for me!





Prayers from Linda

A Christian Aid Prayer, Prayers in a time of coronavirus

Even in the darkest moments, love gives hope. Love compels us to fight against coronavirus alongside our sisters and brothers living in poverty. Love compels us to stand together in prayer with our neighbours near and far. Love compels us to give and act as one. Now it is clear that our futures are bound together more tightly than ever before. As we pray in our individual homes and around the nation and around the world we are united as one family. So let us pause and find a moment of peace, as we lift up our hearts together in prayer.

Amen



A Christmas Prayer

God, our Creator, we offer this humble prayer at Christmas time. We have thanks in our hearts, a promise of hope in our lives. We pray for joy in our hearts, hope in our God, love to forgive, and peace upon the earth. We ask for the salvation of all our family members and friends, and we pray for your blessings on all people on earth. May this be bread for the hungry, love for the unlovable, healing for the sick, protection for our children, and wisdom for our youth. We pray for the forgiveness of sinners and life in Christ. Holy Spirit, fill our hearts with your love and power. In the name of Jesus Christ our lord and saviour. Amen.

If anyone would like to share a Prayer with the church family, please call Linda on 07564839380 or

E-mail lindawfleming625@gmail.com.



No names required because God Knows.

Recovering “S/O Mary” as the Relevant Christological Title Today

If my name was Mary, just sixteen with a Child...

In our liturgical Christian tradition, the fourth Sunday in Advent is a time to reflect on Mary, the mother of Jesus, particularly contemplating on how she waited and paved way for the arrival of Jesus Christ into this world. Most times Mary is projected as ‘mother of Christ’ and over the years in some popular Church traditions she is celebrated as ‘*Theotokos*’ (mother of God), in a way discounting her identity, self-worth and agency as a women and mother. In the reading for this Sunday from Luke 1:26-38, we see the angel appearing to Mary and speaking to her thrice about the child she is to deliver. In the angel’s speech we notice at least two important Christological titles, Son of the Most High and Son of God for Luke want to quickly introduce Jesus to his audience about the counter-cultural titles to baby Jesus. In those days, it was only the emperor who was called ‘Son of God’ and ‘Son of the Most High,’ and Luke in contrast to the Roman emperor, he uses those titles to the not yet born Jesus Christ.

The prominent Christological titles in the Scriptures have been Son of God, Son of Man, Son of David, Messiah, Lord, King, Prophet, Priest, Lamb, Shepherd, Emmanuel etc. have all evolved out a contextual demand in the early Christian Church, for they only reflect the kind of patriarchal world during which the gospels have been written and circulated. “Son of Mary” is one the most under-recognised or even unrecognised and even less-explored Christological titles. It is time now for us to recover this title, which is of immense relevance for our times today in 21st century. Exploring the title ‘Son of Mary’ is a Biblical, contextual and theological necessity, for it conveys profound theological insights into our Christian faith journeys, which is to identify Jesus through a woman, in this case his mother Mary.

1. Problematizing the title Son of Mary:

Only in two instances is ‘Son of Mary’ mentioned, in Mark 6: 3 and in Mathew 13: 55, and is one of the least mentioned Christological titles in the gospels. Is this title a problematic one, or is there a problem in this title? In Mark 6:3, it is written “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him.” Several scholars have argued that this title ‘Son of Mary’ in this Markan context is used to pick on the ‘illegitimate birth’ of Jesus, which is only used to mock at Jesus and his birth outside of a marriage. This reveals the kind of patriarchal dominance that was thriving those days, where Mary as a woman, her image and identity was used & misused and even abused for the gains of male arrogance.

The other problem with this title is demonstrated in Paul, the major and early contributor of New Testament who conspicuously did not refer to neither the name of Mary nor to her virgin birth in any of his epistles. In Galatians 4: 4, he only says that “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law.” Such a conscious non-referral of Mary raises a brow, for it only diminishes the worth and agency of a mother called Mary, who bore and delivered a saviour baby Jesus. This also reveals the kind of privilege male-centeredness was enjoying in the mission and ministries of the early Church, for they did not think important to affirm in the agency of a young woman Mary.

These incidents therefore call us to read this title subversively, contesting and unwrapping all the patriarchal perspectives in the title Son of Mary, for in such a title there is a deep encounter of divine with human, in which we celebrate and affirm.

2. Programming the title Son of Mary:

Mary as a young woman is a significant site where the divine and the mundane encounter, delivering a saviour to be born in Jesus Christ. Bearing a son Jesus in her womb signifies that in Mary's vulnerability and fragility as a human, the divine finds a favour and indwells with her and comes out as a fully divine and fully human Jesus Christ. The Christological title S/O Mary for Jesus aptly speaks of his calling, nature and purpose of his coming into this world. The title S/O Mary happens to be nurturing space for both S/O God and S/O of Man to shoot up and bloom in Jesus Christ. It here that the transcendent and the immanent meet up to reveal to the world that out of the womb of Mothers like Mary, divinity can be en-fleshed, be born and take on the flesh of humankind.

This title in its literal sense conveys that Jesus is the son of Mary, and tell me which child does not want to be called after their mums, particularly when she is a woman of courage, singing songs of revolution, teaching her child to 'overthrow the powers.' Mary's song, the *Magnificat*, (Luke 1: 46-55) reveals her role as a mother. When most mothers sing lullaby to their children, Mary has a very revolutionary song that she had to sing when she was pregnant with Jesus. There were several available songs for Mary in Nazareth those days, for she could have chosen a hymn from Psalmody or from their hymnal, but she chose to compose a contemporary song of justice, her own yearning for her society, and sang it for her son Jesus. Her situation and context of oppression and discrimination, demanded mother Mary to sing this radical song of justice. This song reveals her mothering quality, her dream for her son, and raised Jesus with those values and ethos and he eventually lived up for all those that her mother aspired and raised him with. This song could have been the song that Jesus heard her sing daily, and learnt it as an anthem of justice for his mission in his life. Eventually, with that kind of radical nurture from her mother Mary, there is no surprise that Jesus became a revolutionary of his times critiquing and contesting all forms of injustice of temple and empire. Jesus lived up to all the dreams of her mother Mary, and became a proud son of Mary.

S/O Mary is the most fitting title for Jesus, for out of a Mother came an Emmanuel, came a Saviour, came a Messiah, came a king, came a prophet etc. To put it other way, S/O Mary is the mother of all Christological titles of Jesus, and by understanding this title, we get to grips with the rest of the titles of Jesus.

3. Pragmatizing the title Son of Mary:

This title is important to Jesus because, S/O Mary is a critique against all dominant forces of patriarchy which has not allowed to celebrate womanity as an agency of delivering divine in human form. This title is important for the Church today because, S/O Mary challenges the Church to affirm woman as agents of divine grace and calls on the Church to confront all forms of violence meted against women and all genders of vulnerability. This is a confessing title of the Church for our times, where the divine is willingly partaking to co-in habitat in the human. S/O Mary is a liberating affirmation for all those parents and children who are struggling in life with broken parental relationships. This title is the most public theologically relevant title

of Jesus, for Jesus is situated in the context of human motherhood, who is relatable to all human beings without any dogmatic assertions.

The title S/O Mary has been used more prominently as *Isa ibn Mariyam* (Jesus, Son of Mary) in Arabic of the Muslim faith tradition, for they believe in the virgin birth of Jesus and as a prophet.

Let me also remind you that today the 18th December is observed as International Migrant Day, where we as churches are called to participate in addressing the concerns of the people who are crossing the borders and seas as migrants. As I think of mother Mary today, as a young woman of Nazareth in Galilee, she was forced to take on the hazardous journey to Bethlehem with Joseph, just because she was betrothed to him, and for he is of the lineage of David to be registered in his home town and so had to go with him as a pregnant. And after the delivery of Jesus, she again with the baby in her arms nursing him, had to flee with Joseph to Egypt as a migrant to save their lives from the wrath of Herod. Mother Mary along with baby Jesus took on a risky travel as a refugee family with some insufficient documents or no documents which reveal some grey areas on the forms like the status of their marital relationship, their permanent address etc. Yet she faced all those hardships with courage and faith in God, and did all she could in raising a child for God to be the child of God and to be child God.

Five times as many migrants crossed the Channel to the UK in the first eight months of this year 2020 compared with the same period last year, Sky News can reveal. Analysis of the data found that at least 5,385 migrants have landed in small boats or been rescued between 1 January 2020 and 6 September, compared with at least 1,110 between the same dates in 2019. Already, more than two and a half times the number of migrants have arrived in small boats in the first eight months of 2020 than the whole of last year, when at least 1,823 arrived.

They say one in every seven people in the world is a migrant, which is one-seventh of the globe today form the migrant community, and the call of the Church is to join along this community for there are several Mary, Jesus and Joseph among them, and for the Church happens among them only.

It is high time that we are called to recover this very significant and relevant Christological title Son of Mary, for it provides an important gender, political, spiritual & public twist in the kaleidoscope of Christology.

Allow me to conclude with the lyric that was penned by John Bell in 2015 in response to the growing migrant crisis, as an commitment to the call of gospel.

*If my name was Mary
(Just sixteen with a child)
Forced to flee my country
(failing state turning wild)
Would you find a place for me?*

*If the town I came from
once had been occupied
By your nations soldiers
At whose hands my dad died
Would you find a place for me?*

*If your nations air force
Dropped their bombs on my street
On the wrong presumption
That was where rebels meet
Would you find a place for me?*

*If I'd learned that your country
Saw and heard our plight
But remained persuaded
We were wrong, you were right
Would you find a place for me?*

*If the boat I paid for
Was unfit to set sail
And that seeking refuge
was now certain to fail
would you find a place for me
Would you find a place for me?*

*If my name was Mary
(Just sixteen with a child)
If his name was Jesus...*

Rev. Dr. Rajbharat Patta,
18th December 2020

Sunday 20th December 2020

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Opening Prayer (adapted from material provided by Christian Aid for Advent)

Even if we cannot physically gather:

God is with us

Even if Christmas celebrations are different:

God is with us

Even if we might not be able to hug family and friends: God is with us

Even if we cannot sing carols in church buildings:

God is with us

Even if Christmas cheer is harder this year:

God is with us

Emmanuel, God with us, we come before you in worship and praise. We remember that you are ever faithful, eternally loving, and mysteriously present always. Amen

Hymn: Tell out my soul (Singing the Faith 186)

Sing/Read/pray/proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqwoqRo9N6E>

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice;
tender to me the promise of his word;
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!
Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;
his mercy sure, from age to age the same;
his holy name -- the Lord, the Mighty One.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by;
proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
to children's children and for evermore!

Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926)

Let us pray together:

Emmanuel, God with us,
we rejoice in your faithful and eternally loving nature, as we remember the events surrounding the birth of Jesus, your Son.

Like Mary, we want to rejoice and sing of your love for all creation. From mountain tops and ocean depths, we want all creation to hear the amazing story of your unfathomable generosity and grace.

We give thanks that you cannot be contained, boxed in, or trapped by us for our selfish purposes. You need to be free to be among your people in every situation we face.

To accept your call on our lives is dangerous, risky but above all transformative and life-giving. This morning we rejoice in the knowledge of your love.

Forgive us for the times we have obstructed your message, deliberately or unknowingly.

We hear Christ's gracious word: 'Your sins are forgiven. Amen. Thanks be to God.'

Today's Reading from the Old Testament:

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

Today's Gospel Reading: Luke 1:26-38

Time to Reflect

It has been a while since I have read Samuel, and it came to me afresh as I read it through for the purposes of preparing this reflection.

God reminds Samuel that he does not need a house, a temple, a place to be contained. God is a free agent, who does not need a building.

Well that's a bit of luck because for many of us, our church buildings have been closed, or for the brief period when we were able to enter the building everything was different.

Instead we have used material such as this to help us worship. Perhaps you have used the Methodist Worship Book, the Prayer Handbook, your hymnbook, television or radio services, or various online platforms.

We can encounter God in a myriad of different ways and in different places, just read through our scriptures and see for yourself.

Mary encountered God's purpose for her through the voice of an angel, a messenger from God. A frightening, awesome, thrilling experience – one that caused her to sing a song that continues to stir the hearts of people today.

Mary became the one who housed the Son of God for a short time in her womb. Her call was to nurture and protect him whilst he was an infant; after that she could no longer contain him, he was free to go where he was needed. Free to challenge, to change, to transform, and to reveal God's love to all he met.

As we prepare for a Christmas that may be unlike any that we have experienced, remember God does not need a building from which to be discovered and worshipped. We can celebrate the birth of Christ in our own homes. Rejoice that God revealed in Christ continues to be made known and calls people to follow and to serve.

Take a moment to think about the times you have encountered God beyond bricks and mortar. Or remember the words of a messenger, who changed your life and helped you see God. Give thanks for those moments and, perhaps like Mary, rejoice from deep within that the love of the one who entered our world as flesh and blood, continues to be experienced.

Take a time to sit quietly.



During this season the Methodist Church is proclaiming "God is with us". God is with us is more than a statement.

It's a reminder that God is always with us. We are encouraged to share our story (and other people's stories) of walking with God in this extraordinary year. How might you share how God has been with you this week? Find out more here <https://www.methodist.org.uk/christmas/>

A time of prayer

God of light and love,
you entered our world bringing hope and healing to the nations. The world today needs to hear your message of healing and reconciliation.

We remember the nations of the world where there is enmity, distrust of one another, and bloodshed. May your message of peace be made real.

We remember those who have no home to call their own, those living on the streets or in refugee camps. May your message of justice for all be heeded.

We remember those whose lives have been affected by Covid-19: through the death of loved ones, long-term health difficulties, loss of income. May your message of hope be heard.

We remember those who live in poverty, those who live in fear, those who are anxious, those for whom Christmas means isolation and loneliness. Encourage and equip us to be your messengers, offering words and deeds that bring comfort and relief in the name of Christ. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

Hymn: Listen to Garth Hewitt sing:

Light a Candle in the darkness

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B0agQyxTVwY>

or sing a verse of a hymn that comes to mind

A prayer of blessing

'May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit'.

(Romans 15: 13)

Original Materials by **Revd Deborah Cornish**

All

Hymns reproduced under CCLi 1144191.

Local Churches please insert CCCLi No here

The Big Church Sing Christmas Special was broadcast live on the Methodist Church's YouTube channel on Sunday 29 November. Have you seen it yet? If you have access to the internet go to

<https://www.youtube.com/methodistchurch>

Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph,

of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.' Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16 God's Covenant with David

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, 'See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.' Nathan said to the king, 'Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you.'

But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?' Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will

make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.