

OUTLOOK

The Magazine of Bethesda Methodist Church, Cheltenham

December 2025

No. 159



Nativity scene

“... lying in a manger.”

Luke 2:12

Bethesda Methodist Church Cheltenham

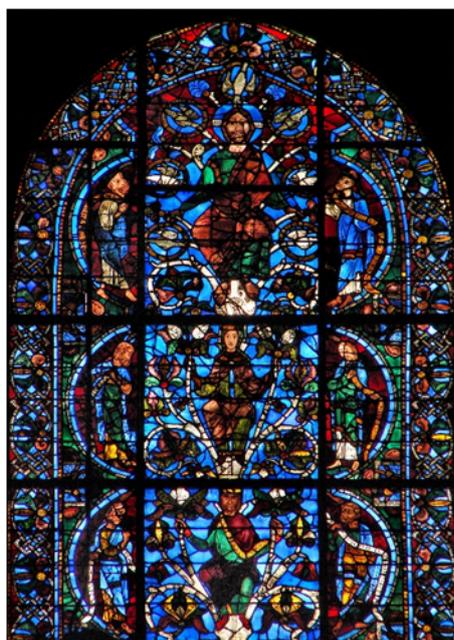
www.bethesda-church.org.uk
Minister: Rev. Rachel Leather
Lay Worker: Rachel Simpson
Church Office tel: 01242 269803

A community of hope

ECO  **CHURCH**

AN A ROCHA UK PROJECT

Rev'd Rachel Leather
Bethesda Methodist Church
Great Norwood Street
Cheltenham



Dear friends

During Advent this year we're doing things a little differently, in that we won't be having our normal candle lighting liturgy during worship in the four weeks running

up to Christmas. Instead we will have a Jesse Tree in church. Each week we will be celebrating characters from the Jewish Scriptures, our Old Testament, and thinking about the family tree of Jesus.

The image of a tree of Jesse goes back to a verse in Isaiah:

*A shoot shall come out from the stock of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord*

We think of this shoot being Jesus whose family roots go back to David, and Jesse was David's father.

The Jesse Tree has a long tradition as a way of marking the days through Advent and the path which ultimately leads to the birth of Jesus. The earliest example of a Jesse Tree is thought to date from the late eleventh century, and we also find images of a Jesse Tree in the stained glass of Chartres Cathedral (as seen in photo above).

Each week in Advent we will be celebrating different characters from scripture and what they symbolise, all pointing towards the incarnation. The Jesse Tree will be made up of bare branches, in contrast to the glitz of a Christmas tree, and we will hang our symbols from these branches.

The Jesse Tree invites us to consider how Jesus was connected to these figures of the past - we are familiar with Jesus coming from the house of David - but the Jesse Tree gets us to think much wider than that. It also can help us to think about how the roots of Jesus, grounded in history, help us to be grounded in him, and how we are connected. Whilst each one of us will have a family tree, some of our history is unknown to us, or even fractured. The Jesse Tree can help us to reflect on the definition of family, of how this family tree of

Jesus is via Joseph, and we are told Jesus did not have a blood connection to the person he would have called “dad”.

Families are complicated and none of us have a perfect family, despite the adverts which depict Instagrammable Christmases with everyone getting along and having the most wonderful time.

Mary was never going to have a “normal” child and she knew by saying yes to God her son would not share the same life as other children. But her joy came through giving up on her expectations of a perfect family and embracing the plans God had for her and her family. Mary’s yes meant that we are all now connected through that bond of love.

As we each prepare for Advent and the days leading up to Christmas, I hope we can all reflect on the traditions and saints of the past and how a family tree doesn’t just have to include those we are biologically related to. Through Jesus we are all connected into one big, imperfect, dysfunctional, chaotic, joyful and most loving family there can be.

Yours in Christ

Rachel

INTERVIEW

**Susan Jennifer Barr (“Sue”)
answers questions about her
life and links with Methodism**



Where were you born?

I was born in 1938 and grew up in Surbiton, Surrey, crossing the Thames to Middlesex for my secondary education.

My earliest memories are of wartime London, particularly the flying bombs (doodlebugs) and the one that demolished my maternal grandmother's flat. She survived because she sheltered in a doorway as the building collapsed around her.

How did your life develop?

My sister and I were taken to the safety of my other grandmother's house in Berkshire where we learned to swim and row a boat on the river. That grandmother was a formidable lady who was a particular influence on me, she took me and my sister to church for the first time. Her forebears were from Austria and she married into a Scottish family who had found their way to London in Victorian times.

What was your first contact with Methodism?

I emigrated to Canada in 1960 but came back to marry Jerry the following year. We had both been baptised and confirmed as Anglicans and continued to attend local parish churches until a move to Wales in 1971. By that time we had 3 children and were looking for child friendly worship. Our needs were met by a card through the door inviting us to attend a welcoming service in the local United Free Chapel, Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians sharing premises in the small town of Cowbridge, South Glamorgan. Our family felt very much at home there.

When we eventually moved to Staffordshire our loyalties were confused but we were particularly impressed by the Methodist church and in due course became members. We took that membership with us just two years later on a move to Suffolk and became active in Trinity Methodist Church, Felixstowe. 11 years later on coming to live on Cleeve Hill, we found two Methodist Ministers turning up on our doorstep at the same time. One, the then Bethesda minister, the Revd. Mark Booth had, prior to ordination, been a member of our Lichfield congregation and I baby sat their

newly born daughter Pippa. Terry Spencer, the Bishop's Cleeve Minister at that time forgave him for seemingly trespassing on his patch.

We continued as members in Bishop's Cleeve where I became a church steward, a role I fulfilled on the arrival of Revd. Rachel Leather as our Minister. We moved with her to Bethesda after the Covid lockdown, having in the meantime come down hill!

What jobs have you done?

Never content to be a housewife, I have experienced a variety of jobs as Jerry's work took us around the UK. These included being school secretary at comprehensives in both South Wales and Suffolk but voluntary work has proved to be the most satisfying. I worked with our Minister in Lichfield in setting up a "battered wives shelter" and as a probation volunteer in Suffolk. Particularly rewarding was working with Cheltenham's Young Homeless Project (now CCP) to set up their Furniture Recycling Project and showing Princess Anne around our warehouse. This work still continues as the Vision 21 Reclaim Project.

Have you any pastimes or hobbies?

I have always enjoyed drawing and painting although sight issues have put an end to that. I grew up in the trad jazz era and was particularly

fond of the clarinet playing of Sydney Bechet. I treasured one particular 78rpm record of his although I can't remember the name of the tune.

Sadly it was leaned on by Jerry and broke! I have fond memories of jiving to Humphrey Lyttleton and Chris Barber's Bands at the 100 Club in Oxford St, London in the late 50s.

I found running in my forties and was able to compete in the World Veteran Athletic championships in the USA and Finland. I even had my name in the record books, *1984 Ipswich Marathon female veteran, course record 3hrs 50mins 36secs.*

What are your thoughts on Bethesda?

Becoming members at Bethesda relatively recently, Jerry and I have felt warmly welcomed and cared for. We have long admired the church's commitment to environmental issues and I am frustrated that I am no longer able to make a contribution to that work. We find the presence of so many young people refreshing, together with the emphasis on inclusivity. Long may that continue though that challenge may be hard to achieve.

Do you have a favourite hymn?

"God be in my head and in my understanding" H&P 694, which was part of our wedding service.

photo (opp.) Sue as Yoga Queen

WELCOME THE CHILDREN



children, for if we don't, we will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

What does that mean?

Unfortunately, none of us has a magic elixir that we can drink and swish all the way back to being a child... So what does this passage mean? What does it mean to be like a little child? Recently, it was Bonfire Night, when fireworks start and seem to continue all the way to the new year... but as you can imagine, my 5-year-old loves Bonfire Night. She loves the enormous flash of light that each firework emits when it shoots into the sky. She is also amazed at the loud, resounding, echoing bang as it explodes high above the houses. She is genuinely in awe of fireworks; she is so small, and fireworks are very big.

For me, as I reflect on Matthew 18:1-5, I am challenged by the awe and wonder that children experience. Like when my daughter sees the fireworks and she is just totally in awe or when she experiences something new for the first time and is just simply amazed.

I sometimes wonder if we have lost our awe of God, perhaps becoming like a child in this sense, would be rediscovering what it is to look at God in awe and wonder, to focus on his infinite bigness and to thank him

At a recent circuit staff meeting, we reflected on and discussed Matthew 18:1-5. Which reads:
At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

This passage reminds us of the importance of welcoming children into every area and aspect of church. However, this passage also challenges us on the very nature of who we are. Jesus says that we need to change and become like little

that even though he is so massive,
he became small and accessible to
us.

Many blessings,

Sean
Sean Marsh

Young People and Families
Worker, Bethesda Methodist
Church.
Youth Enabler, Gloucestershire
Methodist Circuit.
Mobile: 07704493983

ECHR

Now is the time for a full-throated
defence of the ECHR and HRA.
No one has human rights, unless we
all have human rights.

Nearly 300 organisations have
joined together to express support
for European Convention on
Human Rights, in a letter
coordinated by Liberty. Signatories
included senior representatives of
the Baptist, Methodist and United
Reformed Churches, alongside
leading human rights organisations
such as Amnesty, Shelter, Mind,
and Friends of the Earth.

JPIT (Joint Public Issues Team)
November Newsletter

FOREST CAROL

by Leonard Clark

The trees of the Forest are lusty and
bold

(And the starlight is over them all),
The tender shy lambs huddle close
in the fold

(But our Saviour was born in a
stall).

The hills of the Forest are glittering
with frost

(And the starlight is over them all),
The white moon is merry on silver
clouds tossed

(But our Saviour was born in a
stall).

The fields of the Forest sleep under
the sky

(And the starlight is over them all),
The ox in his straw does contentedly
lie

(But our Saviour was born in a
stall).

So tree, hill and meadow are
pleasant this night

(With the starlight there over them
all),

But out of their joy they find tears at
the sight

(Of our Saviour now born in a
stall).

This 'Forest of Dean' poem was first
published in 1940.

- submitted by John Wilcock -

CHRISTMAS MEMORIES



The day she left, my mother checked her packing and found several of my 'treasures' in her bag which she removed and she left our home, never to have contact with us again.

I cannot now imagine how anyone in their right mind would devise such an experience for a financially impoverished youngster to endure alone!

Elaine Bailey

Questions That Haunt Me.

One Christmas stands out for me as leaving me with questions that haunt me to this day.

When we were living in Shirley, outside Birmingham, we hosted a girl of about 8 from inner city Birmingham with the idea of giving her a 'wonderful Christmas' her parents obviously couldn't afford. Needless to say this girl, we had never met, arrived into our family of 3 children she had never met before and away from all she knew - at Christmas of all times! My mother tried to spoil her with our seasonal dishes (but my mother was no great cook) and we shared our toys and she received some from us, but it must have been a bewildering experience as she was involved in all our church activities too as a guest at the manse!



Christmas Down Under

Beginning in May 1995, Christine and I embarked upon what turned out to be one of the best years of our lives. We spent twelve months in Western Australia, the result of a house (and car) exchange with an Australian couple.

The afternoon of Christmas Day, and Boxing Day too, found us on a favourite beach, swimming in the clear blue water, basking in the sun and licking ice creams. This was

like no Christmas we had ever experienced before.

My outstanding memory of Christmas, however, is of Christmas Eve when the small community of Darlington in which we lived - so called because it is located in the Darling range of hills - held their annual 'Carols by Candlelight' evening on the village green. All those attending were given a candle to hold.

The event was not exceptionally well organised, nor was the singing particularly good, but the sight of hundreds of candles, flickering in the velvety darkness, against a silhouetted backdrop of beautiful Australian hills and trees, is a picture which remains indelibly printed on my memory.

Many Australians also celebrate 'Christmas in July', during a normally not very cold winter. Roast turkey, with all the trimmings is eaten plus cheesy fondues, and mulled wine is often drunk, but all that is another story.

Bernard Stradling



A Time of Traditions

Christmas is often a time of traditions. Routines and rituals in church or at home can be comforting, and they signal inwardly and outwardly that this very special season is upon us.

For as long as I can remember throughout my childhood, an extended group of our family and friends would gather to go carol singing for charity every year in the run-up to Christmas. We would begin the evening in local care homes and hospitals, progress around several country pubs and finish at bars and restaurants in the centre of Cheltenham.

At the end of the evening, we would return to someone's house for festive nibbles. This was the point at which I was allowed to count the takings.

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CHRISTMAS MEMORIES

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I was rather outcome-focused in my younger years and my retrospective enjoyment of the evening's endeavours was very much proportional to how much we had managed to raise.

As I grew older, the musical aspect started to mean more to me.

An indistinct alto-tenor-bass blend of Willcocks harmonies became firmly engrained in my musical soul. At some point, probably around the same time that I became a more discerning consumer of the many mince pies on offer throughout the course of the evening, we stopped being allowed to count the takings ourselves, so the focus of this carol singing tradition for my adolescent self shifted almost entirely to the process.

Now, looking back, it is the connectedness of the outing that resonates most strongly with me – connection within the group of singers, which only sang together at this same point each year, but more importantly connection with the communities that we sang to and with, who responded warmly, kindly and generously.

Things change and traditions evolve. For my husband and me, this will be the first time in nearly fifteen years that we plan to wake up in our own beds on Christmas morning! But traditional or otherwise, may yours be a peaceful, joyful and connected Christmas.

Diana Wadsworth

* * *

Climate Education

“Just as literacy paved the way for the first Industrial Revolution, climate education will ignite the next revolution, one that addresses the climate crisis.”

That's what supporters of the EU's new plan to put climate literacy on the school curriculum had to say this week. In an unexpected move, the bloc recently made the commitment, saying that doing so would help pupils counter climate disinformation, explore careers in the green transition, and find [solutions to the climate crisis](#).

Campaigners described the pledge as a “watershed moment”. “Education is a fundamental tool in building climate resilience,” said one.

Positive News
November Newsletter

REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE



Nowadays we're all being encouraged to eat less meat, - better for the environment and also our health. For this edition **Doddy Marlow** has sent in a recipe for the colder weather that is both simple to prepare and uses seasonal vegetables and store cupboard ingredients.

Bean and vegetable hotpot.

Ingredients

1 onion
2 parsnips
2 large carrots
a little oil for cooking the vegetables
1 tin of red kidney beans, chick peas, and another type of beans e.g. black eyed beans (3 tins of beans in total)
1 tin chopped tomatoes
a good knob of butter

Method

Peel and chop all the root vegetables. Cook the onions in a little oil until soft but not browned, but only cook the carrots and parsnips until they begin to soften as they will continue to cook in the hotpot.

Rinse all the pulses and place these and all the other ingredients in a slow cooker or a large casserole. Stir well. Add a good knob of butter. You might like to add a few herbs if liked.

Cook on a low setting for a few hours to allow all the flavours to mellow and until the carrots and parsnips are soft.

This hotpot is great for “beans on toast”, and also for a main course with grated cheese on top and a green salad or another green vegetable. The combination of different proteins is nutritionally excellent as a meat substitute.

These quantities mean there's lots for large families, or for freezing for another day.

Bon appetit!

Do you have a vegetarian recipe you could share? Please send it in for another edition.



OUR CHURCH FAMILY

as at 15th November, 2025



It is with sadness that we note the death of Ray Gage in October.

The church was full as we gathered to celebrate his life with Val and the family, to whom we continue to send love, prayers and support.

Mark and Lindsay celebrated their ruby wedding anniversary in September; congratulations on forty years together, and the joyful celebrations with the family in Devon.

It was good to know that our young members have had a great time at 3Gen again this year. We trust that everyone involved has now recovered from lack of sleep!

This month we have news from our extended family – people who have worshipped with us but now are living further away. It is always good to hear news from near and far.

Mary and Robert Sanders who have been living in Devon for the past decade have now moved closer to Gloucestershire; they are making their home in Ripple and we hope

this will be a happy place for them.

Rachel Young sends her best wishes from Tresco to all at Bethesda who remember her. Earlier this year Rachel had the distinction of having an apple tree named after her. Something for us to look out for if we are planting a new apple tree maybe.

And more news from Devon – from Jean Hughes in Budleigh Salterton. She writes ‘At 96 I am still preaching and leading a home group, both of which I enjoy.’ She continues ‘Last week we celebrated 25 years of a Partnership with an evangelical Lutheran Church and school in Beit Sahour, the small town on the Palestinian West Bank which, according to tradition, has grown up on the ‘Shepherds’ Fields.’ Jean last visited there in 2022 and says it is a great privilege to help sustain the faith of a small, struggling Christian community. Some of our Bethesda family will have memories of the Shepherds’ Fields from their visit in 2015!

Some of our church Family have been struggling recently with ill health and hospital visits and stays. We send them and their families our prayers for positive outcomes, good recovery and stamina during the difficult times.

We remember all those friends who are unable to join us in person for whatever reason, who are in need of our prayers and support.

Our church family is founded on faith, joined in love and sustained by God.

Shalom.

Christine and Ros.



YOU ARE A GIFT MADE WITH LOVE

Together, all districts, circuits, local churches and fellowships of the Methodist Church are invited to remind people of their inherent worth and beauty – not because of what they’ve done, or what they can give – but because of who they are.

Gifted:

- is for everyone in our churches and beyond: both believers rejoicing at God’s gift of Jesus, and those who might find the season more wearying than wonderful.
- reaches out to people longing for transformation but feeling stuck. For those searching for something more, something real – but unsure where to look.

Gifted is the Methodist Church's open invitation, speaking the good news to people that they matter. That they are Beloved. Created with infinite care. A gift to the world, just as they are.

Gifted is a message of good news to a weary world...

*<https://www.methodist.org.uk>
Advent and Christmas*

EMERGENCY CONTACT DETAILS

Following a discussion at the recent Pastoral Visitors meeting, we would like to ask everyone who attends Bethesda for worship to provide us with emergency contact details, just in case you fall ill during a service and may require medical attention. I have spoken with Peter Gardner, the Circuit Safeguarding Officer about this and he considers this is best practice for all churches to hold this information as part of safeguarding guidelines.

If you are comfortable with sharing these details, firstly, please ask the person for their permission! I will keep a database which will be held securely according to our GDPR requirements, and a copy of this list will also be stored under lock and key at church, only accessible to the stewards' team.

Whilst we hope we won't ever have cause to use this list, we are aware when emergencies happen we don't always have details as to who to contact to inform on your behalf.

This list will also be helpful in case we are unable to contact you and haven't seen you for some time. The pastoral team do notice when

they haven't seen people at church, or haven't been able to contact someone for a while, and it would be very helpful having a family member or close friend to ask regarding your wellbeing.

If you are happy to provide an emergency contact with me, you can either ring or email me on:

01242 262657//

revrachel.leather@methodist.org.uk

WHAT THE DONKEY SAW



No room at the inn, of course,
And not much in the stable.
What with the shepherds, Magi,
Mary,
Joseph, the heavenly host -
Not to mention the baby
Using our manger as a cot.
You couldn't have squeezed another
cherub in
For love nor money.

Still in spite of the overcrowding,
I did my best to make them feel
wanted.

I could see the baby and I
Would be going places together.

U. A. Fanthorpe.

IT'S BEHIND YOU! OH NO, IT 'S NOT, OH YES, IT IS!

Every year, across towns, cities and villages halls, on stages large and small, these now immortal words are heard throughout the festive season and well into the new year. They are part of that particularly British phenomenon, the Pantomime. From Victorian times, pantomime has been a traditional part of our Christmas celebrations and there is no sign of this changing in spite of the influx of social media and "on-line" entertainment. For many, adults as well as children, it is their only experience of the magic of live theatre.

It's origins are to be found in Europe. and date back to the Italian Commedia dell'arte where stock characters appeared and told their stories in dance and mime: Harlequin and Columbine, the lovers, Pantaloon the villain and Pierrot the clown.

By the end of the 19th century they had become fully entrenched as part of Christmas. In 1697 Charles Perrault published 'Tales of Mother Goose' which included 'Beauty and the Beast', 'Little Red Riding Hood', 'Cinderella', 'Sleeping Beauty' and 'Puss in Boots'. Another source were 'Tales of the Brothers Grimm'

bringing 'Snow White' and 'Hansel and Gretel' into the mix. 'Aladdin' was first performed at the Strand Theatre, London in 1861.

Characters were established: the principal boy and girl, the villain both male and female, the Fairy Godmother, the comic foils be they broker's men, side kicks or what you will and probably the most popular of all, the Dame.

Many famous actors down the years have trodden the boards as pantomime dames. They are always played by a man as the character of Principal Boy is always a young lady.

Part of our enduring fondness for pantomime is its familiarity. We expect music and dance and topical jokes. There will always be the love story, the comedy and slapstick and the audience participation. We know that the Ugly Sisters, Abanazar, The Terrible Giant, the Wicked Queen, the Demon King and the rest will get their come-uppance and that good will win in the end.

We know that poor Buttons will not win the hand of Cinderella and we know that in spite of all the hurdles put in the way of the hero the machinations of the villain will fail.

Abridged from an article by Barbara Hothersall in the Fulwood Methodist Church magazine.

GRACIE SILK ANNOUNCED as YOUTH PRESIDENT 2026/27



The Methodist Youth President for 2026/2027 will be Gracie Silk, who attends Melbourne Methodist Church in the Nottingham and Derby District

Gracie, aged 19, was elected by the children and young people of the Methodist Church across the Connexion. The Methodist Youth President is a salaried position working full-time for one year to serve the children and young people of the Methodist Church in Britain. The role involves meeting and representing the young Methodist people to ensure that their voices are heard and to help them be involved in every aspect of Church life.

Joining the Connexional Team,

from 1 August 2026, Gracie will succeed the current Youth President, Genesis Padgett, from 1 September 2026. She will be formally welcomed at a service next autumn.

Gracie has been attending Melbourne Methodist church for as long as she can remember. “I really became passionate about Methodism when I became a Methodist youth representative two years ago,” said Gracie.

Currently studying Theology and Mission at Cliff College, Gracie decided to run for youth president as she is passionate about children and young people.

Gracie commented, “I’m very excited to be the next Youth President and really looking forward to starting the role and being an advocate for the children and young people of the church.”

“I am keen that everyone, no matter their age, can be a positive voice for change and I feel honoured that the young people trust me to speak on behalf of them.”

Current Youth President, Genesis Padgett, commented, “Congratulations to Gracie, a massive well done! The role of Youth President is truly an amazing

one. I look forward to working together during the handover process in August and I will be praying for her in the run up to her appointment. Please keep Gracie in your prayers as she starts preparing for her year in office.”

The minister at Melbourne Methodist Church, the Revd Nikki Geeson, was delighted at the news of Gracie’s election, "Congratulations to Gracie on this achievement. I am thrilled that she has been appointed as the next Youth President, as I know she will embody this representative role within the Methodist Church, speaking for and on behalf of our young people, providing a platform for their dreams and concerns. On behalf of Melbourne Methodist Church, I know that we will be praying for you, and cheering you on, as you embark on this new, exciting chapter!"

The Methodist Church - Methodist News

* * *

Because of Jesus.....

we have hope for tomorrow,
confidence in the future,
light in our darkness,
victory in each trial,
rest when we are weary
and love for a lifetime.

Source unknown

PALM OIL



We use palm oil extensively in the UK. Over the coming months I would like you to check the ingredients on your purchases just to see how ubiquitous it is, in foods, cosmetics and even toothpaste.

The deforestation in the tropics caused by this use is disastrous, for the environment and especially for the dependent wildlife.

We are hoping to encourage folk in Bethesda to be aware of this in their shopping and everyday life and to encourage their friends and family to do likewise.

Watch this space for an exciting involvement for Bethesda.

Elaine Bailey

Children's

Page



A Christmas Reconciliation

In the tight-knit town of Harmony, two brothers, Michael and Thomas, had not spoken to each other for years. A misunderstanding had spiralled into a deep rift, dividing not only their relationship but also their families.

As Christmas approached, their mother grew increasingly sorrowful over the discord. On her deathbed, she expressed her final wish to see her sons reunited. "Promise me you'll find it in your hearts to forgive each other," she whispered.

After her passing, both brothers were consumed by grief and guilt. Invitations to the Christmas Eve service at their childhood church arrived, and independently, they decided to attend in honour of their mother.

That night, the church was filled with warm light and the scent of flowers. The minister spoke about the true meaning of Christmas: love, forgiveness, and reconciliation,

exemplified by God's gift of Jesus to humanity.

Moved by the message, Michael glanced across the aisle and saw Thomas watching him. The weight of the years of silence pressed upon them. As the congregation stood to sing "Silent Night," the brothers found themselves side by side. Michael turned to Thomas. "I miss you," he admitted softly.

Thomas's eyes welled up. "I've missed you too. I'm sorry for everything."

They embraced, the barrier between them dissolving. Their families, witnessing the reunion, joined in the embrace, tears of joy streaming down their faces.

After the service, they gathered at their mother's home, sharing memories and stories late into the night. The once-divided family was whole again.

From that Christmas forward, the brothers honoured their mother's legacy by keeping their family united, recognizing that life's too short for bitterness.

Always Remember: Forgiveness heals wounds and restores relationships, embodying the true spirit of Christmas.

3Generate 2025



Sean writes: “We had a fabulous time at 3Generate in October, we took 42 young people from across the circuit, including a few from Wiltshire. Here is a group photo of all the young people and the team. A big thank you to everyone that made it happen. Please do continue to pray for all our young people.”

Christmas Carols misheard by children

- We three kings of porridge and tar
- On the first day of Christmas my tulip gave to me
- With the jelly toast proclaim
- Sleep in heavenly peas
- The cattle are blowing the baby away
- Hark, the hairy angels sing



Methodist leaders have welcomed the appointment of Bishop Sarah Mullally as the new Archbishop of Canterbury.

In a statement the President and Vice-President, and Secretary of the Methodist Conference expressed their encouragement at her appointment and the assurance of their prayers.



The full statement follows:

“We warmly welcome the news of Bishop Sarah Mullally’s appointment as Archbishop of Canterbury. We pray God’s blessing upon her for this profoundly important ministry. May God guide Archbishop Sarah in her leadership within our public life, within the Church of England and among the worldwide Anglican Communion. The Methodist Church and the Church of England are covenanted partners: in local communities across the country Methodists and Anglicans are growing together in responding to the gospel of God’s love in Christ, enriching one another’s discipleship, and sharing in worship and mission.

As church leaders, we look forward to walking alongside Archbishop Mullally in that same spirit of partnership in the coming years. Our present age demands a confident and united witness by the Church, to the love and grace of God that can mend divisions and overcome the fears of our world. We are encouraged by Bishop Sarah’s clear commitment to making the Church a safe space for all, where all are welcome and can thrive. We will keep Bishop Sarah and her family in our prayers as she takes up this significant and demanding global role. ”

The Revd Richard Andrew, President of the Methodist Conference

Mr Matt Forsyth, Vice-President of the Methodist Conference

The Revd Dr Jonathan Hustler, Secretary of the Methodist Conference

In a Bethlehem stable.....

Out of the silence - music,
out of the darkness - light,
out of uncertainty - promise.
Hope was born that night.

Source unknown

Christmas Prayer Poem, Robert Louis Stevenson.

Loving Father,
help us to remember the birth of
Jesus,
that we may share in the song of
the angels,
the gladness of the shepherds,
and worship of the wise men.
Close the door of hate
and open the door of love all over
the world.
Let kindness come with every gift
and good desires with every greet-
ing.
Deliver us from evil by the blessing
which Christ brings,
and teach us to be merry with
clean hearts.
May the Christmas morning
make us happy to be thy children,
and Christmas evening bring us to
our beds
with grateful thoughts, forgiving
and forgiven,
for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Can this be Christmas?



What's all this hectic rush and worry?
Where go those crowds who run and
scurry?
Why all the lights - the Christmas trees?
The jolly "fat man", tell me please!

Why, don't you know? This is the day
For parties and for fun and play;
Why this is Christmas!

So this is Christmas, do you say?
But where is Christ this Christmas Day?
Has he been lost among the throng?
His voice drowned out by empty song?

No, he's not here - you'll find him where
Some humble soul now kneels in prayer,
Who knows the Christ of Christmas.

In countless homes the candles burning,
In countless hearts expectant yearning
For gifts and presents, food and fun,
And laughter 'til the day is done.

I'm tired of all this empty celebration,
Of feasting, drinking, recreation;
I'll go instead to Calvary.

And there I'll kneel with those who know
The meaning of that manger low,
And find the Christ - this Christmas.

M R De Haan



OUTLOOK

The February 2026 issue of 'Outlook' should appear on 8th February 2026. Contributions are invited by not later than 25th January 2025 by email: bernard_stradling_1980@btinternet.com or in any format by hand or by post. 'Outlook' can also be found on the Bethesda website: bethesda-church.org.uk Please note that articles reflect the views of the writer and not necessarily those of Bethesda Methodist Church. The cover photograph was taken several years ago near the entrance to Holy Apostles Church, Chipping Norton.

SLOW CHRISTMAS DOWN

The pressure to buy - and fast — is a recipe for stress and waste.

We've all been there. It's three days until Christmas and only one gift has been bought. Cue the quick-fire online purchasing, followed by a 3pm skid to the shops.

Rushing is on the rise: last year saw retail footfall on Christmas Eve up 31% compared to the previous year and it seems last-minute purchasing does not a satisfying gift make. In January 2025, £1.51bn worth of gifts were returned to retailers, according to home delivery specialist Parcelhero.

On 2nd January, there was a 6.8% increase in returns compared to the same day the previous year.

Now with time still left until the big day choose a slower, calmer pace. Not only around gifting, but around how you spend your time over the holidays too.

Positive News
November Newsletter

TIME FOR A SMILE

An 8 year old girl stood up in class and said, “God lives in our bathroom.” The teacher said, “What? God lives in your bathroom? How do you know that?”

“Well teacher, every day in the morning, my father bangs on the bathroom door and says, “Oh God! You’re still there!”

My wife and I went into town to shop. When we came out, there was a cop writing out a parking ticket. We went up to him and said, “Come on man, how about giving a senior citizen a break?” He just ignored us and continued writing the ticket. I called him a rude name. He glanced at me and started writing another ticket for having worn out tyres.

So my wife called him a “jerk”. He finished the second ticket and put it on the windscreen with the first. Then he started writing more tickets.

This went on for about twenty minutes The more we offended him, the more tickets he wrote. He finally finished and sneered at us. Just then our bus arrived so we got on it and went home. We try to have a little fun each day now that we are retired. It’s so important at our age.

It was a cold and misty Christmas morning in the very depth of winter after a heavy fall of snow and only Farmer Evans and the Reverend Joseph Lancaster managed to arrive at the church for the morning service. ‘Well,’ said the Minister laconically, ‘I guess there’s no point in having a service today.’ ‘Well that’s not how I see it.’ said Farmer Evans smartly.



‘If only one cow turns up at feeding time, I still feed it.’

At a Nativity play, all was going well until the angel appeared and told the little girl playing Mary that she was going to have a baby. “But how can that be,” said Mary, “since I am a Viking?”



Heavenly Father



As we enter this holy season of December, we thank You for the gift of Your Son, Jesus, whose birth we prepare to celebrate. In the stillness of this Advent season, may our hearts be filled with anticipation and joy, knowing that You are with us, Emmanuel.

We ask that You help us to reflect on the true meaning of Christmas — not just the festivities and traditions, but the incredible love You showed through the coming of Christ. May we be reminded of the humility of His birth, the peace He brings, and the hope He offers to all the world.

Lord, as we prepare to welcome the Saviour anew into our hearts, let this December be a time of renewal. Fill us with Your peace and compassion so that we might share Your light with those around us. In a world that often feels dark, help us to be a reflection of Your love and grace.

We also pray for those who are struggling during this season—those who are lonely, sick, grieving, or in need. May they experience the warmth of Your presence and the kindness of those around them. We ask for Your comfort to surround them and for Your peace to restore their hearts.

Bless our families and loved ones, and give us hearts of generosity as we share the blessings You have given us. Help us to be mindful of the needs of others, especially those less fortunate, and teach us how to serve with joy and compassion.

We offer this prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour, the Light of the world. Amen.

With thanks to manchestermethodists.org.uk