



**MAGAZINE OF UNITING  
CHURCH SKETTY  
DECEMBER 2024 &  
JANUARY 2025**



The shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about. So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.

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**Uniting together - Caring for all -  
Seeking God**

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**Minister:** The Revd Louise Gough

**Senior Elder:** Pat D

**Senior Steward:** Jan C

**Church Related Community Worker:** Adella P (Swansea Region of URC Churches)

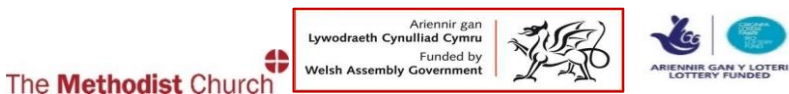
**FEBRUARY 2025 MAGAZINE:** All items for inclusion in the February 2025 edition of the Magazine to be sent to Noel D by 14 January at the latest, but sooner if possible. Issue date: Sunday, 26 January.

*NB We have stopped producing audio recordings of this church magazine due to a lack of demand. This is under continuous appraisal and if you think such recordings could benefit you, please let Les W know. If you would like to receive the weekly notices and/or monthly magazine via email (.pdf file) please contact Lynne W*

**Contacting us:** Uniting Church Sketty, Dillwyn Road, Sketty, Swansea SA2 9AH. Website: [www.unitingchurchsketty.org.uk](http://www.unitingchurchsketty.org.uk)

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The building development was funded by the following



The refurbished hall was funded from the sale of the Bethel building

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## LETTER FROM THE MANSE

### Dear friends

Did you ever play ‘hide and seek’ when you were children? I loved it when it was my turn to search and would shout at the top of my voice, “Co-ming – ready or not!”. I probably just wanted an excuse to make a lot of noise. It’s likely my shouting drowned out the sounds of friends shuffling to find last minute hiding places – I don’t know about you, but I was rarely ready by the time the seeker had counted!

Christmas – coming ready or not! It’s already arrived in the shops (1<sup>st</sup> November is now ‘normal’), and I’ve seen my first Christmas tree (bear in mind that I’m writing this towards the front end of mid-November!).

Soon the hyper-organised will start telling me that they’ve done their cards, and the presents are wrapped, and they are all ready. Suffice to say, they will always be streets ahead of me. Each year I feel daunted by the volume of things to do, and for ministers, as for many others, there is both a professional and personal Christmas to prepare for.

So my offering is this. We don’t have to be ready for Christmas!

In our household, growing up, 25<sup>th</sup> December was the deadline by which the house had to be perfectly tidy and clean (it never was usually!), the sausage rolls and mince-pies baked (yum, thanks mum), the cake iced (mum again), the crackers hand-made with a personal gift inside, and numerous other detailed tasks completed. But did this make for a happy Christmas day? Not necessarily! One of us would wake up with a bad cold, and by mid-afternoon the Christmas specials were wearing thin, and everyone was getting a bit grumpy.

Alas! The myth of the perfect Christmas is all too pervasive. Everything is presented in a way that tells us we’re expected to enjoy the festivities and have a happy time. But life’s just not like that! Difficult things happen at Christmas as they do at any other time; troubling thoughts or low moods can

be harder to bear. The world is not an easy place to live in at the best of times – no wonder Christmas is often approached with anxiety and dismay.

The Christmas that will come, whether we're ready or not, is worlds away from the commercial Christmas or the trappings of Christmas, relished or dreaded. Christmas will come because Christ will come. Richard Rohr says this: "Remember, when we speak of Advent or preparing for Christmas, we're not just talking about waiting for the little baby Jesus to be born. That already happened 2,000 years ago. In fact, we're welcoming the Universal Christ, the cosmic Christ, the Christ that is forever being born in the human soul and into history."

This is the Christ who comes, ready or not – the spark of hope who appears and lights our darkness; the one who creeps in alongside us in all our messiness and into our pain; the One who surprises us with love and gives us an assurance of God's loving presence at the most unexpected times, and when we most need it. This is the sudden and gentle uplift of our hearts after they have sunk and embedded themselves into the depths like a cold heavy stone. Christ comes, ready or not, and invited or not, to warm us, to usher us into wholeness, to show us that we are never alone. Which reminds me of the famous words: "Bidden or not bidden, God is present."

This can give us personal hope – but also hope in a world where the political reality is complex and where even the fabric of earth is compromised. The stories of Jesus' birth remind us that he was born to an ordinary family, into the unpredictability of an occupied territory. Matthew's Gospel tells us that shortly after his birth his parents fled as refugees, his life endangered, as families grieved and a tyrant reigned. So much for the belief that the world had to be perfect before the longed-for Messiah came! It was into troubling times of hardship, chaos, questionable government, and suffering that Jesus was born.

This is the good news: Christ still comes – ready or not. Christ comes into the most difficult situations, the most troubled times and hearts.

If we can, we are invited to spend the weeks of Advent watching and waiting, opening ourselves to the possibility of light and hope, to the reality of God's love, making room for the birthing of Christ into our lives and in our world. (If we can't, Christ will come anyway.)

During Advent, I pray that we might find the quietness and peace to steady our hearts and minds and be alert to the movement of the gentle Spirit of peace and love. Peace and love which doesn't depend on perfection, or readiness, but which is born through fear, pain and uncertainty, and shines a light of unwavering hope. Immanuel – God is with us! Alleluia! Amen!

With blessings and love

Louise

## **A PRAYER**

Come, Christmas-Christ!  
Be born into our fears  
and into the chaos and pain  
so prevalent in our world.  
Come, Christmas-Christ!  
Be born into the revellers,  
and into those deafened  
by their own silent scream.  
Come, Christmas-Christ!  
Be born and born, that all might know  
your comfort, healing and peace.  
God-with-us, always and everywhere.  
Amen.

**"BLUE CHRISTMAS"** is a service for anyone who finds it hard to enter into the cheery festivities of the Christmas period, for people wanting space, and for anyone for whom this might be a difficult time of year. It will be a quiet and gentle service, with room for remembering, and space for reflection. 3.00pm on December 15<sup>th</sup>. All are welcome.

## WORSHIP SERVICES IN DECEMBER AND JANUARY

December 1	10.30am	Revd Louise Gough (Communion)
8	10.30am	Revd Andrew Charlesworth (Synod Chair)
15	10.30am	Revd Louise Gough
	3.00pm	Revd Louise Gough (Blue Christmas)
22	10.30am	Revd Louise Gough (Nativity)
	6.30pm	Revd Louise Gough (Carol Service)
24	11.30pm	Revd Louise Gough (On-line service)
25	10.00am	Revd Louise Gough (Christmas Day Service)
29	10.30am	Revd Linda Woollacott
January 5		Revd Louise Gough (Covenant Service & Communion)
12		Sue Raad
19		Revd Louise Gough
23	10.30am	Revd Noel Davies (Thursday Communion)
26		Revd Howard Long

Evening Prayer is held on Zoom on Sunday evenings at 7.00pm.

See Weekly Notices for any changes over Christmas and New Year.

**“For unto us a child is born”**

## **Celebrating the birth of Jesus**

Services over the Christmas season will be as follows:

December 15:	10.30am	Revd Louise Gough (Advent 3)
	3.00pm	Revd Louise Gough (Blue Christmas)
22:	10.30am	Revd Louise Gough (Nativity)
	6.30pm	Revd Louise Gough (Carol Service)
24:	11.30pm	Revd Louise Gough (On-line)
25:	10.00am	Revd Louise Gough (Christmas Day)
29:	10.30am	Revd Linda Woollacott

This is our opportunity to hear again the Christmas story, to celebrate together and to think about what the story means for us and for our world today.

## COMMUNION COLLECTIONS

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Our charity for December is **Crisis**, working with people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. They aim to treat everyone as an individual with dignity and respect. Many of their clients have complex needs such as physical and mental health issues or substance abuse. Crisis have a special appeal at Christmas but work all year round.



Every  
person's  
potential  
fulfilled

In January we will support All We Can, the Methodist international development and relief organisation

<https://www.allwecan.org.uk/>. In 2022 it had its most successful appeal to date for Ukraine. It has also worked for the Turkey and Syria earthquake appeal and many

other natural and human disasters. It has just launched the Gaza/Lebanon justice appeal in partnership with the United Reformed Church.

You might also like to look at the All We Can extraordinary gifts website:  
<https://www.allwecan.org.uk/gifts/about-extraordinary-gifts/>

**Penlan** is our church project for the year. Penlan Methodist



Church has no congregation, but the building has been kept, due to its usefulness to the local community. Ogof Adullam is the main project based there for 3 days a week.

They offer a free hot meal, Men's Shed, gardening group, arts and craft, knitting and a pool and table tennis table. We hope to find more about what happens in Penlan during the year.

## REMEMBERING...

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I was born on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1939. My older sister was three years older. The war had just begun, but I don't remember it, except for a vague recollection of being in a cramped air raid shelter at the end of our small garden. We survived the war, but many didn't. I wonder how my parents, like many thousands of other families, managed to overcome what must have been so hard. I was moved to tears, like many of you will have been, listening to the stories of the few veterans left, with their harrowing tales and to those families that had lost so many. Next year, there will be even fewer to tell us their stories. And the battles and wars that have taken place since will, no doubt, continue to have their sad stories to tell, reminding us all of the suffering and loss of war.

As this magazine appears, the marking of remembrance will already be taken over by Christmas celebrations. But I hope we never stop marking November 11<sup>th</sup> as a time to remember, as a time 'never to forget'.

**Pauline L**

## MEMORY

'Remember, remember the fifth of November  
Gunpowder, treason and plot'

Many people in Britain love their fireworks displays and most folk do remember the story of Guy Fawkes and have some idea of its importance. Then, soon after the fifth, comes the eleventh, and the national importance of Remembrance Day.

Of course, Christians must always be forward-looking. But memory is vital. Just think of the importance of the Eucharist or Holy Communion to all Christians and of Passover to all Jews.

In November, Wesley House, Cambridge, (the Methodist Theological College that has trained many Methodist ministers and is part of the Cambridge Theological Federation) is beginning the process of moving (in August 2025) from its current site which it has occupied since 1925, to new, more sustainable premises within Cambridge, more suited to the current needs of equipping God's people for mission and ministry. Sixty or so years ago, universities had flourishing Methodist student societies (*and other denominational and ecumenical societies, of course. ed*). In Cambridge then, when I was a student, some students would gather





every Wednesday morning at 7.00am for prayers in the Wesley House Chapel. As the college moves to new premises, I have powerful memories of the faces of people in the chapel on that day. The minister in the meeting for prayer that morning was the Revd Dr Gordon Rupp. I remember feeling the powerful

presence of God and my own emotion of a quiet special commitment to Jesus. Such powerful memory can drive Christians forward rather than feeling mere nostalgia. We can join the crucified thief, beside Jesus on Golgotha, as we remember and say, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

*[Thanks to Alice (R) for reminding us, not just in this article, but over the years, of what it means to be inspired by Jesus and give your life to following and serving him). Ed]*

**FLOWERS:** There are still plenty of spaces on **the church flower rota for next year, 2025**, which is on the notice board near the vestry in the foyer. If you would like to give flowers one Sunday, please sign your name against your preferred date and if you would like to arrange them yourself, please sign in the arrangers’ column. If you are unable to get to church and would like to give flowers, please do not hesitate to contact me and I will add your name to the list. Thankyou.

Many thanks, Rosemary

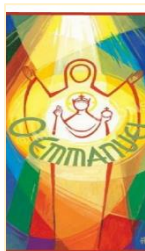
**COFFEE MORNING:** There will be a Coffee Morning on December 7th, from 10.00 until 12.00 in aid of Shuktara, Calcutta, (founded by David Earp), that provides a loving home for children and young people with disabilities who have no family of their own. We take a caring and nurturing approach to help all our residents reach their full potential.



NB There be no coffee morning in January

# Faith and Fellowship for Advent

*O Come, Emmanuel: Words and Music for Advent, exploring the 'O Antiphons' [Baffled? Come, listen and see!]*



Ant.  
2.  
O  
Emma-nu-el, Rex et lé-gi-fer noster,  
exspectá-ti-o génti-um, et Salvá-tor e-á-rum :  
ve-ni ad salvándum nos, Dómi-ne, De-us noster.

*Led by the Revds Noel Davies and Linda Woollacott*

*November 19th: Jesus our wisdom! Jesus our Lord!*

*November 26th: Jesus, root of Jesse! Jesus, key of David*

*December 3rd: Jesus, Emmanuel! Jesus, born of Mary!*

*December 10th: Discussions are ongoing...you might be surprised!!*

## PASTORAL UPDATE

- We send our love and prayers to Sue J who is making good progress in hospital and hopes to be home soon.
- Congratulations to Elinor (daughter of Clare and Nigel) who recently ran the Snowdon Marathon and came 2<sup>nd</sup>. Well done, Elinor!

**AN INVITATION FROM THE CRAFT GROUP:** In 2026 it is the church's 150th anniversary and the Craft Group would like to mark this with a new banner. We would like some input from members of the church, and we would like it to reflect the history of the church and its activities over the years. Please put your 'Thinking Caps' on and place your ideas in the Ideas Box in the foyer. The Craft Group is a small group of 5 members and would appreciate your ideas by January 12th. It's now Over to You. Thankyou. Rosemary.

## **“THIS IS MY HOME”**

“Do you want to see a photo of my home?”, a young man asked. She was aiming for the door at the end of the meeting, but she turned back. He showed her the photo on his mobile. It looked like a wilderness with a few piles of rubble here and there.

“There”, he said, pointing to a pile of bricks and dust. That was my home. The militia came and burned every house in the village. My sister and her four young children were killed.”. “What about your parents?”, she asked, not really knowing what to say. “I don’t know where mum is. I’ve lost touch”.

The conversation happened in a church in Bangor, a church where a group of volunteers meet refugees and asylum seekers every week to offer support, companionship and practical help to a group who come from Africa, the Middle East and Afghanistan and are living on £70 a week.

This young man came from Sudan, and God knows how he arrived here over land and sea with his very sparse English. A vicious civil war is tearing the country apart and no one wants to intervene, and no one tells the story.

In the same room, there was an older man, an academic back in his own country, on his mobile all evening trying to find information about his family as missiles rained down on their homes. One of his brothers had been seized in the street a few weeks previously by Government secret service agents and he and his family were expecting the worst. They’re unlikely to see him ever again, because that’s what the heinous government does with people who’ve refused to kow-tow to the Shiite Clerics who run the show.

People like these, who are welcomed by this church in Bangor, are the greatest threat to ‘our way of life’, according to right-wing politicians. Indeed, Kemi Badenoch, the newly-elected leader of the Conservative Party says that she has the most detailed plan yet to deal with this ‘extreme threat’.

But while the Climate Crisis continues to turn dry land into searing desert on the one hand and to drown low lying sea-boards, on the other, and while poverty, starvation and wars continue, people will escape – in their millions – to seek better prospects; some kind of shelter, some kind of safety. Of course. Seriously, what else will they do?

In a dark schoolroom in Llŷn, Dr Gwyn Williams, Chwilog, quoted Martin Luther King: "Darkness cannot defeat darkness; only love can do that!" Or as Jesus said in Matthew's Gospel, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice."

**Alun Ffred**

*(Reproduced with permission from Cristnogaeth21/Christianity21 [C21] and Alun Ffred. C21 is an on-line platform that 'aims to provide radical, liberal and progressive interpretations of the Christian faith and thereby facilitate public debate and personal reflection on issues of faith. C21 does so*



*mainly through the medium of Welsh'. Alun Ffred was born in Brynaman, where his father, the Revd Gerallt Jones, was minister. His uncle, the Revd F.M. Jones, was my predecessor as minister in Ebeneser Newydd, Henrietta Street. Some of you will have heard of his brother, the Welsh folk singer-entertainer and campaigner, Dafydd Iwan. Alun Ffred has been leader of Gwynedd County Council, a member of the Welsh Assembly Government and has won the Daniel Rowland novel prize in the National Eisteddfod. The people who use our clothes bank, those who attend Unity in Diversity and those for whom Linda and her friends are preparing Christmas bags with the gifts we've provided, could all tell similar heart-breaking stories. Diolch i C21 ac Alun Ffred)*

## **UCS CHRISTMAS BAGS 2024**

Writing this report in November means the project is still in its initial stages but will have finished before the next magazine in February

I first extend my grateful thanks to everyone who has helped with sewing, donating items or money for items to be purchased, as well as, latterly, the most important task of filling the bags. It has been a wonderful effort from everyone.

I will be grateful to receive any filled bags any Sunday but the deadline date is Tuesday 10th December. The bags will be blessed during the morning service on December 15th.

I am confident that by that day we will have filled 100 bags for adults and 100 for children of varying ages. Adella and her team will then be delivering these bags to our local refugees and asylum seekers.

Well done UCS.

Thank you everyone for your support with the project. Linda

**GREAT OAKS AND ACORNS:** This year has been a very good one for acorns. As a result, there has been a large population of ducks on the canal at the bottom of our garden in Clydach as they just love acorns. Mallards aren't supposed to dive, but they do if the water is too deep for just 'dabbling' and a few tasty acorns have fallen in! There are many



mature oaks along the canal, including at the bottom of our garden, but none compares to the winner of the 'Tree of the Year' prize, the Skipinnish Oak of Lochaber, Scotland. Named after the folk band, one of whose members was responsible for making its existence in a dense

conifer forest known, the oak is thought to be 400 years old. Once 'discovered' volunteers cleared some of the trees from around it to help it to continue to thrive. Oaks support hundreds of wildlife species and are vital for biodiversity. This year's Tree of the Year prize focussed only on oaks because of their importance.

Did you know that in the Bible the oak represents sacredness and righteousness, and many significant meetings took place under an oak, most notably Abraham's meeting with his three visitors in Mamre (see Genesis 18 [seen by Rublev as a symbolic representation of the Trinity – see his famous icon. ed]) (Alan C, from the Clydach and Morriston Methodist Churches' newsletter. I'll get Alan C's permission when he returns from Tanzania!)

### **"I AM THE MARY OF YOUR CHRISTMAS CARDS"**

I am the Mary of your Christmas cards. I listen calmly while the angel brings me news that will shake up my life beyond measure. I accept what has been ordained for me. I am young and dressed in blue.

I am the Mary of your Christmas card. Despite travelling almost 100 miles on a donkey and giving birth in a stable, I am still immaculately clean and tidy, cradling my infant son, unperturbed by my surroundings. I am still young and dressed in blue.



Do you have a picture of me 30 years on? Have I aged in your eyes? Am I still calm and dressed in blue? Do you see me at the wedding feast, recognizing deep within that his time was coming and he would soon be no longer mine?

How I aged in those three years. But am I still young in your picture? Was I not grey haired as I stood at the foot of the cross? Do you know what it takes to watch your son being crucified? Do you have a picture of me – in tears, distraught. Or am I still the Mary of your Christmas cards, young and dressed in blue.

You know the end – the triumph of his resurrection, the kingdom without end – and knowing, this affects your picture of me. I am always young, dressed in blue, calm, serene, humble and willing – never allowed to show fear, hurt, anger, pain and grief.

For many, I remain the Mary of the Christmas cards. If I am called to be blessed, please remember all I stand for. As you receive your cards this Christmas, please look at me and remember that this is just the beginning.

*[sent in by Margaret H, from **Magnet, words:** Katie Baker, an abridged version of the original reflection published in Hay and Stardust, a Wild Goose publication for the Iona Community. Permissions sought.]*

**A BIG THANK YOU:** I wish to thank our minister, the Revd Louise Gough, the Revd Noel Davies and Mrs Pat D, and everyone at UCS, for their kindness, prayers, visits, phone calls and cards received during my illness at home and at Morriston and Singleton Hospitals. I am making good progress and have now moved to Bloomfield Care Home in Sketty.

With love and best wishes,  
Graham B

*We send our best wishes to Graham. It was good to see him at Evening Prayer.*

## **UPDATE FROM THE TREASURER, JON D**

### **Benevolence Payments made in October 2024**

Action for Children	£604.97
Save the Children	£545.13

### **Payments to be made in November 2024**

Swansea Prison Fellowship	£371.47
Christians against Poverty	£480.75

**Other Fundraising in November 2024** (other collections not yet finalised)  
Craft Fayre Coffee Morning £618.05 (including Gift Aid where appropriate)

**Winter 2024 edition of *Dialogue* (The Methodist Insurance Publication)**

Includes articles/features on:

- Seven Steps to Successful Fundraising
- Escape of Water and Flood Damage
- Creating Warm Spaces
- Methodist Grants Programme
- We can insure your home too

I only have one copy – let me know if you would like to borrow it – alternatively, it can be viewed at: [www.methodistinsurance.co.uk/dialogue](http://www.methodistinsurance.co.uk/dialogue)

**ADVANCE NOTICE**



- The Gower Chorale -

***THE GOWER CHORALE in UCS***

At 7.00pm on Saturday, January 25<sup>th</sup> 2025 the Gower Chorale will give a concert in UCS.

Their musical director, Dr William Reynolds, writes, 'The Gower Chorale, who in 2025 celebrate their 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, will perform a selection of much-loved choral classics, including music by Handel, Fauré, and Verdi.'

Tickets: £10.00. Proceeds will be shared between UCS and the choir.

**MADCAPS NEWS**

**Memories and Milestones**

Madcaps are delighted to announce that at long last we have found a home for our old hall lights. I am sure that some of you will recall that these lights were the generous gift of Robin H and were used not only by Madcaps but all hall users for many years to enhance our stage – if not always our productions! When the hall was refurbished, it came with a new lighting system and since that time, loath to simply discard a gift which held such an emotional link, Madcaps have been trying to find a home for what are now, of course, out of date lights. Our patience has been rewarded. They have been “sold” to the “Climate Shop – a different kind of shop” in Carmarthen.

This shop buys items which they sell to purchase trees for Africa. The goods they take in are not priced in pounds and pence but in their own currency of “Trees Planted”. Apparently, it costs 20p to purchase a tree and as a rough estimate the owner thought our lights would be worth 1000 trees and would offer employment to 60 – 80 people. I am sure this is something which would have been very much approved of by Robin, and those who will gain from the employment. And the trees planted will again be thanking him.

### **Mirth and Merriment**

*Can you find the answer to the following questions?*

- Why does lemon juice have artificial flavouring and lemon dishwashing liquid uses “real” lemons
- Why can’t women put eye make up on with their lips closed?
- Why is “abbreviation” such a long word?
- Who let the dogs out?
- How do you get to Sesame Street?
- Why doesn’t Dora the Explorer use google maps?
- What is Victoria's secret?
- Why are eggs packed in flimsy cartons and batteries secured in plastic as tough as nails?
- Why do the ABC song and ‘Twinkle, Twinkle, little star’ have the same tune?
- Why did you just sing both – just to check?

### **MADCAPS ADVENTURES OF MR TOAD**

Yes, it’s that time of year again folks. Madcaps are asking for the support of all our church family, relatives and friends, neighbours and anyone else you can think of, to come to at least one of our performances of “Madcaps Adventures of Mr Toad.” Those on stage and off stage are working incredibly hard, well at least they tell me they are, to produce a show that an audience will enjoy. However, the key, of course, is the audience. Without an audience all their effort will have been in vain, and the audience is YOU. Each one of you can make a difference. So, please come along to support us and start you Christmas by sharing the funny adventures of Mr Toad and reminding yourselves of the real meaning of Christmas. Look forward to seeing you All. Jan C



**UNITING CHURCH SKETTY**  
**Dillwyn Road, Sketty, SA2 9AE**

**MADCAPS ADVENTURES**



**OF**

**Mr**  
**TOAD**

Based on the characters from  
**The Wind in the Willows**  
by Kenneth Grahame

Written by Allan Archer  
Produced by Jan Chaplin

**THURSDAY 5th & FRIDAY 6th DECEMBER at 7pm**  
**SATURDAY 7th DECEMBER at 2pm**

**TICKETS Adults £10, children £5 ( includes refreshments)**  
**from John** Email [unitingchurchsketty@gmail.com](mailto:unitingchurchsketty@gmail.com)

## ECO (Earth Cries Out)

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### I'm Dreaming of a Green Christmas

In the run up to Christmas it's easy to get caught up in a frenzy of preparations and feel pressure to have everything perfect. Or a version of perfect thrust on us from advertisers and lifestyle magazines and programmes. It's not just the Christmas message that can get lost but also the impact the festive season can have on the environment.

Celebrating Christmas doesn't have to cost the earth and being green at Christmas doesn't turn you into the Grinch.



Here are some tips for a greener Christmas.

### Homemade Gifts

How lovely it is to receive a gift that someone has spent time and love making especially for you! My children used to love baking and wrapping tasty treats for family and neighbours and I got a kick out of it too. Crafty people and bakers have the advantage here but websites such as Pinterest have lots of ideas for all abilities. If making is not your thing, you could perhaps think about gifting time or a service and make a little book of promises.

### Buying Gifts

Try to buy gifts from sustainable sources. Peace With The Wild ([peacewiththewild.co.uk](http://peacewiththewild.co.uk)) is an example of a company offering natural eco-friendly products. Gifts from charities such as Oxfam and Crisis, for example, could also be worth considering.

### Wrapping

There are lots of ways to wrap a present including reusable boxes and bags. Fabrics can be used instead of paper and can look bright and inviting. When buying wrapping paper, try to buy the ones made from recycled paper or that are sustainably sourced. Also keep an eye out for recyclable paper. This is usually marked on the packaging.

Recycle or reuse the wrapping on the gifts you receive. (My grandmother was expert at collecting up and smoothing out used wrapping paper.) The way to test if wrapping paper is recyclable is to scrunch it up into a ball. If it stays scrunched, then it's usually recyclable. If it springs back, then it's not recyclable because it contains plastic or foil. If it's shiny, metallic or glittery it's not recyclable because it's laminated paper made from mixed materials.

If your wrapping paper is recyclable, you should remove any sticky tape, tags, bows or ribbon before recycling.

Eco friendly sticky tape is now readily available.

## Christmas Trees

There are so many options! Real? If so, cut or potted? Artificial? It's a personal choice. There's an argument for or against any option. Artificial trees which are used year after year may be a green option, particularly if they are made from recycled materials. Onco Recycled Christmas Trees ([www.oncoruk.com](http://www.oncoruk.com)) is an example of a supplier.

A relatively new trend is for renting or adopting a tree. Several producers, such as Love A Christmas Tree ([www.loveachristmastree.co.uk](http://www.loveachristmastree.co.uk)), now provide a service where a tree is delivered to you for the festive period and picked up to be returned to the farm.

If you use a cut tree, think about how to dispose of it. It could be shredded and used in the garden. (*We've got a tree in a pot which spends most of its time in its pot out in the garden and comes in for a special treat at Christmas! ed*)

## Decorations

I love my Christmas decorations. They're old friends. My oldest is a bell which is over sixty years old. Christmas celebrations just wouldn't be the same without it. So, what's the tip? Cherish your decorations. They carry precious memories. Avoid dumping them and renewing each year. I don't actually know anyone who does this, but I'm told such people exist.

Homemade decorations are great, and my tree is adorned with things that the family have made over the years. I love a bit of sparkle, and I'm

delighted that there is eco friendly glitter now available from a wide range of outlets including [www.sparkletown.co.uk](http://www.sparkletown.co.uk) and Peace With The Wild.

## Cards

A Christmas card can bring a huge amount of joy to the recipient and to the sender. Christmas cards connect us to those who are dear to us, especially those who are far away so I'm not going to suggest they are never sent. Rather, I suggest that thought is given to alternatives such as e-cards or phone calls where appropriate. When buying cards, think about the materials used. Go for recycled and/or recyclable cards from sustainable sources. For the cards you don't recycle, use them to make decorations or gift tags.

Wishing you all a greener Christmas and God's blessings,  
With love, Jude (a green friend)

## WATER FOR ZIMBABWE

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In a recent article in The Methodist Recorder there was an account of how a fundraising partnership between the West Norfolk Methodist Circuit and a village in Zimbabwe had enabled the village to have an improved water supply. One of the ministers in the circuit, the Revd Dr Rich Ncube, was brought up in the village, and so had a particular interest in the project! A twinning relationship was developed between the circuit and the Zimbabwean village.



Over recent years, this region has experienced periods of prolonged droughts as a result of changing weather patterns. After fundraising efforts in the circuit, new boreholes were drilled and, in due course, a modest water supply was

found. Initially, this could only supply a handpump 1km outside the village. But in due course, after further fundraising, an old, blocked borehole was unblocked and a new supply opened up in the village

school, which now has two small water tanks, three new taps, and a small solar pump powered by solar panels. This has been life-changing for the villagers.

Why am I telling you all this? Two reasons. One is that this year the URC Commitment for Life project is focussing on Zimbabwe and this story is a reminder of the growing challenges that people face there day by day. The second, is that the village is called Matjinge. Alice R – who sent me the article – remembers visiting Matjinge to preach one Sunday morning when she was a missionary in Zimbabwe. There is still a Methodist Mission Boarding School in the village.



Alice recalls: “About 70 years ago (!) – *Alice’s exclamation mark, not mine* – I had a preaching appointment in Matjinge, preaching in the open air with an interpreter. The only primary education in the country was provided by the church. The quality of worship was not very high in those days, but the article shows how the dogged courage and commitment of those Christians and their successors, has produced fruit. The area was always very dry, being near the Kalahari Desert, but climate change has made things really very severe now.” But shared faith can move mountains – or at least find water!

**Noel**

## **CHRISTMAS COMES OUT OF THE BOX**

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Be careful! Climb up the ladder,  
Slowly crawl into the attic,  
Look for boxes, all tattered and battered,  
Please, no complaints, don’t be so dramatic!  
Where’s the tinsel, baubles, stars, garlands,  
Candles, wreaths — last season’s bargains?  
Christmas happens once a year.

Come on, let's spread the Good Cheer!  
Oh dear! Poor Rudolph's rather bent,  
To think I thought 'twas money well spent  
Last December, don't you remember?  
I'll handle him gently with special care  
And blow away cobwebs - a fervent prayer  
Will restore him to his former glory  
He'll stand well-lit in frost crisp and hoary  
Twinkling beneath starry-spangled night  
To our neighbours' and friend's sheer delight!

Ah look! Here's a Santa made in the past,  
Red felt coat, cotton wool beard, both stuck fast!  
Angel's wings unfold, her halo's silver, still,  
Fasten her to treetop, there, you've such skill!  
Empty boxes lie strewn across the floor  
Wasn't decorating easy - not the expected chore?

Christmas is coming! Grab the bargains, empty the shelves,  
Piped music, such razz-ma-tazz, just think of yourselves,  
There's some sort of a story but, who believes it anyway?  
Bring out the food; party and open presents from a sleigh.

Pause, reflect on two thousand years or more,  
Christmas came then, not out of a box  
But in a straw-filled manger, with ass and ox  
Protecting the Jesus child Mary bore,  
Marvelled by shepherds humble and poor,  
Above the inn His star of gold brightly shone  
Bringing hope, peace and love to everyone.

Anne Whitehead © November 2024

## MARY AND PILATE: A REFLECTION FOR ADVENT

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I spent some time during the first week of November in a World Council of Churches conference held in Geneva. In my study. On Zoom. We were gathered to think about the Nicene Creed, one of the most ancient creeds of the Christian Church, dating from the 4<sup>th</sup> century. As you may remember from a previous article in the magazine, its first version was agreed in Nicea in 325AD. So 2025 is its 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary. 300 bishops came to Nicea, accompanied by priests and helpers (including some women). Just think what it involved to get all those people from across the known Christian world in 325AD to Nicea (the modern Turkish city of Iznik) – all at the same time! They came at Emperor Constantine’s invitation. He wanted to stop a heretical movement that claimed that Jesus was not fully human AND fully divine. Actually, he didn’t really care much about the theology! He wanted to stop a crisis not just for the Church, but more importantly, for him, and for the Empire. A split Church meant a split Empire and a split Empire was dangerous for his position.

We listened to a number of papers and conversations in our conference. They helped us to see why the creed was important then and why it’s still important now. There’ll be a chance next year to think a little more about all this (so be prepared to talk about what we believe!) But as I thought about the conference and at the same time prepared for leading worship in UCS on November 24<sup>th</sup>, I was struck by something that I’d been aware of before, of course, but to which I hadn’t really given too much thought.

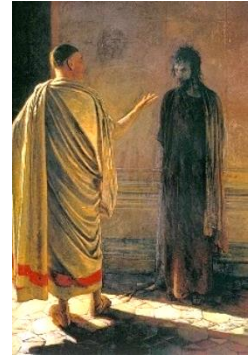
Only two historical figures (other than Jesus himself) appear in the creed. The first is Mary. The second is Pontius Pilate. And they appear very near to each other:

‘...by the power of the Holy Spirit,  
(Jesus) became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,  
and was made man.  
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried...’

Born of Mary; crucified under Pilate. One was young and vulnerable; frightened probably; innocent, unknown, and inexperienced certainly; without any influence or power in the world of the powerful. The other wielded power, though it was not his. It was Rome's power. He was frightened too, probably. Frightened that unless he did the right thing, he'd lose any power he had. Nervous of the crowds calling for Jesus to be



crucified. He may have wanted to do the right thing for Jesus, but it would probably be the wrong thing for Pilate. So he had Jesus crucified, to please the crowd and to maintain his power base. 'He handed him over...'



And the Creed remembers

them 1700 years later! In our world of power and innocence. At the heart of our faith is a young girl who grew to old age (*see earlier reflection on Mary*) having to wrestle with tears every day from the agonizing memory of watching her son dying on a cross. And Pilate too. A reminder that in the end – the end that is God's purpose and in which we hope – it is the vulnerable and powerless, like Mary, that are 'lifted up' and can 'bring down rulers (who crave absolute power – today as then) from their thrones' (*Mary's Magnificat*). So, 'We believe' and 'We have hope'.

**Noel**



All shall be well in His kingdom of peace,  
Freedom shall flourish and wisdom increase,  
Foe shall be friend when His triumph we sing,  
Sword shall be sickle when Jesus is King.

*Charles Silvester Horne (1865-1914)*