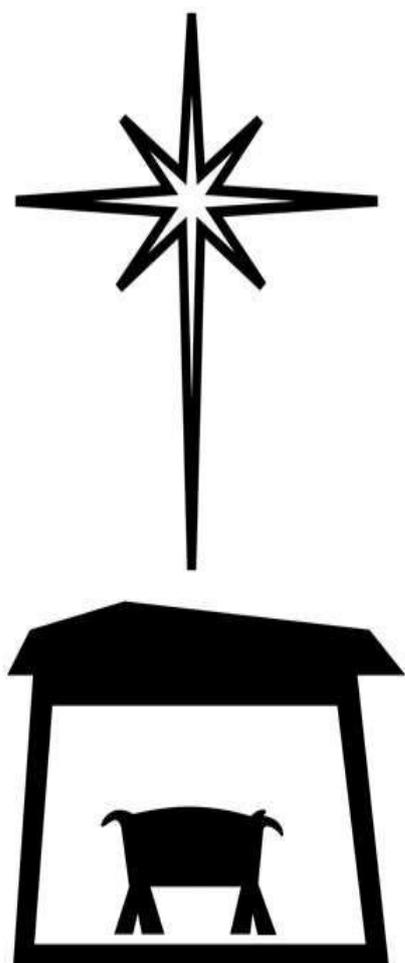


Wilbraham St Ninian's United Reformed Church

*Egerton Rd South, Chorlton-cum-Hardy,
Manchester, M21 0XJ*

December 2018 – January 2109



Christmas came simply:
a pregnant woman,
a worried father
a night birth,
a healthy child.

Just God,
unwrapped, vulnerable,
lying in a manger,
living in our world.

*Ruth Burgess "Winter", Wild Goose
Publications, Glasgow 2016*

Interim Minister
Rev Alan Poolton

Secretary
Kath Lacy
0161 860 4717



“I was hungry and you fed me”

This reflection was triggered by an appeal for donations to “The Christmas Dinners”, a project which provides Christmas dinners for care leavers across the UK. It was founded by Manchester poet Lemn Sissay, who was himself “in care”. It reminded me of the line in the title above, taken from the Lectionary Gospel text for New Year’s Day in every

Church year: Matthew 25:31-46. Here’s an extract:

³⁵I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink; I was a stranger and you received me in your homes, ³⁶naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me, in prison and you visited me.’ ³⁷The righteous will then answer him, ‘When, Lord, did we ever see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? ³⁸When did we ever see you a stranger and welcome you in our homes, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹When did we ever see you sick or in prison, and visit you?’ ⁴⁰The King will reply, ‘I tell you, whenever you did this for one of the least important of these followers of mine, you did it for me!’

Most of the language about God in our praise, prayer and worship speaks in terms of power and might and glory: all knowing, all-powerful, all-loving, all-just, and so on. And, yes, we are talking about the Creator of the cosmos and author of all life. And, yes, this parable begins by describing the coming of the Son of Man in glory to sit on his throne attended by angels. But this passage depicts this royal figure as identifying with “the least of these” and so it undermines any tendency to look for God in places of power.

Because that's not where Jesus invites us to meet, or be met by, God. This passage is shocking; it tells us to expect to see Jesus, not in places of glory and power, but in the faces of people who are disadvantaged, poor, imprisoned, and in need. And at Christmas we celebrate God's most disruptive and shocking act - coming to earth as a poor, vulnerable baby to live and eat and teach and work among the poor, the sick, the needy, the outcasts.

And this is truly "good news": God is with us, here and now; revealed in the fellowship of people we call "church", made manifest in the ordinary elements of bread and wine, and available to us in the seemingly small gestures of compassion that we offer and are offered each and every day. It may not be where we expect God to be, but it is just where we need God to be.

So, let's donate to Christmas Dinners, to the Mayor's Fund for Homeless People, to Crisis, to any number of charities and foodbanks (including our own) this Christmas, but let's not lose sight of the Jesus in this passage who, in time-honoured Biblical and Judaic tradition, demands justice for those at the bottom of the pecking order: "the least of these". The Incarnation tells us never to give up working, never to give up hope that, one day, we can build a world where homelessness, poverty and foodbanks are a distant memory - in other words, the Kingdom of God. (You knew I'd get to the Kingdom in the end!)

What difference would it make if we saw the face of Christ in all who are in need, in fact, in everyone? For us as individuals? As families? As congregations? As communities? As a nation?

Wishing you and those you love every blessing this Christmas and
New Year,

Mel

News Round up

Family & Friends' News

Margaret Edwards recently asked the congregation to pray for her daughter-in-law, **Claire**, who has endured 4 operations to alleviate a brain tumour, and had yet another operation on Wednesday 27th November. Claire's operation had taken only 3 hours, the shortest duration of the 5 operations that Claire has had, and Margaret reports that Claire was awake and "with it" in the evening. At time of writing, more can't be said or assumed, but we hope for a steady recovery. Margaret sends her heart-felt thanks to the church for supporting her in her anxiety about Claire's operation, and asks that we keep Claire and Nick, and their family, in our prayers.

Chris Burton visited **Ian Meadowcroft** at his care home in Didsbury and shared Communion with him. Ian is suffering from mouth infections but was delighted to receive Communion. Chris says but Ian is comfortable, and looking forward to receiving Communion on a regular basis. We give thanks for Chris's ministry and also that Ian is able to enjoy the experience of Holy Communion.

Fiona Royle plays the organ for us most mornings, and she has been recording hymns for those rare occasions when she can't be with us. **Chris** Burton is the skilful operator of the playback system, but it has its quirks (but our "a cappella" singing was good!). Managers have agreed that the recording system needs modernising in order to be more reliable than it currently is!

Walt Johnson attended his assessment conference for the role of Non-Stipendiary Minister at Luther King House in late November. Walt is expecting to hear the results on 7th December. We wish Walt every success in his calling and hope he recovers from the very nasty cold that he (and several others!) contracted during the conference!

Church News

We send a big “thank you” to everyone who came to decorate the church ready for Advent and Christmas on Saturday 1st December.

Commitment for Life donations on Sunday 21 October and afterwards total £615.00 so far; an additional £153 should be added through Gift Aid. The **Harvest Collection** for the Foodbank raised £275.00, and with what can be claimed under Gift Aid will reach a total of £343. Thank you to everyone who donates so generously for this valuable work, here and overseas.

Kath received a letter from our Synod Mission Enabler, Dave Fraser, thanking the Missional Partnership representatives (Kath Lacy and Walt Johnson) for entering into their commitment “prayerfully and with enthusiasm”. The search for new ordained ministers continues.

Members of the Morning Congregation enjoyed a “Count our Blessings” lunch after the service on 25th November. Food was ordered in, and the MadDonnas entertained with their latest Christmas songs. Thanks to Kath for organising the event and everyone who helped in any way.



Dates & Rotas

December 2	Rev Alan Poolton Communion
December 9	Gift Day service led by Worship Group Please bring donations for the Wood St Mission
December 16	Carol Service led by Worship Group, Elders and Congregation
December 16	Church Meeting 1.45 pm
December 23	Rev Tony Burnham
December 24	Rev Valerie Davies Christmas Eve service 11.30pm
December 30	United Service at Manley Park Methodist Church
January 6	Walt Johnson
January 13	Rev Dr Walter Houston
January 20	Stewart Graham + L'Arche Manchester Community
January 27	Philip Jones

Open Church: the church is open for quiet reflection and prayer every Thursday between 10:00am and 12:00pm

The next Church Meeting will take place on Sunday December 16th at 1.45pm. We will be voting on the latest plans for the Manse Find scheme and the admission of more new members, so please try to attend.

Readers & Readings

Taken from “Roots on the Web” Revised Common Lectionary Year C

December 2	George Morton	<i>Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalm 25:1-10; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36</i>
December 9	Joyce Henry	<i>Matthew 13:10-16 (from The Message) John 1:1 – 14</i>
December 16	Barbara Williams	<i>Zephaniah 3:14-20; Isaiah 12:2-6; Philippians 4:4-7; Luke 3:7-18</i>
December 23	Ella Burton	<i>Micah 5:2-5a; Luke 1:46b-55; Psalm 80:1-7; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-45(46-55)</i>
December 24	Chris Burton	<i>Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14 (15-20)</i>
December 30	At Manley Park Methodist	<i>1 Samuel 2:18-20,26; Psalm 148; Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 2:41-52</i>
January 6	Cathy Morgan	<i>Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7,10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12</i>
January 13	Ella Burton	<i>Isaiah 43:1-7; Psalm 29; Acts 8:14-17; Luke 3:15-17,21-22</i>
January 20	Barbara Williams	<i>Isaiah 62:1-5; Psalm 36:5-10; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11</i>
January 27	George Morton	<i>Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a; Luke 4:14-21</i>

Please check readings with the preacher in good time before the service

Thank you to Kath Lacy for producing the Readers’ Rota and Preaching Plan.

Traidcraft News: Bad and Good

Despite enormous efforts by staff, management, Fair Traders, and many churches Traidcraft's sales have been poor. Its Board of Directors have decided to continue trading under a new model from the start of 2019, aiming to build on the success of fair trade in the manner of its pioneering fair-trade founders. Sadly, it will only have 12 employees, which means that the majority of its 67 employees face redundancy. (Some have chosen voluntary redundancy, but the majority face notices of redundancy).

The new Traidcraft will establish core grocery lines, carry fewer craft lines, encourage communities to buy co-operatively and thus save on packaging, and deliver discounts through a membership model for everyone. Traidcraft will initially focus on its established partners and advocates, who are predominantly active in Christian churches. Products will be available through the online Traidcraft shop and by mail order.

Unfortunately, Traidcraft will not continue buying craft products from many producers who have supplied them for years. Its sister company, Traidcraft Exchange, is looking at ways to support these producers, especially the worst affected.

Traidcraft was born from a vision of a world where all trade is fair. Despite the sad news, its ongoing work is needed more than ever. Traidcraft will go on campaigning for trade that's fair for everyone, and working directly with people living in poverty in Africa and Asia to help them get a better deal from trade.

It's thanks to the support of people like us that Traidcraft Exchange is able to continue to make the world a better, fairer place. Traidcraft has transformed shopping in the UK, now you can find fair trade everywhere, from online shops to petrol stations. **We still believe in the power of trade to change the lives of people in developing countries. We see that power in action every day.**

Thank you to **Pat Anstis** for her faithful work in championing Fair Trade by selling Traidcraft products in church and elsewhere for many years.