

The Manse  
December 2016

Dear Friends

Christmas is fast approaching, and the time is coming when churches all over the country will be thinking about putting up Christmas trees, searching for nativity figures, and setting up crib scenes. Some people have mixed feelings about rushing into Christmas too early, without really appreciating Advent as a time of preparation, but it gives a welcoming backdrop as churches prepare to receive visitors during the festive season.

And visitors can play a part in our preparations. After all, there are lots of visitors in the Christmas story ... the angels, visiting Elizabeth and Zechariah, Mary and Joseph and the shepherds on the hills; the travellers from the East; and the mass movement of people travelling back to their family homes for the Roman census. It can be easy to forget how stressful travelling could be in those days: most people didn't travel more than a day's journey (unless they were merchants or soldiers); there weren't service stations or hotels at regular intervals; you had to carry all your provisions and equipment with you, because once you were out of your normal area you wouldn't know where you might find food or lodgings; and who knew what trouble you might meet on the way?

This year I'm inviting the churches in the Group to celebrate Posada together. Posada is a Latin American festival that remembers the travelling of Joseph and Mary (and the donkey) on their way to Bethlehem, by giving hospitality to the nativity figures, as the innkeeper gave room to two weary travellers on Christmas night.

It's an opportunity to reflect on the welcome we give to strangers, not all of whom have wanted to make a journey to this place, at this time; to think about the poor and marginalised who are vulnerable

to the decisions of people in government and the economically powerful; to think about the risk God took, sending his Son to be born to a first-time mother in an age when childbirth was a risky business, with no hospitals, no professional midwives, no understanding of hygiene – and the women who still face this situation in parts of the world today; to think about the way we welcome people into church – who don't share any faith background, who may bring questions that surprise us and attitudes that make us stop and think; to think about Jesus, "the reason for the season", and to welcome him into our hearts once more.

The innkeeper found room for Joseph and Mary with the animals – I wonder how much thought and heart-searching went into that offer? It's so easy to say "no room" when the guest rooms are full, it was probably a response Joseph and Mary heard more than once. The stable around the back was an afterthought, an attempt to be helpful to a couple in obvious need without expecting them to take it up – but it became the place where Jesus was born, a place remembered (and cleaned up!) in countless pictures on Christmas cards and crib scenes through the years – although the innkeepers have been written out of the story.

Perhaps we need to put the innkeepers back in the story this Christmas – to help us to think about the times when we find we are saying "no room", not giving the time or space to the second thoughts that might turn out to be all that God needs to work with; to help us to think about the way God can use even the most unpromising afterthought; and to remind us that the God we worship is the one who surprises earth with heaven, coming here on Christmas Day.

God bless and Happy Christmas

Stella

## MARTOCK UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

### DECEMBER

Porch

4th	11am	Morning Worship, Dr Stephen Powers	Mrs J Rees
11th	11am	Morning Worship Miss Elizabeth Beattie	Mrs D Walker
18th	11am	Carol Service, Revd Stella Hayton	Mrs W Westwood
18th	4pm	Group Carol Service at Princes Street	
25th		No Service	

### JANUARY

Porch

1st		No Service. Join with Middle Lambrook	
8th	11am	Morning Worship, Revd Stella Hayton	Mrs D Walker
15th	11am	Group Service, Templecombe	
22nd	11am	Morning Communion, Pulpit Exchange, Churches Together, Mr Chris Spracklen	Mrs W Westwood
29th	11am	Morning Worship, Mr Nigel Nichols	Mrs M Crossman

### DIARY for December

3 <sup>rd</sup>	10.30am to 12 noon	Coffee Morning in the School Room. All welcome
9 <sup>th</sup>	2pm to 4pm	Time for Tea First Birthday Party.
16 <sup>th</sup>	4pm	Acorns Nativity in the Church

### DIARY for January

13 <sup>th</sup>	2pm to 4pm	Time for Tea in the School Room
17 <sup>th</sup>	2pm	Church AGM in the Yandle Hall
25 <sup>th</sup>	2pm to 4pm	Whist Drive in the Yandle Hall

### DIARY for February

4th	10.30am to 12 noon	Coffee Morning in the School Room. All welcome
5th	11am	Morning Worship, Mr Basil Wright

## MIDDLE LAMBROOK UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

### DECEMBER 2016

4 <sup>th</sup>	11.00 am	Morning Worship at Martock URC	Dr Stephen Powers
11 <sup>th</sup>	11.00 am	Morning Worship	Mr Peter Trenchard
18 <sup>th</sup>	11.00 am 4 pm	Morning worship with Carols Carol Service at United Reformed Church, Princes Street, Yeovil	Mr Philip Andrews Revd S Hayton
25 <sup>th</sup>	11.00 am	Morning Worship at Templecombe URC	Revd S Hayton

#### Elders Duties:

4 <sup>th</sup>	Mr W Powers
11 <sup>th</sup>	Mr F Pocock
18 <sup>th</sup>	Mrs J Harris
25 <sup>th</sup>	Service at Templecombe URC

### JANUARY 2017

1 <sup>st</sup>	11.00 am	Morning Communion	Revd S Hayton
8 <sup>th</sup>	11.00 am	Morning Worship	Join with our friends at Martock URC
15 <sup>th</sup>	11.00 am	GROUP SERVICE Templecombe URC	Revd S Hayton
22 <sup>nd</sup>	11.00 am	Morning Worship for Week of Christian Unity	Revd David Gent
29 <sup>th</sup>	11.00 am	Morning Communion	Revd Paul Cattermole

#### Elders Duties:

1 <sup>st</sup>	– Mr W Powers	also Holy Communion elder
8 <sup>th</sup>	– Mr F Pocock	
15 <sup>th</sup>	– Group Service	
22 <sup>nd</sup>	– Mrs J Harris	
29 <sup>th</sup>	– Mr W Powers	Holy Communion Elder – Mrs J Harris

## STOKE SUB HAMDON UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

### DECEMBER

6 <sup>th</sup>	2.30 pm	Quarterly Church Meeting	
11 <sup>th</sup>	9.30 am	Carol Service	Nigel Nichols
18 <sup>th</sup>	9.30 am	Morning Communion	Rev Stella Hayton
<b>JANUARY</b>			
7 <sup>th</sup>	2.00 pm	Service to mark the closure of Stoke URC	

The Carol Service on 11<sup>th</sup> December will be a service of lessons and carols. Music will be provided by members of Stoke Band and “festive refreshments” will be served afterwards.

Castle Street School will hold their Carol Service at the church on 15<sup>th</sup> December at 2pm.

## TEMPLECOMBE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

### DECEMBER

4 <sup>th</sup>	11.00 am	Morning Service –	Rev Stella Hayton
11 <sup>th</sup>	11.00 am	Morning Service –	Dave Gorman
18 <sup>th</sup>	11.00 am	Morning Service – Carols of your Choice	
	4.00 pm	Group Carol Service - Yeovil	
25 <sup>th</sup>	10:30 am	Christmas Communion Service with Rev John Hayton	

### DIARY

8 <sup>th</sup>	10.00 am	Coffee Morning**	
	7.00 pm	Craft Club	
	8.00 pm	Table Tennis	
22 <sup>nd</sup>	10.00 am	Coffee Morning**	
	7.00 pm	Christmas Lights Service	
	8.00 pm	Table Tennis	

### JANUARY

1 <sup>st</sup>	10.30 am	Benefice Service	Horsington
8 <sup>th</sup>	11.00 am	Morning Service –	TBA
15 <sup>th</sup>	11.00 am	GROUP SERVICE –	Revd Stella Hayton*
22 <sup>nd</sup>	11.00 am	Morning Service -	TBA
29 <sup>th</sup>	11.00 am	Benefice Service	St Mary's

### DIARY

THURSDAYS	10.00 am	Coffee Morning**	
	7.00 pm	Craft Club	
	8.00 pm	Table Tennis	

\*\* not run by the URC

## PRINCES STREET UNITED REFORMED CHURCH YEOVIL

### DECEMBER

4 <sup>th</sup>	10.30 am	Morning Communion	Rev Dick Gray
11 <sup>th</sup>	10.30 am	Morning Worship	Rev Stella Hayton
18 <sup>th</sup>	10.30 am	Morning Worship	The Junior Church
3.30 for 4.00 pm		Carols with the Group	Rev Stella Hayton
25 <sup>th</sup>	10.30 am	Christmas Day Worship	Rev Stella Hayton

### DIARY

2 <sup>nd</sup>	9.45 – 11.45 am	Coffee Morning	Médecins Sans Frontières
3 <sup>rd</sup>	10 – 11.45 am	Coffee Morning	Leprosy Mission
6 <sup>th</sup>	2.00 pm	Friendship Club	Rev Stella Hayton
7 <sup>th</sup>	7.30 pm	Healing Service	62 Westfield Road
9 <sup>th</sup>	9.45 – 11.45 am	Coffee Morning	Church Funds
10 <sup>th</sup>	10 – 11.45 am	Coffee Morning	Leprosy Mission
13 <sup>th</sup>	12.30 pm	Friendship Club	The Gateway
16 <sup>th</sup>	9.45 – 11.45 am	Coffee Morning with Good News Library	Church Funds
17 <sup>th</sup>	10 – 11.45 am	Coffee Morning	Leprosy Mission
20 <sup>th</sup>	2.00 pm	Friendship Club	Carols for All
	7.30 pm	Bible Study	Hillgrove Avenue
23 <sup>rd</sup>	9.45 – 11.45 am	Coffee Morning	Church Funds
30 <sup>th</sup>	9.45 – 11.45 am	Coffee Morning	Church Funds

### JANUARY

1 <sup>st</sup>	10.30 am	Morning Communion	Rev John Hayton
8 <sup>th</sup>	10.30 am	Morning Worship	Baptist Church
15 <sup>th</sup>	11.00 am	GROUP SERVICE at Templecombe	Rev Stella Hayton
22 <sup>nd</sup>	10.30 am	Morning Worship	Baptist Church
29 <sup>th</sup>	10.30 am	Morning Worship	Baptist Church

### DIARY

3 <sup>rd</sup>	2.30 pm	Friendship Club	Members
4 <sup>th</sup>	7.30 pm	Healing Service	Westfield Road
6 <sup>th</sup>	9.45 – 11.45 am	Coffee Morning	Murray Parish Trust
10 <sup>th</sup>	2.30 pm	Friendship Club	
11 <sup>th</sup>	7.30 pm	Church Meeting	
13 <sup>th</sup>	9.45 – 11.45 am	Coffee Morning	Murray Parish Trust
17 <sup>th</sup>	2.30 pm	Friendship Club	AGM
17 <sup>th</sup>	7.30 pm	Bible Study	Hillgrove Avenue
20 <sup>th</sup>	9.45 – 11.45 am	Coffee Morning with Good News Library	Murray Parish Trust
24 <sup>th</sup>	2.30 pm	Friendship Club	Members
24 <sup>th</sup>	7.30pm	Elders' Meeting	To be confirmed
27 <sup>th</sup>	9.45 – 11.45 am	Coffee Morning	Murray Parish Trust

## **Charity of the Year 2017**

We decided at our November church meeting that our charity for 2017 will be the Murray Parish Trust. This is the charity set up by James Murray and Sarah Parish in memory of their daughter Ella to fund a new children's emergency and trauma department at University Hospital Southampton for the South of England.

## **Friday Coffee Mornings**

Church meeting also decided that the proceeds from all Friday coffee mornings should go to the charity of the year, except when there an appeal for a charity that Friday eg Comic Relief, Royal British Legion, Children in Need.

## **Church Clearance**

The Management Committee is leading the effort to empty the Princes Street building by the end of June. Please help by removing anything owned by you and loaned to the church by the end of 2016. Please contact Colin Gray or Ray Brown if you have any queries.

## **STOP PRESS**

On the 10<sup>th</sup> December Eileen Bonnett will be holding a significant birthday (90) and Carol will be holding open house if people would like to go along.

## **OUT ALONG LEA**

*"Arise, shine; for your light has come,  
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.  
For darkness shall cover the earth,  
and thick darkness the peoples;  
but the Lord will arise upon you,  
and his glory will appear over you.  
Nations shall come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.  
- Isaiah 60 v1-3*

One Saturday in December at Sophie and Angel's place, it was time to decorate the Christmas tree. In the morning, their father had dug up the tree he had planted back in the garden after Twelfth Night the previous Christmas and had potted it up into the biggest pot he could find, vowing that this was probably the last year he was going to be able to do this, as the tree was getting too big. However, this was what he had also said for the two previous Christmases, thus bringing upon his head remonstrations from his wife about being too tight-fisted to buy a new tree. Not to be beaten by

such hurtful truths, he and Angel had nearly strained themselves lifting the potted tree, and had then manoeuvred it through the front door. Bernhard Cribbins' "Fred", who readers may recall had considerable trouble in shifting a piano with his fellow removal men, would have been proud of their exploits, which involved a break for a cup of tea and chocolate biscuits before the second stage of shifting their burden through another door to its resting place in the corner of the front room. Eventually, after much heaving and struggling and shifting of the coffee table and various arm chairs that other careless family members *surely* could have had the fore-thought to move for them, seeing that they could *surely* have seen what was going on, father and son finally succeeded in their exploits.

"But we can hardly see the telly!" Sophie had exclaimed, still trying to stop the laughing that had afflicted her while the two unqualified interior designers had been re-positioning furniture around the over-sized tree. Any concept of *feng shui* had gone right out the window, almost along with the standard lamp at one point. "Whoever sits in that chair there is gonna get a pine needle stuck right up their nose! And the top is a little bit bent over on the ceiling, isn't it? I suppose we can't cut it off or it would look silly!"

"Not any more silly than it looks already in this little room!" Angel had replied in tone of mock tragedy.

"Yes, I reckon after *next* Christmas I'll have to call it a day for this tree" his father had then said sadly, whilst shrugging, pulling a face of disappointment and putting his hands in his pockets.

"OH DAA-AAD!" the children had vented at him in unison. But, of course, he had been joking, hadn't he?

After lunch, Sophie and Angel set to the task of decoration. Some years before, their mother would have supervised this activity, handing the various items to be hung on the tree to each of her children in turn, but now they were old enough to do it on their own. Even so, Sophie was instructed to hang the majority of the glass baubles, due to Angel's innate ability to drop them on the floor.

"No Susanna acting like Athos from *The Three Musketeers* to help us this year then?" queried Angel, picking up a fluffy red reindeer with a golden cord coming out of its back.

"She's out with her folks today – gone doing their Christmas shopping. I wanted to go with her but then I decided that that was no good or else I'd probably end up seeing what she's going to get me!" answered Sophie.

"My dear, is it not over-presumptuous of you to think that she *is* going to get you something?" shot back Angel in his gentleman-from-a-period-drama voice.

"You know so little of our friendship, brother. And, if you will condescend to permit me to say so, it doesn't become you to speak so bluntly, and especially to your sister," retorted Sophie, turning on her mildly offended lady-in-a-period-drama voice and diction.

"Pah! What do I care?! She'll probably get you some dreadful carbuncle to vanity. Perhaps a new brooch for your shawl when you have at least five thousand of them already," continued Angel, warming to his role and flourishing a gaudy purple and green bauble under his sister's nose to help him make his point.

"You fancy her really," replied Sophie, slyly.

"Hey, you've gone all out of character now" garbled Angel quickly. "Where do you want this one?" he continued, changing the subject.

"Next to that fella with the big red face if you like. Oh, sorry, that's your face, I thought it was Father Christmas's! Ha-ha-ha! Or should I say Ho-Ho-Ho!"

"You'll be doing the rest of this yourself in a minute" growled Angel. "Now, where's that bag of tinsel?"

"I think mum had it last. She uses so many pieces over the pictures that there won't be much left for the tree if we're not careful. And this tree has got so big now that we're gonna need all the decorations we can get."

"Oh it'll be alright" dismissed Angel, surveying their handiwork so far. "Dad's got the lights to put on it yet."

"Oh yeah!" said Sophie with renewed excitement. "I haven't seen them, but he says he's got some new LED ones. I'd forgotten that! They're gonna be smashing."

"Hmm. I'm not so sure about that" pondered Angel. "You know how they've replaced the fluorescent tubes with them things at school?"

"Yes"

"And how they make Mrs Thompson shine like she's been varnished?"

"Well, she has got a pale complexion. And that make-up she wears doesn't do much for-"

"But they're incredibly bright!" interrupted Angel.

"Ah, I see what you mean" cottoned-on Sophie.

"And *we'll* be having them in the front room!"

"Ooo-yeah. Well, we'll have to see. Maybe they tone 'em down a bit for Christmas trees?"

"I dunno. What I do know is that we seem to go from one extreme to the other with lights nowadays. There's the low-energy light bulbs that take a while to warm up and then aren't that bright when they do warm up, and then, at the other end of the scale, there's these LEDs that are brighter than Mr Jones' 1970s wallpaper!"

“He says it cheers up the walls in the cottage seeing that the windows are so tiddly” reasoned Sophie.

At that moment, their father came into the room, carrying a large box, which, given the pictures and wording on its outside, clearly contained the much-discussed new light emitting diode (LED) lights. He put it down on the one bit of floor space left in the front room and started ripping along the clear tape holding the top flaps of the box together. To make some extra space, Angel left the room to hunt for the bag of tinsel.

“These are going to look great!” said the electrician, stopping to rub his hands together and smile widely at his daughter. Sophie raised her eyebrows and puffed out her cheeks. “Whassamatter?” asked her father, in the high-pitched voice that he had always used to ask her this question ever since she was a little baby. Indeed, he had seen these expressions from his daughter on many, many occasions before and so knew that something was worrying her. Sophie approached the box.

“But they’re quite big” she said, warily. “I thought they’d be smaller than that.”

“But we’ve got a big tree”

“Wait a minute!” said Sophie with even more concern. “It says here these lights are for outdoors. Did you know that?”

“Yes.”

“But our tree is indoors.”

“It is this year.”

“This year?”

“Yes. Next year it’ll be too big to be indoors, or so *some* folks say, and so these lights will be alright on it when its outside. I thought I’d run the cable out from an upstairs window”

“Ahha”

“In the meantime I think they’ll be alright in here. Now where’s Angel? He’ll be small enough to crawl in under this tree to get to the plug socket... .. oh, let’s just put them round anyway and save time...”

Before long it was time for the big switch-on.

“I think we should have tried them before putting them on the tree” warned Sophie.

The children prepared themselves, or rather Sophie stood back whilst Angel crawled under the tree to plug in and flick the switch.

“Ah, here’s your mum and old Mr Jones coming up the path” said their father, glancing out the window into the quickly darkening December afternoon. “She must have invited him back in for coffee and mince pies after taking him shopping. That’ll be nice. Hey, we can see what they think of our lights! Quick, turn ‘em on Angel!”

And on they went. To quite an effect. Mr Jones visibly jumped back in amazement. But the surprise on Sophie's mother's face subsided to a grimace as she witnessed her front room being turned into something akin to a party dancefloor.

"I told you they'd be bright" said Angel. "And now at least two people who walked in darkness have seen a great light!"

It wasn't long before the two shocked shoppers entered the front room.

"Grief! What were you lot thinking about?" demanded Sophie's mother of her family.

"Wasn't our fault!" shouted the children, laughing and pointing at their father.

"Err, hum..." began the guilty parent.

"Well, it makes me think about the shepherds on the hillside that first Christmas night in Bethlehem" put in Mr Jones, coming to his rescue. He stroked his beard a few times and then continued: "They were shocked by a sudden, great light shining from the sky. It turned out to be the angel of the Lord, and the glory of the Lord shone all around. You can't imagine how scared those shepherds must have been."

"It must have been overwhelming" said Sophie.

"But the angel starts with very comforting words, 'Do not be afraid', he says, before telling them the good news of the birth of Jesus, the Messiah, the Saviour of world. However, there's a bit more to come, because then a whole load more angels appear, praising God for his most wonderful plan that was coming to fruition. How much light must that have been to behold?"

"It would have put my LEDs in the shade, that's for sure" said Sophie's father with a smile. "Yes, Christmas is all about light. Both the physical kind, what with those angels and then the star that the wise men followed, but also in terms of enlightenment. The Light of the World coming to be with us and enlighten us of God's tremendous love."

"The best Light of all" confirmed Mr Jones.

S.J.P.

