

WHEATLEY URC NEWSLETTER



DECEMBER 2016

Covering Thoughts

The strong dark and light tones in this painting made me think how much our lives depend on contrasts.

We feel up one day and for no apparent reason down on another. There may be physical factors: illness or the weather, pressure of too many things to do or not enough positive things to look forward to. There may be emotional factors: we have achieved unexpected success and are highly elated, or unmerited criticism and feel put down. All these personal experiences are a natural part of the human condition and also of our spiritual journey.

*What about when our feelings are influenced by outside conditions: a tense social or political situation, the suffering of others near and far? It is so important to try hard to empathise with others but often it is difficult to let go of the weight of emotions you are left with after **sharing another's pain.***

As in other seasons of the year Advent is a time of contrasts. I do not need to remind you of the things you enjoy and those you dread! Suffice it to say that we would all benefit from moments of stillness in which to recharge our batteries for the stressful activities, and the space to recognize the wonder of each and every contrast we experience – good and bad.

The retelling of the Christmas story can bring us close to understanding the incarnation. However it can be told in such a way that it is removed from the realm of our human experience, and far from our contemporary world. But notice the contrasts there: the fear as well as the joy, the suspicion as well as the trust, the journeying and the sense of arrival. We can empathize with all these contrasting emotions and we may experience them for ourselves, but it is important to recognize that Christmas is not just about a baby and miraculous events, it is about recognizing the divine in every single human experience.

Christine

Dear Friends

Have you ever heard of a cobweb party? It was new to me. I thought it might have something to do with inviting your friends and neighbours round to see who could find the most cobwebs in those corners of the house we never **notice (well, I don't) when doing the housework. But no: it was apparently an** old Christmas tradition, in which each family member was assigned a colour, then shown to a room criss-crossed with yarn of varying colours. The aim was **to find your colour and follow it to its end, where you'd find a small gift** wrapped up for you. In a household full of children it must have been rather chaotic and a lot of fun. And no spider would be harmed in the process.

Why do we give presents at Christmas? The Romans gave them at the midwinter feast of Saturnalia, and early Christians may have incorporated this into their Christmas celebrations, which, as so often, were grafted on to an existing religious festivity. But they also relate to the visit of the three magi, who, according to St Matthew, offered gold, frankincense and myrrh to **the Christ child. It probably wasn't until the Victorian period, though,** that the modern custom began in earnest. At this time of year my mother is prone to lamenting that the giving of presents has lost much of its point. Once, presents were something special and brought excitement and genuine **surprise. She's remembering childhood days,** of course; but also times when there was never anything much to spare out of the weekly budget, and a little luxury, normally out of reach, could light up the day with unexpected pleasure.

She's right (mothers usually are); but it needn't dampen our preparations. We can relive something of the spirit of Christmases past through our own children and grandchildren in the build-up to the great day. But present-giving was never intended to be an end in itself, let alone a competition in **generosity or a display of wealth. We don't, and certainly shouldn't, measure** the love we have for one another by the size of presents given and received. So if anything of the original spirit of the season is to survive, however dimly, amid the bright lights, Santas, sleighs and decorations, we could usefully remind ourselves that we are giving presents because of what we have been given; given in this child, born in poverty, who would die in ignominy, and yet whose life-giving power is the true reason for the celebration. The lights tell us, if we will look with the eyes of faith, that this is a time of unaccustomed light in the darkness. **'At this dark season, full of frost and fire', as the late,**

great poet Sir Geoffrey Hill described it in one of his sonnets, it is good for the lights to sparkle and glow. And even if present-giving is not what it was, because our circumstances have changed, there are many presents we can give which cost nothing and cannot be bought: a gift of hope for someone who has none; a gift of friendship for the lonely; a gift of peace for those who know only conflict; a gift of love for those who are unloved.

The pattern of the season follows the Church's year: Advent, a time of anticipation; Christmas, a day of celebration, and then, as the new year begins, Epiphany, the showing forth, the unwrapping, if you like, of the greatest gift of all.

May Christmas be a time of refreshment and blessing for you all.

Colin

“Longest Night Service” on Thursday 22 December at 6 pm

This is a new service which is also called **“Blue Christmas”** from **“having the blues”**.

At this time of year, the constant refrain of family, happy gatherings, celebrations and affluence can rub salt into the wounds of many people who are dealing with the death of a loved one, are facing life after divorce or separation, are coping with unemployment, are living with cancer or some other serious disease. There are many such situations of loss and emotional **trauma in people's life and parties, big family reunions and joviality** are therefore painful, inappropriate and unwelcome for them. A Longest Night service recognises and honours the fact that for many, the approaching Christmas holiday does not bring with it the joy and buzz that is advertised on television, in shops and in greeting cards. It therefore aims to create a sacred space for people living through such dark times.

The service has a reflective and meditative feel and comprises readings, music and meditations. It also uses candles, with people in the congregation invited to come forward and light a candle in memory of someone or to mark an event in their lives. In short, the service hopes to be a time where participants have an opportunity to grieve, but also to experience light and hope. Even if it is a Christian-inspired service, everyone in the community is invited to participate and experience a quiet, spiritual time during an otherwise very busy season.



“Synod calling”

...the second of a series

As a Synod, we try to support one another in many ways. Our Development and Support Officers, Children and Youth Work Development Officers, Property Officers and Employment Adviser all support the work of local churches. But we also rely on volunteers to enable us to plan together, work together and share our resources with one another.

For Example:

- At the time of writing this we are looking forward to a visit from Bishop Chomba from Zambia, and exploring exciting possibilities for closer working with the United Church of Zambia. This would not have happened without the work of our World Church Group.
- Mission Development Group is looking at how God may be calling us to serve the new housing developments that are planned for parts of the Synod.

You can find out more about the work we do by looking at the Synod website <http://wessexsynodurc.org.uk/>

When we meet as a Synod next March, we will have a list of Nominations to approve; volunteers who give their time and talents to serve us all.

But we still have gaps in the list. In particular, some of our working groups are looking for a volunteer to take the minutes of their meetings.

If you are interested in serving God in this way, or know someone else who might find this a rewarding thing to do, please contact Sue Brown to find out more.

clerk@urcwessex.org.uk or 01329 232454.



Wheatley Singers

Dear Lovely Members of Wheatley URC,

Now that Wheatley Singers have completed their Howard Goodall concert at St Mary's last Saturday, may I draw your attention to the next opportunity to hear more exciting live choral music, locally. Currently I am also singing with The Lord Williams Festival Chorus and our next concert entitled "**Starry Nights**" is at 7.30 pm on Saturday 3rd December in Lord Williams Upper School Concert Hall.

We are singing **Karl Jenkins, "Stella Natalis"** and **Ralph Vaughan Williams,**

"Fantasia on Christmas Carols". We have the excellent **Ealing Symphony Orchestra** playing with us again, and we shall be conducted, as always, by our choir master **John Gibbons**. There will be the usual large raffle and bar facility for hot and cold drinks.

I think it's going to be a really good (and affordable) evening with tickets priced at £13 (Concessions £10, & under 18's £1 only), which can either be obtained through me in advance, online at lordwilliamsfestivalchorus.org or by phoning Rosemary on 01844 344083

Do come if you can,

Tony.



CAROL SINGING at Lunchtime

The two Tuesday lunch clubs hosted by our church will be enjoying Christmas dinners in the church hall this month.

Please come along to join in singing well-known carols after the lunches on TUESDAY 13th and/or TUESDAY 20th December.

Contact either Laurence Devlin (13th December) or Catherine Harding (20th December) for further details.

There will be Carol Singing in ASDA supermarket on the 17th December from 10.00 – 11.30 am and afterwards outside the Merry Bells, Wheatley High Street, for half an hour.

I hope you will enjoy one or more of these events and on behalf of Wheatley Area Churches I would like to wish everyone a very happy Christmas, always remembering those for whom Christmas can be a very difficult time.
Edna Ackroyd, Chair, Wheatley Area Churches

Wheatley Area Churches – Christmas events

Christmas is fast approaching so here are some of the events produced for the festive season across our area.

St Mary's, Wheatley, December, Friday 9th, 7.30 pm; Saturday 10th, 2.00 pm and 6.00pm

'A Christmas Carol' produced by Kit Arnold

Tickets are available from Kit Arnold, tel. 01844339693 or e-mail Jonathan Barker at jonathanbarker@gmail.com. Tickets £7.50, concessions and children £5.00, family ticket £20.

St Bartholomew's, Holton, 14TH December, 7-30 pm

A Celebration Of Christmas Music given by Musica Viva, directed by Roger Simmonds, organist, Peter Foster; both ex-Heads of Music, Wheatley Park School. There will be carols to sing and the evening will finish with mince pies and mulled wine.

Tickets are available from Edna Ackroyd, 01865-872198 and Cecilia Hulse, 01865-272685. Adults £10, students and children £5, family ticket £20.

Wheatley Area Churches

Joseph And The Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat

Following the success of *Godspel* in the Spring of last year, Wheatley Area Churches are planning to **stage Andrew Lloyd Webber's hit musical *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat* in St Mary's Church, Wheatley**, at the end of April 2017. The show, which is packed full of memorable numbers such as *Any Dream Will Do* and *Close Every Door*, will feature the same production team as *Godspell*, with musical directors Ed and Alexandra Hewitt, director Peter Fanning and the Wheatley Community Choir under the direction of Rachel Cave.

Auditions: Actors and singers are warmly invited to audition. Auditions will take place in the URC Church on Sunday 11th December from 2.30 pm. Further details may be obtained by emailing joseph.wheatley2017@gmail.com.

Behind the scenes: We are planning to start choir rehearsals on Monday 9th January in the URC Hall, and will continue on Monday evenings throughout the Spring Term (with the exception of half term, 13th February). We like to have a short break in the rehearsals for refreshment, but time is always short and it would be really helpful to have some non-singing volunteers to make tea and coffee. I am intending to set up a rota for this - if you would be **willing to help, please contact me on 07976 106944, or on the 'Joseph' email** above.

Nearer the time, there will be plenty of other things to do, so please do get in touch if you are interested in being involved.

Ruth Burdet

Church Calendar for December 2016

Everyone is invited to stay for coffee or tea after 10am Sunday services.
Traidcraft stall on occasional Sundays.

Date	4 th Dec.	11 th Dec.	18 th Dec.	Christmas Eve	Christmas Day
Service	Morning Service with H.C.	Morning Service	Morning Service with H.C.	Carol Service	Morning Service
Time	10 am	10 am	10 am	6.00pm	10.00am
Worship Leader	Revd. Pauline Main	Richard Bainbridge	Revd. Colin Thompson	Revd. Colin Thompson	Richard Bainbridge
Vestry Elder	Phyllis Williams	Ellen Webster	Ann Hardiman	Liz Barry	Joan Kidd
Welcomer	Pauline Shelley	John Kidd	Laurence Devlin	Phyllis Williams	Charles Bennett
Steward	Zena Knight	Moira Watson	Barbara Joiner	Tom Goss	Andy Walkey
Reader	Catherine Harding	Robert Harding	Chris Shelley		Barbara Joiner
Prayers	Barbara Joiner	Tom Goss	Bobbie Stormont		Robert Harding
Flowers	Barbara Joiner	Team Decoration	Team	Team	Team

For an antidote to Christmas stress there will be a quiet reflective Advent evening with refreshments at 3 Barns Close Holton at the earlier time of 7pm on Sunday December 18th - everyone welcome.

In this season of goodwill we would like to entertain people for coffee or tea and give them the opportunity to enjoy work in the studio. If you feel like coming individually or in a small group just give us a ring. (872868).
best wishes,
Christine and Richard.

Common Lectionary Readings for December 2016

Note: leaders may choose to use other readings.

Date	4 th December	11 th December	18 th December	25 th December Christmas Day
Old Testament	Isaiah 1: 1-10.	Isaiah 35: 1-10.	Isaiah 7: 10-16.	Isaiah 52: 7-10.
Psalms	Psalms 72: 1-7 & 18-19.	Psalms 146: 5-10.	Psalms 80: 1-7 & 17-19.	Psalms 98.
New Testament	Romans 15: 4-13.	James 5: 7-10.	Romans 1: 1-7.	Hebrews 1: 1-4.
Gospel	Matthew 3: 1-12.	Matthew 11: 2-11.	Matthew 1: 18-25.	John 1:14. Luke 2: 1-14

News of the Church Family

Kit Rasmussen has been selected as Captain of the Balliol College team in the next series of University Challenge.

We were delighted to welcome Hendrik Petrus Eloff into the church family **by Baptism on 20th November. We pray for God's blessing on him and his family.**

Please remember in your prayers the **members of Liz Barry's** Pastoral Care List: Christine & Richard Bainbridge, David & Gillian Herring, Pat Simpson, Annette Wright, Bobbie Stormont & Tom Goss.

We also ask you to pray for the members of the Communications Team, Phyllis Williams, Christine Bainbridge, Barbara Joiner, Zena Knight and Moira Watson.

The deadline for the January newsletter is 6pm on Sunday 18th December. Please send email copy to newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk Paper copy may be handed to Barbara or Andy.

Bi-blog” by Laurence Devlin

11 Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. ² And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³ **And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar.** ⁴ **Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.”** ⁵ The LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. ⁶ And the LORD said, **“Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.** ⁷ **Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.”** ⁸ So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. ⁹ Therefore it was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

The conventional interpretation of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11: 1-9) is that humanity arrogantly challenged God by building a tower “with its head reaching up to the heavens” (v.4). As a punishment God decides to “scatter” human beings to all corners of the earth and “confuse” them with many languages so that they could not understand each other any longer. This interpretation showing the foolish residents of Babel raising a clenched fist in defiance towards heaven, has been prevalent not only in the long history of Jewish and Christian thought but also in many western literary works by Milton, Kafka, Dostoyevsky and even Jacques Derrida, the king of “deconstruction”!

However, despite this seemingly quasi-unanimous consensus, modern biblical thinking has proposed an alternative meaning which I personally find quite compelling because I could never understand how having different languages was a punishment! To my mind, different languages are not only a tremendously interesting source of cultural wealth but also the obvious proof of the immense creativity of the human spirit, something that presumably God himself created and therefore approved of. So how could that diversity be a punishment?

Other features in the conventional interpretation of Babel are also puzzling. For example, if the Tower is such an affront to God, why not simply destroy it! In the Old Testament, Yahweh is never averse to exert punishment through destruction including entire cities (Sodom and Gomorrah) or even the whole of humankind with a catastrophic flood. But here, the big tower, such a symbol, apparently, of ambition and excessive pride, is left still **standing... Strange. Furthermore, our text says in the first verse that the people of the earth had “one language and the same words” which is in total contradiction of what happens in the previous chapter (ch.10) which relates the dispersion of mankind to other territories after the Flood: the families of Noah’s sons and their descendants re-populate the earth, spreading in different lands, creating different nations and “speaking their own distinct languages” (Gen.10 v. 5, 20 and 31). So why suddenly do we read that “now the whole earth had one language”?** Did something dramatic happen during that gap? Yes, indeed: The domination of the Assyrian empire!

It is a feature of most empires and domination systems to impose one ideology, one way of thinking and therefore *one uniform language* as the vehicle of that ideology and way of thinking. It happened in ancient times with the Egyptians, the Greeks and the Romans and it has happened in modern times with colonisation in Africa and Latin America. The Assyrian Empire in the time of Ashurbanipal was no exception and might have been, in fact, one of the first empires to do this: according to an inscription found in Turkey on a clay cylinder of the 7th century BC, king Sargon II is reported to boast **“Populations of the four quarters of the world with strange tongues and incompatible speech, whom I had taken as booty at the command of Ashur my Lord, I caused to accept a single voice.” The Assyrians asserted their supremacy by insisting that their language was the only one used by the populations they had defeated. And this is the situation we see at the beginning of the story of Babel: *subjugated by the Assyrian empire, the people must speak the same language.* Uniformity rules OK!**

However, among that general subjugation, one splinter-group decides to **rebel and “migrating from the East” (v.2) finally settles** in the land of Shinar where they start building not only a big tower but, the text says, an entire **city in order “to make a name for themselves” and build a more permanent settlement.** They do that by inventing an extraordinary new building method: Instead of the adobe bricks commonly used to build the famous ziggurat

temples of Mesopotamia - which overtime crumbled and dissolved through the action of rain and sun - they “baked” their clay bricks in a kiln, which made them as “hard and durable as stone and they use bitumen for mortar” (verse 3). The use of these bricks made the construction of giant building projects with much higher structures not only possible but allowed much more permanent and much more *secure* settlements. Being secure must have been a constant preoccupation for people who had fresh in their mind the terrible memory of the Flood, the most destructive event that ever occurred to mankind till then.

God is so impressed by what he sees that he “come down” to have a look (!!!) and says that if these people can do this, they will be able to do anything on earth (v. 6). Could it be that God is not alarmed and angry but full of admiration? In any case, he decides to “disperse” them (a much better translation than “scatter”) and “mix” the languages of the builders (again a much better translation than “confuse” or “confound”). This is done NOT to punish them but rather to spread their creativity and ingenuity and create **new civilisations and cultures all over the world. In other words, God’s action is neither a judgment or a curse upon the human race nor a catastrophe which dooms humanity to confusion and chaos but rather God’s design for cultural diversity in the world.** In a way God is not creating a new state of affairs but re- establishing the individuality of the seventy languages and cultures described in Genesis 10. It also shows that the collective power of **the Assyrian empire can, with God’s help, be defeated by the creativity of some individuals.**

Since the early church Fathers, it has been commonplace to contrast the story of the Tower of Babel with the story of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-12) when the Spirit as tongues of fire, descends upon those who are gathered together and who start speaking other languages. But Pentecost is not simply the positive reversal of the Babel story as it has often been said. At Pentecost, the people do not suddenly start to speak one language (as in the beginning of the story of Babel) but they hear their own language spoken and therefore understand what is being proclaimed. Therefore, diversity is not abolished but rather vindicated and this *in both stories*: At the beginning of the Babel episode, they all spoke one language and were all working on the same project but at the end, they can no longer understand each other so they go their separate ways to start new projects and new cities all over the world. In

the Pentecost narrative, they “were all together in one place” (and presumably speaking the same language) but at the end, these same people are speaking a variety of languages that those present can understand and then glorify God. Uniformity is banished in favour of diversity!

What we see in both stories is therefore the beginning of a new age: After the Flood, the earth has been re-created and the creative individuals of Babel are sent to the four corners of that earth to create diverse cultures. At Pentecost, the disciples empowered by the Spirit are able to go forth into the world to announce the good news in different languages, be understood and therefore proselytise.



Many thanks for all the generous contributions for our efforts towards sending Christmas boxes to those in need, through the Trussell Trust. We were able to pack and send sixteen boxes, which was wonderful.
The Pulse Youth Group



Dear All,

I don't know how many of you are aware that our church (along with most other churches and other public buildings) is noted as a key place in Pokemon Go. We have come across players (youngsters with their parents in a nearby car) at the church, but they skid-addle as soon as we turn up.

Anyway Mark and Elliot think it would be nice to show that we know they come and Elliot has made a poster that they would like to put on the outside notice board. Before doing so I thought it best to run this idea past you all.

Phyllis

OCCASIONAL EVENTS IN DECEMBER

1 st Dec.	Thursday	10.00am-12.00 7.15pm	Coffee in the hall church open Elders meet
4 th Dec.	Sunday	8.00am 2.30-4.30pm	Morning Meditation, Foodbank Afternoon Tea in hall
5 th Dec.	Monday	2.00 – 4.00pm	Not So Young Club
13 th Dec.	Tuesday	1.00pm	Christmas Lunch Club Two
19 th Dec.	Monday	2.00 -4.00pm	Not So Young Club Christmas Party
20 th Dec.	Tuesday	1.00pm	Christmas Lunch Club
22 nd Dec.	Thursday	6.00pm	Longest Night Service

WEEKLY EVENTS

(NB Youth activities, Choir around the Piano and Wheatley Singers are term-time only)

Brownies & Rainbows (Term time)	Monday 5.30pm to 7pm
Choir Around the Piano (Term Time)	Monday 7.30pm to 9 pm
Carers and Toddlers (Term Time)	Monday 9.30am to 11.30am
Wheatley Singers (Term Time)	Tuesday 7.10pm to 9pm
Pre-School Music Group (Term time)	Wednesday 9.30am and 10.30 am
Guides (Term time)	Wednesday 7pm to 8.30pm
Prayers and Breakfast	Thursday 8.00am
Mindfulness Sitting Group	Thursday 9.00am to 9.40am
Brownies & Rainbows (Term Time)	Thursday 5pm to 6.30pm
Table Tennis	Friday 10.30am to 12noon
Hymn Practice	Sunday 9.30-9.45am
Pulse Youth Group	Sunday 7.30-9.00pm

Disclaimer: The editors of this newsletter welcome letters, articles and announcements from individuals and organisations but reserve the right to publish or not, and to edit.



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