

WHEATLEY URC NEWSLETTER



DECEMBER 2018

Covering Thoughts

As we enter Advent we come to a period we associate with waiting, and for many of us waiting is a time of frustration. We may not know what the waiting will lead to and just what we can do in preparation.

As Jesus waited on that final night in the garden of Gethsemane the waiting was clouded by fear. He might have wished for more support from his friends but it was something he had to wrestle with himself. What did he say to those friends when they awoke? Watch and pray that you are not tempted to go astray.

So this Advent I am thinking of the positive side of waiting – the watching that goes along with it. Now that the clocks have gone back it is no effort to watch for the dawn, and as the day rolls on we can choose to keep our eyes open and our senses alert to watch and to pray our way through the beautiful and the challenging.

There is in me a tendency to close my eyes to the unpleasant. Perhaps it is the same for you. But to face up to things with curiosity can be very liberating and I like to think of a phrase from Music by Ralph Waldo Emerson:

***In the dark and cold of things,
There always, always something sings.***

So let us sing our way through Advent, cheering up the waiting time, and making the message of Christmas an everyday experience.

Christine

PASTORAL LETTER

I find myself writing this letter just after the commemoration of the centenary of the Armistice in 1918 and wondering what that first peacetime Christmas after four years of terrible suffering and slaughter can have felt like. Searching the internet I lighted on a poem written by Helen M. Alexander, entitled 'Christmas 1918' and published that December. Hardly anything is known about her, except that she was a nurse who tended wounded and dying soldiers and died soon after the war ended, perhaps a victim of the Spanish Flu epidemic:

Thanks be to God who did His aid impart,
That we might persevere with steadfast heart,
Seeing the end with clear undaunted eyes,
E'en when the blackest clouds had filled our skies.

Thanks be to God that those we loved the best,
Some living yet – some entered into rest -
In that dread hour made with unfaltering voice
Whether for Life or Death, the hero's choice.

Thanks be to God for those who come again,
Preserved by Him by air and land and main,
Thanks, too, for those whose sacred memory
Makes real the dream of Immortality.

Thanks be to God that now the Child is given,
As very Prince of Peace from highest Heaven,
That with the joy, that greets Emanuel's birth,
Mingles once more the joy of Peace on Earth.

OK, it's not great poetry. But it's real. It's the voice of someone who was there and who yet managed to keep her faith and strike a note of thanksgiving without ignoring the horrors she had witnessed.

One hundred years on from that great conflict we still have a long way to go. When the Christmas angels first sang their message it came in three parts - Glory to God, Peace on Earth, and Good Will towards People. When people worship themselves and their achievements, trumpet them loudly and victimise those least able to defend themselves, they are giving glory to themselves, not to God, and the consequence will always be conflict and violence and war. Peace on earth can only be established when we live in right relationship with all the peoples of our common home and use the resources of the earth wisely and for the common good. The Greek word *eudokia*, 'good will' has a variety of possible translations – other versions of the Bible give 'peace, good will among people', or 'peace among those God favours'. But the text is clear that in the gift of the infant Christ it is God who shows good will towards us, so that we can be reborn out of the selfishness which corrodes and destroys and into a new and creative form of living. As the baby grows to manhood we learn to glimpse God's glory in his words and actions; even in his suffering and death. We learn what peace is through his gentle call to reorder our lives according to God's justice and love. We are called to pass on God's good will to others, not to judge or to condemn just because we do not understand them or their ways.

May glory, peace and good will be God's gift to you and from you to others this Christmas and in the years ahead.

Colin Thompson

Cogwheel Finance



I am sure you will be aware that our project is now gathering pace and we recently received four tenders and have chosen our preferred contractor, Savvy.

All the tenders came out somewhat higher than the original estimates we had been working to. This now means that when all the pledges due in and donations received are taken into account, we will be about £30,000 short of the funding needed.

The Cogwheel team are reviewing which areas of the project could possibly be postponed to a later date.

However, if anyone feels that they would like to pledge or donate to our Cogwheel Project, **it is not too late**. Please speak to me or email me at treasurer@wheatleyurc.org.uk.

Last but certainly not least, our grateful thanks go to all those who have so generously pledged or donated to the project so far.

Chris Shelley

Weekly Offertory Envelopes

I am in the course of preparing the offertory envelopes for 2019, for those who used them this year.

I have some spare packs of envelopes, so if anyone would like to join the scheme, please let me know.

Chris Shelley

CHURCH CALENDAR FOR DECEMBER 2018.

Everyone is invited to stay for coffee or tea after 10 am Sunday services.

Date	2 nd Dec	9 th Dec	16 th Dec	23 rd Dec	25 th Dec	30 th Dec
Service	Morning Service with HC	Morning Service	Morning Service with H.C.	Carol Service	Christmas Day	Morning Service
Time	10 am	10 am	10 am	10 am	09.15 am	10 am
Worship Leader	Revd. Pauline Main	Richard Bainbridge	Revd. Colin Thompson & Laurence	Revd Colin Thompson	Revd. Pauline Main	Lay-led
Vestry Elder	Malcolm Benson	Tom Goss	Catherine Harding	Robert Harding	Phyllis Williams	Pauline Shelley
Welcomer	Peter Devlin	Laurence Devlin	Charles Bennett	Malcolm Benson	Laurence Devlin	Peter Devlin
Steward	Bob Webster	Christine Bainbridge	Liz Barry	Ann Bettess	Sybil Beaton	Bobbie Stormont
Reader	Tom Goss	Chris Shelley	John Kidd	Angela Holdaway	Liz Barry	Ellen Webster
Prayers	Robert Harding	Bobbie Stormont	Ann Bettess	Richard Wood	Ann Hardiman	Bob Webster
Flowers	Advent	Advent	Advent	Team	Team	Catherine Harding

Elders' names in **Bold** are on Communion duty

Simple evening worship in the style of Taizé at 3 Barns Close at 7.30 pm on Sunday 9th December

DECEMBER COMMON LECTIONARY READINGS (leaders may use other readings.)

Date	2 nd Dec	9 th Dec	16 th Dec	23 rd Dec	25 th Dec	30 th Dec
First Reading	Jeremiah 33: 14-16	Malachi 3: 1-4	Zephania 3: 14-20	Micah 5: 2-5a	Isiah 9: 2-7	1 Samuel 2: 18-20, 26
Psalm	25: 1-10	Luke 1:68-79	Is 12: 2-6	Psalms 80: 1-7	Psalms 96	Psalms 148
New Testament	1 Thessalonians 3: 9-13	Philippians 1: 3-11	Phil: 4: 4-7	Hebrews 10: 5-10	Titus 2: 11-14	Colossians 3: 12-17
Gospel	Luke 21: 25-36	Luke 3: 1-6	Luke 3: 7-18	Luke 1: 39-45	Luke 2: 1-14	Luke 2: 41-52

WEEKLY EVENTS

(NB several activities are term-time only)

<i>Brownies & Rainbows (Term time)</i>	<i>Monday 5.30 to 7.00 pm</i>
<i>Choir Around the Piano (Term Time)</i>	<i>Monday 7.30 to 9.00 pm</i>
<i>Wheatley Singers (Term Time)</i>	<i>Tuesday 7.10 to 9.00 pm</i>
<i>Pre-School Music Group (Term time)</i>	<i>Wednesday 9.30 am and 10.30 am</i>
<i>Guides (Term time)</i>	<i>Wednesday 7.00 to 8.30 pm</i>
<i>Prayers and Breakfast</i>	<i>Thursday 8.00 am</i>
<i>Mindfulness Sitting Group</i>	<i>Thursday 8.50 to 9.40 am</i>
<i>Table Tennis</i>	<i>Friday 10.00 am to 12 noon</i>
<i>Hymn Practice</i>	<i>Sunday 9.30 to 9.45 am</i>

OCCASIONAL EVENTS IN DECEMBER 2018

2 nd Dec	Sunday	2.30 to 4.30 pm 6.30 to 8.30 pm	Foodbank Afternoon tea in the Hall Pulse Group games in Hall
4 th Dec	Tuesday	2.00 pm	St Marys' Guild Christmas Tea Party
6 th Dec	Thursday	10.00 am to noon 7.20 pm	Coffee morning, Church open Elders Meeting
9 th Dec	Sunday	6.30 to 8.30 pm 7.30 pm	Pulse Film Night, 17 Bell Lane Taize at 3 Barns Close, Holton
10 th Dec	Monday	2.00 to 4.00 pm	Not so Young Club
11 th Dec	Tuesday	1.00 pm	Lunch Club Two
16 th Dec	Sunday	8.00 am	Morning Meditation & Breakfast
17 th Dec	Monday	2.00 to 4.00 pm	Not So Young Club
18 th Dec	Tuesday	1.00 pm	Lunch Club

Bi-blog by Laurence Devlin

What would Moses have done without women? Not a lot as it is thanks to some daring women that he survived and became the man who liberated the Hebrews from bondage, who received Torah on Mount Sinai and led his people to the Promised Land. For the 3rd instalment of our series on biblical women, we will therefore have a look at these women who prove once again that “beyond every great man, there is an even greater woman!”

We start with **Shiphrah and Puah**, also known as “the Hebrew midwives” who appear in the first chapter of Exodus around the time of Moses’ birth. While being slaves in Egypt, the Hebrews were “fruitful and prolific, multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them” (Ex. 1:7) something which seriously worries Pharaoh: “Look, he says, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. In the event of war, they will join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” So he commands the taskmasters to oppress the Hebrew slaves further to break their spirits and make their conditions of living so harsh that they will stop breeding so successfully, but “the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread” ([Ex. 1:12](#)).

As Trevor Dennis comments: “As so often happens, oppression ends up working against the oppressor and produces the opposite of what is intended¹”.

As those violent and ruthless measures do not produce the desired effect, Pharaoh comes up with a second and more drastic plan to quell the Hebrew resilience. This is a familiar pattern as tyrants and dictators respond to resistance with an even greater level of violence: “*The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, when you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, if it is a boy, kill him but if it is a girl, let her live. But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them and they let the boys live*”. (Ex. 1: 15-17) There are 3 lines of comments worth pursuing in these short verses. **First** the midwives are *named*, a fact which is always significant in the Bible but in this case quite remarkable: In the long narrative (14 chapters) which occupies nearly half the book of Exodus and ends after the crossing of the Red Sea, only 5 other people are named in a cast comprising literally thousands: Moses, Jethro, Zipporah, Gershom and Aaron. Note by the way that Pharaoh is NOT named as he represents the archetypal tyrant and the anonymous enemy.

Secondly, some details of the story are highly improbable: No two women could begin to help with all the deliveries of Hebrew babies! Even more improbable is that two such women of low status would ever have been allowed “to walk the corridors of power”, as Trevor Dennis aptly remarks, and in any case, Pharaoh would never have stooped to meet them in person. It does not matter of course as the narrator is not interested in historical veracity as he has a much more important purpose: showing that Shiphrah and Puah are real heroines who refuse to be complicit with a state-sanctioned structure of oppression and decide to subvert a corrupt system. Their disobedience not only required great courage, but by their action, they symbolically are the first to assist in the birth of the Israelite nation. They therefore deserve to be named and honoured. It is even more remarkable if, as some commentators think, they are not even Hebrew themselves: Because of ambiguity in the language, the two women may not be Hebrew but midwives *to the Hebrews*. Whatever their ethnicity, their disobedience shows that changing the world is not just the work of great leaders like Moses: the liberation of the Israelites from slavery was the work of countless *ordinary* people who did something *extraordinary*. We have seen this often in our times as the Martin Luther Kings, the Gandhis or the Oscar Romeros of this world

¹ Trevor Dennis, *Sarah Laughed: Women's Voices in the Old Testament*, (SPCK, London), 1994, p.87

do not act alone: as heroes, they inspired people who together, build a movement against injustice.

The **third** element worth commenting upon is that the Hebrew midwives have their place in the long line of biblical “female tricksters”. Shiphrah and Puah do not defy Pharaoh openly as it would probably have cost them their lives, but they cleverly deceive him: When Pharaoh summoned them a second time to ask why so many boys are still being born to the Hebrews, they explain: *“because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.”* Really?!?! Apart from the obvious humour, disguised effrontery and parody in such a response, it also shows that for many women in the Bible, trickery and deception is the only weapon at their disposal. We can find many other examples in the Old Testament: Rebekah helping her son Jacob to deceive Isaac, Tamar showing up Judah, Rachel cleverly lying to Laban about his household idols, Jael killing Sisera, Rahab tricking the men of Jericho, Michal helping David escape from Saul, Esther acting against Haman or Lot’s daughters taking advantage of their father. Trickery is often the most powerful weapon of the powerless.

Let’s now return to Moses’s story: despite his two previous failed attempts, Pharaoh still intends to annihilate the Israelites and so we read in Ex.1:22 *“Pharaoh commanded all his people that every boy born to the Hebrews shall be thrown into the Nile, but every girl shall live.”* (Ex.1:22). As Cheryl Exum reminds us: “Exposure was in ancient times a common means of disposing of unwanted children.”² Bad timing for Moses though, who is just being born at the time! However, thanks to more women, Moses survives. In fact, from now on, his infancy narrative will be entirely dominated by the courage and resourcefulness of women: his **mother** who hides him for 3 months and finally places him in a basket among the reeds of the Nile, **Pharaoh’s daughter** who, discovering the child “takes pity on him” (Ex. 2:6b) and rescues him - meaning that she knows perfectly well that it is a Hebrew baby but decides to defy her father’s orders - and **his sister** who offers to find a Hebrew wet nurse for the child, who will be none other than Moses’ real mother! It is abundantly clear therefore that without all these women, there would be no Moses. Moses changed the world, but so did these women. We will see next month that there is still another woman without whom Moses would not have been the deliverer and the law giver of Israel: his first wife, **Zipporah**, the Medianite.

² Cheryl Exum, *You Shall Let Every Daughter Live*, in Jonathan Magonet, *Bible Lives* (SCM Press, London) 1992, p.73

Prayers

Please remember in your prayers the members on Catherine Harding's pastoral list: Christine and Richard Bainbridge, Gillian and David Herring, Pat Simpson, Annette Wright.

We also ask you to pray for the members of the Worship Team: Pauline Main, Charles Bennett, Laurence Devlin, Pauline Shelley, Colin Thompson and Allison Towner.

Deadline:

The deadline for the January 2019 Newsletter is Wednesday the 12th December 2018. Please email copy to newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk or hand paper copy to Moira or Jim Watson.

Disclaimer

The Editors of this Newsletter welcome letters, articles and announcements from individuals or organisations, but reserve the right to publish, or not, and to edit.



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