**Wrenbury & Nantwich Mission Area Methodist Churches** 

**Newsletter No 37 6 December 2020**

Dear friends

Every year we hear that Advent is a time of waiting. This year, the whole year seems to have been a time of waiting. In the build-up to lockdown, we waited for hand sanitiser, soap and even toilet paper to appear in the shops, then when lockdown began and the nation started baking, we waited for flour. Then it was waiting for masks, tests, and alongside all of this, waiting for the churches to reopen, and, perhaps closest to all our hearts, waiting to see our loved ones again. So in a very real sense, we know that Advent is a time of waiting, we have spent most of the year waiting for one thing or another.

Yet Advent is also a time of hope. This Sunday, we open our church doors again after lockdown 2, and with the news of 3 vaccines looking like being 90% effective, there is a very real hope on the horizon. Not that everything will suddenly be bright and beautiful again, it will cause further problems as it solves others, but it does look like being a real way forward.

Hope is not just wishful thinking. It is based on something that offers a genuine glimmer of hope in the darkest night. This month is the month in which the nights are at their darkest and longest. Yet the Christmas lights will still shine in our streets even if many of the usual Christmas celebrations cannot take place in the usual way. As we see them, perhaps we will hear those very familiar words from the carol “Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light”.

So in this time of waiting, as we look back on our hopes and fears from this past year, may we know the Advent hope and the promise of the Light of the world in our darkest times.

With love in Jesus,

**Robin**

~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~

**Services Across the Mission Area in December**

*It has been our custom to support one another’s services over the Advent and Christmas period, but due to restricted numbers and having to maintain social distancing, please stick to your usual place of worship to allow churches to accommodate people from their local community, families and friends.*

*Booking will be required to ensure we can hold services safely.*

*Facemasks must be worn.*

*No congregation singing will be allowed in church, however a choir/ music group/ soloist can sing.*

*We don’t want to put anyone at risk, particularly when we are all hoping to spend time with family and friends over the Christmas period.*

*Thank you for your understanding and co operation.*

The **Big Church Sing Christmas Special** was broadcast live on the Methodist Church's YouTube channel on Sunday 29 November. Have you seen it yet? If you have access to the internet go to:

 <https://www.youtube.com/methodistchurch>

***A note from the Editors …***

***The newsletter will be issued next week, Dec. 13th, as usual. The following edition will cover 3 weeks – Dec. 20th & 27th and Jan. 3rd. All material for Christmas and the New Year must be submitted by Tuesday Dec. 15th, and items for Jan. 10th by Tuesday Jan. 5th. Thank you.***

**J.T. and P.M.**

We can all choose what we make of Christmas:

CHRISTMAS/SACRED or CHRIST/MASSACRED. Where will YOU draw the line ??

Wrenbury & Nantwich Mission Area Methodist Churches 

**Sunday 6 December 2020 Second Sunday in Advent**

This short act of worship has been prepared for us to use as we are not able to gather for worship. We can remain connected in fellowship by following this simple act of worship around the time you would normally be gathered for worship in your chapel/church.

**Opening Prayer**

Lord, grant us the same eagerness in waiting and the bigness of desire that we had when children, and the faith that knows the greatest gift is Christ Jesus himself. Amen.

**Hymn:** **Come, thou long-expected Jesus**

 **(StF 169)**

Come, thou long-expected Jesus,

born to set thy people free,

from our fears and sins release us,

let us find our rest in thee.

Israel's strength and consolation,

hope of all the earth thou art,

dear desire of every nation,

joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver,

born a child and yet a king,

born to reign in us for ever,

now thy gracious kingdom bring.

By thine own eternal Spirit

rule in all our hearts alone;

by thine all-sufficient merit

raise us to thy glorious throne.

 *Charles Wesley (1707-1788)*

**Let us pray together**

Father God, whose is the world in which I live, and to whom I owe my being, accept the love and praise for which I was created.

Lord Jesus Christ, who for our sakes took human flesh to reveal God’s glory and to bring the Kingdom; who for us sinners endured the cross and triumphed in resurrection, accept the love and praise for which I was redeemed.

Holy Spirit of God, sent as the seal upon the finished work of Christ to equip the church and to bear fruit in yielded lives, accept the love and praise for which I was sanctified.

Thanks be to you, Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Today’s Reading from OT, Isaiah 40 v.1-11**

Comfort, O comfort my people,
   says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
   and cry to her

that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the Lord’s hand
 double for all her sins.

A voice cries out:

 ‘In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,  make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

 Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low;

 the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.

 Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.’

 A voice says, ‘Cry out!’
And I said, ‘What shall I cry?’
All people are grass,  their constancy is like

 the flower of the field.

 The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;
surely the people are grass.
The grass withers, the flower fades;
 but the word of our God will stand for ever.

 Get you up to a high mountain,

    O Zion, herald of good tidings;
 lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
 lift it up, do not fear;
 say to the cities of Judah,
 ‘Here is your God!’

 See, the Lord God comes with might,
 and his arm rules for him;
 his reward is with him,
 and his recompense before him.

 He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
 he will gather the lambs in his arms,
 and carry them in his bosom,
 and gently lead the mother sheep.

**Today’s Gospel Reading: Mark 1 v. 1 - 8**

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

*‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
   who will prepare your way;*

 *the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
   “Prepare the way of the Lord,*

*make his paths straight*” ’

 John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

 Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, ‘The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.’

**Time to Reflect**

 The usual question from preachers is along the lines of ‘Have you prepared?’ and recites a litany of pre-Christmas tasks. Predictable; boring; patronising. And below the dignity of the event.

 The obsession of preachers – and advertisers and shopkeepers – on ‘preparation’ means we miss the point. It isn’t about the red-carpet or the ticker-tape, since nothing could be worthy of the entrance of the Son of God. Preparing is pointless unless the event takes place.

 Rather, like the sentry, we are primed for his arrival. We are watching for his coming. Fans of steam trains spot the tell-tale plume of smoke before the train itself comes into sight; we watch the arrivals board as we wait for family to arrive at the airport; so worshippers spot the tell-tale of majesty veiled in flesh and laid in a manger. They come in wonder and worship, and they return transformed by the love that stooped to conquer. The herald of Good Tidings tells them that that they can behold their God. He is here. He will baptize, not with water as a sign, but with the reality of his Holy Spirit. As we welcome him, so we become *his* guests, his flock.

**Take a time to sit quietly**

During this season the Methodist Church is proclaiming “God is with us”. ‘God is with us’ is more than a statement. It’s a reminder that God is always with us. We are encouraged to share our story (and other people's stories) of walking with God in this extraordinary year. How might you share how God has been with you this week?

**A time of prayer**

Lord Jesus Christ, how little the world seems to have changed in 2000 years! We pray for those situations that are still sadly too familiar:

you were born to a couple too poor to afford the usual sacrifice, and we pray for those who struggle to make ends meet;

there was no room to welcome you at your birth, and we pray for so many homeless on our streets, and refugees from danger;

your touch brought healing to the sick, and we pray for those who suffer today;

you fed the hungry crowds, and we pray for those who are hungry, for those dependent on the food banks;

you were familiar with the sight of soldiers in the streets, and we pray for places of conflict, that peace, justice and reconciliation may come;

people whose lives were broken by failure and shame found restoration and hope in you, and we pray for those who feel they have lost all their worth or have sinned beyond redemption; may they know your grace that can give them the worth of children of God;

the lost and weary and bewildered found a yoke that was easy; be so gentle a Saviour to the many who still find life overwhelming.

We bring our prayers in your name, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**The Lord’s Prayer**

Our Father ……

**Hymn: StF 162 ‘The prophets’ voice comes**

**down the years’**

The prophets' voice comes down the years

to teach and to inspire,

to show the nature of our God

in words and deeds of fire;

not to disclose some rigid plan

that God has set in stone,

but to renew the promises

the saints have always known.

The prophets' voice speaks of the past -

the actions that reveal

the way God used the people then

this broken world to heal;

and then translates the things gone by

in ways that we find new

so we can judge the world we know

by standards ever true.

The prophets' voice holds up a glass

in which to see our day;

events which span the globe around

and things we do and say.

It calls us to repent and turn

from things that tear life down,

to choose the path that Jesus chose

and share his work and crown.

 *Alan Hinton*

**A prayer of blessing**

Christ Jesus, the Light of the world, shine upon us;

Christ Jesus, the Prince of Peace, fill our life with his peace;

Christ Jesus, gift of the Father’s love, set our heart ablaze with his love; and the blessing of God –

Father, Son and Holy Spirit - be with us and all we love and pray for, now and always. Amen.

*Original Materials by Rev Godfrey Nicholson*

*All Hymns reproduced under CCLi 155789*

***Broomhall and Sound Chapel***

**All Age Worship**

 ***“The legend of the poinsettia”*** **

Sunday 6 Dec

10.30 am led by Deacon Jill Taylor

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82976672769?pwd=aG9pSjMvR3dzaDJaZlFkcnduSmFTZz09>
Meeting ID: 829 7667 2769
Passcode: 366121

Doors Open 10.15am

Sunday 13 Dec 10.30am Zoom service

Sunday 20th Dec . 5pm ?? (tbc) Carol Service

*Outdoor carol singing. Social distancing must be adhered to. Wrap up warm, bring your own torch/lanterns, thermos flasks of drinks*

*Or* sit in the safety of your own car and sing

Christmas Morning Service 10.45am in Church

*Led by Deacon Jill Taylor*

***Baddiley & Ravensmoor***

 6 Dec 11.00 am Nick Cutts

24 Dec 7.00 pm Deacon Jill Taylor

***Aston Chapel***

Sun 6 Dec 11.00 am led by David & Jenny Smith

 Sun 13 Dec 11.00 am led by David & Jenny Smith

Tue 15 Dec 7.00 pm Forget Me Not Carol

 Service led by Deacon Jill Taylor.

Sun 20 Dec 11.00 am Carol Service led by

 Deacon Jill Taylor.

***Lightwood Green Chapel***

 Sun 6 Dec 6.30 pm led by David Smith

 Sun 13 Dec 6.30 pm led by Nick Cutts

 Sun 20 Dec 6.30 pm **Carol Service** led by Mike

 Valentine

***Nantwich Methodist Church***

Sunday Dec. 13th, 10.30am Rev. Robin Fox

Sunday Dec. 20th, 10.30 am Rev. Malcolm Lorimer

*Facemasks must be worn*

*Social distancing must be maintained*

*No singing. Max 30 people.*

 Booking required with

Margaret Kirkman Tel. 611942

by Friday lunchtime if possible.

**PRAYER**

Please remember those who have lost loved ones in recent weeks, and all in whom the coming season evokes special sadness. Many are spending Christmas without a particular family member for the first time.

Pray for all who watch over loved ones as they near the end of this life. David Fox is progressively weaker, though still at home. Pray that he, his family and others in similar situations may know the peace and hope of God with them.

Remember those who feel the pain of separation from their nearest and dearest, whether by distance or as protection against covid.

David Valentine (NMC) is due to undergo surgery on Wednesday 9th. Pray for him and Jean, for others awaiting tests or treatment, or recovering from recent surgery.

Pray for God’s kingdom to be established in this world – that lives may be transformed by the Prince of Peace, and God’s justice prevail in all nations.

*Accept these suggestions as guidance, but most of all think of who and what cause you most concern and bring them to God*.

**~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~**

**North Street Coffee Shop** and

**Alsager Book Emporium** have both re-opened, for limited hours as during the previous lifting of lockdown.

**Circuit News** – December 2020 [ Issue 231, distributed 26.11.2020 ]

Dear Friends,

If ever there was an advent word that fitted this year it’s HOPE!

There’s no denying 2020 has been a rubbish year in many ways, there have been memes going round Facebook such as ‘I’m not adding a year to my age this year because it wasn’t used!’. It made me smile, it was clever, witty perhaps. It rings true with the wish that the year will soon be over and 2021 will be better. There’s a hope for a vaccine for Covid, and we seem to be getting closer to that reality. But as I outlined in my circuit letter last month, developing resilience is about facing difficulty head on, learning, and growing in stature through such difficult paths. Getting them out of the way, wishing they weren’t there, even denying them is not the way of Christ.

The hope is perhaps that the vaccine will enable ‘things to return to normal’. But they won’t return to anything, they will roll forwards. A tough and costly recession, Brexit reality, mopping up the tears and tidying up the debris will take a long time, we will be a slightly different society and a very different country.

The difference between ‘wish’ and ‘hope’ is significant. Whereas a wish is about ‘closing your eyes, blowing out the candles on the cake, and wishing really hard’, hope is a confidence and trust that God will fulfil his promises, and his purposes will be fulfilled.

Hope is a good word:

\* It’s Biblical - Jeremiah 29:11 says “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.” Words spoken by a weeping prophet to a people going through a national disaster, as he encouraged them to look to God. The reassurance comes from God that the nation could trust God and know His purposes. Wellbeing. Wholeness. Peace.

 Speaking of the saints, Paul wrote to the Colossians (Ch1, v27) “To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” The hope that is within us is Christ. Historical. Real. Tough. Ongoing.

 The writer to the Hebrews (Ch10, v23) said “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.” Hope is something we do, but it’s based outside ourselves in God. The stories, letters, poems, and literature of the Bible are full of this message of Hope which is fulfilled and focused in Jesus Christ, who we know and follow.

\* It’s Forward-looking: the trouble with ‘wishing things will get back to normal’ is that we never do go backwards in life, we only ever go forwards. After the First World War the status of the British Aristocratic system reduced, and society was changed. After the Second World War the Welfare state was born as a nation decided that equality, care, and working together for each other’s good was to be the shape of our society, poverty should exclude no-one from care. As I look forward in the circuit I hope for mission and growth. I have no desire to return to chapels full of people sitting in straight rows afraid to ask questions or have their own opinions, instead I hope for creative gatherings of people excited by the faith they discover, the Jesus they get to know, and the difference they make to the communities they are part of.

\* It’s Outward-focused: the emphasis of a wish is the person doing the wishing, the emphasis of Advent Hope is the God we know in Jesus. When I was a teenager, my prayers were my wishes, the things I wanted; as I have grown and learned, my prayers have become a bit more lined up with the things God has promised - through hardship, disappointment and fear, I pray for God’s presence, God’s wisdom, and the wellbeing of others.

 Through my ministry in this circuit I long for God’s will to be done as some chapels close, small chapels join with others, and chapels that apparently are ‘doing OK’ discover enthusiasm, new growth, and vision. I long for new preachers who will know what a pulpit is for but don’t need one to live out their message. I hope for creative visionary technicians who can give time and energy to using social media for evangelism, musicians who remember that Wesley’s hymns were set to dance tunes, and that church music should always be popular as well as beautiful. Or are these the wishes of an old man?

And my final reflection about our Advent Hope is that it’s about travelling rather than arriving. My parents used to tell me, on long car journeys to Welsh beach holidays, that the journey was part of the holiday; spending it wishing ‘are we nearly there yet?’ was a waste of the journey. With my family we still often take those same roads through the same Welsh mountain towns to the same remote holiday spot and I drink in that journey, the fields, the sheep, the mountain streams, the people, going about their business in those towns, the new bypasses that speed up the journey and the familiar picnic spots along the way. The journey is about the letting go of work, anticipating the beaches to come, slowing down and relaxing as we travel, being a traveller rather than going somewhere. The journey is about becoming myself again, discovering what makes me tick, reconnecting with closest family, trust re-creating ourselves. Hope is less about getting what we hope for, than living as hopeful people. Since sitting by my son’s bedside after two operations to remove a brain tumour, I have wished for the day when I can return him to his University town and leave him there! It hasn’t happened yet, but I am being transformed by journeying with him through subsequent treatment, gradual healing, celebrating times of health and movements forward, while accepting the ‘new normal’ of what his life is about compared to what it was like before his diagnosis. The wish is the end of the journey of hope. Hope is the nature of the advent journey as we are people being transformed by living our hope in God who has promised to be always there, bringing justice, siding with the ‘little ones’ and revealing a Kingdom which is a beautiful place to live.

“***Come Lord Jesus, Come***”.

Your friend and Superintendent Minister,

***Rob***

~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~

CCLI Licence Requirements

As churches move to online worship it is important to check that your current performance licences cover the new ways of worship. The conventional licence held by most circuit churches does not cover streaming on the internet, this includes YouTube and Zoom services. If your church now offers this you must hold a Streaming Licence. For more information visit: <https://uk.ccli.com/copyright-licences/> Or contact Daniel Keen, Circuit Administrator, who can offer advice.

New Circuit Website – www.cheshiresouth.org.uk

To help you keep up to date with all the latest goings-on in the Circuit we have redesigned the website to make it much easier to navigate and find the information you are looking for. The website still has all the information about individual churches that it had before along with cloud access for those that use it. It now also features a page dedicated to worship during COVID-19 which features updated information on which churches are open and what other forms of worship are available. We try and keep this information as updated as possible but if you know of something missing or out of date then please contact Daniel Keen, Circuit Administrator, so he can update it.

Fundraising

The Circuit website has been updated to include a Fundraising page. This contains links to All We Can, MHA and Action For Children to enable you to donate to these charities during this time. If you wish to give, all you have to do is visit the fundraising page and click on the link next to the charity you wish to donate to, JustGiving take care of the rest. At this time of year we would normally be holding collections for these charities which we are not now able to do, so please consider making a donation to help those in need both in this country and further afield. Charities are one of the worst hit sectors in the pandemic as they have received no government help. You can donate anonymously or leave your details.

Please also keep giving your collection to your church. Each church has its own different system in place so please contact your church representative to find out how. Even putting aside your collection each week so that you can give it when the church reopens will make a big difference. Even though church buildings are closed the church still has a large amount of costs.

Please forward information to be put into the next Circuit Newsletter to Daniel Keen, 1108info.cheshiresouth@gmail.com or phone 07598 580541 by Tuesday 22nd December– Thank you.

~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~ \* ~

**Cheshire South Methodist Circuit - Part Time Book-keeper**

 Cheshire South Methodist Circuit (<https://www.cheshiresouth.org.uk/>) is looking for someone (on a contractor basis) to act as bookkeeper. The Circuit Treasurer takes overall responsibility and will work closely with the person fulfilling this role, which involves looking after the day-to-day book-keeping for a large Methodist Circuit and a community-based cafe project in Crewe. Support and guidance will also be available from the Circuit Lay Co-ordinator.

 Further details of this role can be found on the website above, or Pat (patmaidment@hotmail.com or 627170) would be happy to forward them to anyone who might be interested. Closing date for expressing an interest is Dec. 15th.