

Magazine

December 2020/ January 2021

Unwrap the future

Christmas – it's still on!

A shepherd's view



Zion
United
Reformed
Church

~ Northallerton ~

Zion and Community

These are the weekly activities that would normally take place.
They will be reinstated as soon as possible

Sunday 10.00 a.m.	Morning worship After the lockdown it will be bright and early with a warm welcome every other week
Monday 9.30 a.m. to 11.00 a.m. In term time	Tiny time Mums, come and join us in the Church Hall for a chat and a cuppa while the children play
Wednesday 10.00 a.m. to 12 noon	The other 'Way In' no coffee or tea but time for a chat in the Secret Garden
12 noon to 12.30 p.m.	A chance to sit and eat your packed lunch warm and dry
1.00 p.m. to 1.30 p.m.	Market Day service A time for quiet reflection in the midst of a busy day
Saturday 10.00 a.m. 12 noon	The other 'Way In' More chat in the Secret Garden

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Pastoral letter

To the churches of the Tees-Swale Pastorate

***'I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.'* Psalm 130:5.**

Dear friends,

Advent is a time when we look forward in hope. A time of expectation. A time when nature falls asleep around us, but in the silence and stillness of short wintry days we know that new life and movement is being nurtured, though not yet evident, ready to be birthed into a brighter and vibrant Spring.



And we too as Christians during Advent have our still, silent season of introspection, a lot like Lent, a time of quiet, insistent preparation, as we make ready for the birth of the Messiah and all that flows from God's ultimate divine action, with all that flows from the incarnation.

I am also mindful that as I write you are as congregations moving into a season of change. A time of preparation and waiting. Of careful and prayerful discernment as you reconsider your respective, varied mission contexts and opportunities, and as you reflect together on the kind of minister whose gifting and experience might resonate with your missional opportunities, someone who could also facilitate your spiritual growth as congregations.

In many ways a so-called 'vacancy' is a deceptively busy time: a time to reflect on your collective travel to date, a taking stock of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and naming where the challenges may lie. The word 'vacancy' always appears in my own thinking in inverted commas because we are not vacant without stipendiary ministry: across the congregations we have an amazing variety of gifts, vocations, vision, and appetite for the adventure of faith. A stipendiary minister is one of a team, serving the wider church and community alongside Elders and wider membership. So when you hear the word 'vacancy', take a momentary pause, and offer a prayer of thanksgiving for the sisters and brothers in Christ around you who accompany you every step of the way along your journey of faith. Follow your prayer of thanksgiving for them through with the prayer that God might help you see the unique contribution you too can bring to the life of your local congregation.

Moving into vacancy, waiting to see what, or more accurately *who*, God has in store, looking ahead in hope, all seems to fit in with this season of Advent. 2021, please God, will be a better year in so many respects than 2020. And let's remember how the Christian hope we share is far more than blind optimism. Let's look to the season to come, resting assured in the faith that the future is filled with God's presence and glory, whose presence is love, abundant love, sufficient for all and for all time, fully revealed through the birth, life, teaching, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus among us.



'Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.' Hebrews 10:23.

You are in my prayers this Advent, and as you begin to plan for future ministry in Tees and Swale. You have my support and that of the wider Synod, and the help of not one, but two, Interim

Moderators: Fred Robinson and Sandy Ogilvie, from Waddington Street URC Durham, to help you plan for future ordained ministry. Advent blessings, and when it comes, Happy Christmas!

In Christ,

David.

Moderator, Northern Synod.

Go and tell....

In the time of David
Some called him a king,
And if a child is true born
Lord Jesus will hear him sing:

*Go tell it on the mountain,
Over the hills and everywhere,
Go tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ is born*

When I was a seeker,
I sought both night and day,
I ask the Lord to help me,
And he show me the way:
Go tell....

He made me a watchman
Upon the city wall,
And if I am a Christian
I am the least of all:
Go tell....

*From: Religious songs of the Negro as sung on the Plantations
Edited by Thomas P Fenner 1909*

BLESSing

Najwa remembers feeling as though she was about to travel to the moon. Although the city of Mallawi was only 12km away, it was beyond anything she had ever experienced. Going there for the first time was a daunting prospect – but also incredibly exciting. Najwa, 29, was born without sight, and like many young Egyptians with disabilities, she grew up facing limited prospects. Her family assumed she needed constant supervision, which stifled her independence

'My parents accepted my disability and took care of me all these years, but they did not allow me to go to school. We are a poor family and they are illiterate, and they did not want the expense of educating a blind girl.'

Najwa's experience is far from unusual. Although it's difficult to know exactly how many Egyptians live with a disability, there could be up to 13 million – and their abilities and talents have traditionally been overlooked. In 2018, the Egyptian government passed legislation to enshrine the rights of disabled people in education and the workplace – a historic law that has been welcomed by Egypt's disabled community but is yet to overcome entrenched social attitudes.

Our partners at BLESS – part of the Coptic Orthodox Church – aim to improve disabled people's access to opportunities. Najwa heard from church friends that BLESS ran a project specifically for young blind women. 'When they told me about the project, I was dancing!' says Najwa.

'I wanted the chance to travel to the city, get some money in my hands, go to education classes, learn crafts, eat good food, drink juice, talk to people ...'

So that's when Najwa set off for Mallawi for the first time. She has now been attending BLESS's programme for four years and her life has changed. She has a mentor who helps her develop her daily living skills, and she attends seminars about employment, social issues, women's rights and more.



Her confidence and independence have grown so much that she has become a volunteer supporting other young women, and has set up a small business selling perfume.

'I'm not "the blind girl" any more,' she says.

'I'm an educated woman who can travel independently, dress well, train others and advise them on starting their own small projects. Thanks a million to everyone who has worked on this project to give me my vision of what I can achieve.'

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This article was taken from the magazine of Embrace the Middle East. To read similar stories or make a donation go to:
<https://www.embraceme.org>

Shepherds at the Manger

Even now I can't really believe it all happened. See what you think.

Let me introduce myself. My name is Abraham, a proud traditional Jewish shepherd's name. My father, a priest shepherd, chose it, knowing I would be following in his footsteps tending the special sheep around the Magdal Eder, a tower about a mile

east of Bethlehem. From there you can certainly watch over the flocks by night, that most dangerous of times for our profession, as you can imagine.

We shepherds don't just graze and water the sheep and shear them and milk them. We also have to protect them from shady thieves and predatory animals. Sheep really would be helpless at times without us. I'm only a teenager but I take my responsibilities seriously. You see, our sheep are not like the normal ones kept out in the wilderness areas. They are much more precious. The best of them, the perfect specimens, are intended for sacrifice in the Temple here. Sometimes we even have to wrap the tiny newborn in swaddling cloths in a manger.

Many a night my friends and I have spent in the cold, in the dark, in the fields with our sheep. Bit monotonous sometimes, but I do



love the chance to meditate quietly in communion with God in prayer. But I never expected to be a special part of his plan for mankind. Bizarre experience, I can tell you.

Possibly my eyelids had been drooping, but suddenly the sky lit up. The dazzle of not just one angel, but a multitude. Terrifying. But then, oh that glorious singing about peace and goodwill. And, best of all, the news of a Saviour just born in David's city. Why ever were we, common shepherds, being treated to such an extraordinary announcement? And then I suddenly thought of one of our little sacrificial lambs. And I tucked him under my arm to take to show to the new baby boy...in his own manger, no less.

A few friends and I dashed off down the hill. And we found him in a sort of cave shelter behind an inn, surrounded by animals. His mother was very gentle, but oh so young. How touched we were to feel her sublime presence. And the older man with her was so caring towards them both. A simple carpenter by trade apparently, he told us. They too had been visited by angels a

while ago, explaining how uniquely chosen and favoured they were to nurture this newborn - the lamb of God, you might say. So likewise, we shepherds were awestruck to be a humble part of this cataclysmic event.

Glory and praise to God...out we went with a vow to spread the wonderful news to all we might meet. That baby was destined to change the world, we knew it for certain. And I wouldn't be surprised if he grew up to become the ultimate 'good shepherd'. Not a bad job to have, you know!

Paul Bowes

Reform

Reform is the monthly magazine published by the United Reformed Church. It has a wide variety of interesting articles which are well worth reading. A year's subscription for a printed copy by post is £29.50, starting with whichever month's issue one chooses.

There are a number of different options available to you when taking out a subscription. You can:

- Visit the web shop: <https://reform.escosubs.co.uk>
- Call the magazine on 01371 851886 to place the order over the phone with a Credit/Debit Card or Direct Debit
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billing/delivery address and email address/telephone number.)

- You can ask for a Proforma Invoice to be raised, and you can pay by Credit/Debit Card or send us a Cheque.

(If you would like to request an invoice, please confirm your full address details and they will be happy to arrange this for you.)

Malcom Smith

Christmas cancelled?

Dear All,

I am writing this, my winter newsletter, as we enter the second lockdown. There are concerns and rumours that Christmas is going to be cancelled! Is this really the case for the Christian community? However, as I ponder on this statement it strikes me again what does Christmas mean to me and you? When everything is stripped away what is the true meaning of Christmas? I wonder what Christmas means for you?

Winston Churchill once said that “*Christmas is a season not only about rejoicing but about reflection*”



You will see in the pictures above some of the key messages that a number of different denominations are trying to communicate during this Christmas period; Hope & Joy, Comfort and Joy, God

is with us. They are acknowledging that 2020 has been a difficult year and has impacted everyone in a variety of ways. However, as we consider the story of the first Christmas let us think about how we can reflect some of these messages with the people around us.

I attended a fantastic webinar- (a video call) run by the Methodist Connexion on how to reach out to your community this Christmas and share your story of how God has been with you during this extraordinary year. There was an abundance of practical suggestions; telephone call people, send postcards, Christmas cards, decorate your windows/gardens with scenes of the Christmas story, coordinate your street standing on their doorsteps at a set time for Carol Singing Together etc... I wonder how we could pass on these messages to our family, friends and our communities.

Growing Together – my parents' Project

The last time I saw my parents before lockdown they gave us a lovely amaryllis bulb set. We have been invited to take part in their *Growing Together Project*. In the light of the announcement of the second lockdown my parents decided to distribute an early Christmas card and Amaryllis bulb set to family and to friends who are living alone. The challenge (believe me, it will be one as I am no green-fingered person) - we are to care for it over the coming weeks taking a photo once planted and then again on Christmas Day.

Interesting information about the Amaryllis

- Amaryllis means 'determination, beauty, courage and love'.
- The name Amaryllis comes from the Greek word which means 'to sparkle'.
- I am informed that in Greek mythology, it was the name of a shepherdess who shed her own blood to prove her true love, and in doing so inspired the naming of this bright red flower.

- In Victorian times, Amaryllis came to symbolise strength and determination, due to its tall height and sturdiness.

I thought these little nuggets of information about this plant were really encouraging as we enter the Christmas season. This plant is going to act as a reminder despite whatever is going on in our world that Christmas is not cancelled. God is With Us.

Staying Connected with community groups

The relationships I established pre the pandemic with community group continue to develop. A lot of services aren't physically meeting but are offering telephone support.

- Dementia Forward continue to offer support over the phone both to those who are living with dementia or their carers.
- Community First Yorkshire have information about volunteering- including opportunities for volunteering from home.
- Age UK – are offering a befriending service and hot meals delivery.
- North Yorkshire County Council-Adult Learning and Skills are running On-line meeting courses.

Resources for use at home:

- A reminder If you have a telephone you can call for free the Methodist Church Dial a Prayer line which has a set programme each week. Whilst Daily Hope has a wider range of options including hymns, carols, daily prayers each day - information below.
- Radio 4 Daily Service at 9.45-10am weekdays and 8.10am on Sundays.
- Digital Radio – Premier Christian Radio & Unite Christian Radio.
- Northallerton Methodist Church recorded service can be access via the internet on *You Tube*. This can be sent out as a

DVD format. Someone can play the service down the phone to you if this is something you'd like.

- URC Daily Devotions online
- URC Zoom Service

Dial-a-Prayer



FREE
phone
lines
for
prayers
and
news
from
the

Methodist Church

Listen to a prayer:

0808 281 2514

Listen to news:

0808 281 2478

Content is updated weekly on
Thursday afternoon



A free phone line of hymns,
reflections and prayers



And after all that can I wish you all a very Merry uncanceled Christmas?

Helen McCormack

Pastoral & Development Worker for Older People Thirsk &
Northallerton Methodist Church Circuit and Zion, URC.

A local view

I am old enough to have been able to see Palestine slowly strangulated over the past few decades, with us natives who trace ancestry thousands of years here kicked out or squeezed into cantons/open air prisons like Gaza and Bethlehem. Old

enough to have researched events even before I was born and wrote books about them (like Sykes-Picot, Balfour-Cambon, Gawler, Hertzl and more). I am old enough to have personally witnessed Arab leaders' corruption and treachery. I am old enough to personally witness rampant racism from white European Jews who think they are entitled to steal our land because they belong to the Jewish "people" (actually Judaism like Christianity is a religion for many people of diverse backgrounds). I am old enough to have worked with hundreds of decent Jews and tens of thousands of decent Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Atheists, etc towards peace and justice. I am old enough that when dates are chosen for treasonous signings like yesterday at the White House (now the name fits because it emphasized white rule), I can immediately link why 15 September (squarely in the middle of anniversaries of the Sabra and Shatila massacres and of the signing of the sell-out Oslo Accords). I am old enough to reminisce over a good life I lived in the US (despite racism and discrimination there also) and how I gave all of that up to return to Palestine under the thumb of the Zionists. From one Israeli occupied territory to another - and back!. I am old enough to have patience for the things I can't change, courage to change those I can (e.g. via our work in agriculture and the environment and influencing especially youth), and wisdom to know the difference.

My 88 year old mother (whose Birth Certificate in PALESTINE predates this Jewish state) tells me the world will continue to change in good and bad ways (yes she remembers her friend Haya Balbisi who was massacred in Deir Yassin by Zionists who became 'leaders'). Her calm wrinkled face emphasizes to me that peace is not a destination... peace is the way. I am grateful that my family and I and millions of others of many generations remain true to our conscience and care for fellow human beings, resist tyranny and injustice, and do not join the ranks of the hypocrite



dictators and “deal makers” of our world. Seeing so many good people do the right thing is itself a marvellous victory.

Mazin Qumsiyeh

(A Bedouin in cyberspace, a villager at home, Professor, Founder, and (volunteer) Director Palestine Museum of Natural History Palestine Institute of Biodiversity and Sustainability, Bethlehem University Occupied Palestine)

A prayer for today

Heavenly Father,

We watch the television, listen to the radio and read newspapers. They are a wonderful source of information and education.

Thank you for the opportunity to widen our knowledge, for the pleasure they give; thank you for the opportunity to grow in understanding of people and issues world-wide. We learn about disasters and distress, sometimes seeming too great to bear.

Give us compassion for all those that suffer. Help us to see beyond the figures on the screen, or the words in print, to the people themselves.

Give us discernment as we watch and read.

Open our hearts and minds to oppose ideas and practices which diminish human values and human lives.

Amen

Church diary

Some dates for the diary; a number are tentative but at least you have an idea of what may be happening. If you have anything that you would like to add when the next magazine comes round just let us know (Eds)

Tues 1 st Dec	10.00am	Elders' meeting - Zoom
	7.00 pm	New normal group -Zoom
Sun 6 th Dec	N.B.	No Morning worship
Tues 8 th Dec	7.00 pm	New normal group - Zoom
Tues 15 th Dec	7.00 pm	New normal group -Zoom Reading Circle review date - email
Sun 20 th Dec	10.00 am	'Carol' service (Led by Jo Kennedy)
Sun 25 th Dec	10.00 am	Christmas day service (led by Iris Miller)
Sun 3 rd Jan	10.00 am	Morning worship (leader tba)
Tues 5 th Jan	10.00 am	Elders' meeting - Zoom

5 th cont..	7.00 pm	New normal group -Zoom
Tues 12 th Jan	7.00 pm	New normal group -Zoom
Sun 17 th Jan	10.00 am	Morning worship (leader tba)
Tues 19 th Jan	7.00 pm	New normal group -Zoom
Tues 26 th Jan	7.00 pm	New normal group -Zoom

With a smile

12 days to Christmas

I quite like the little surprises that Christmas sometimes brings
But there's things I just wouldn't thank you for – for instance five
gold rings.

I've had one ring for 50 years, and of this I can be certain
If someone gave me another five they'd be taken off a curtain!

I just wouldn't want eight milkmaids – couldn't be doing with the
row
Of all those chattering females. AND – I haven't got a cow!

I'd not be pleased with three French hens. There's bound to be some friction

My French is rather rusty now – I'd have problems with the diction.

And seven swans! Now that surprise would be a big mistake
I haven't got a puddle, never mind a lake!

Oh. Spare the ladies dancing, don't even think of lords a -leaping
And drummers? Oh, for goodness sake, I've got to get some sleep in.



I don't mean to sound ungrateful. I'm really not one for griping
But the sound of a whistle makes me bristle so I wouldn't want pipers piping.

I've got a sign on the front door and two boldly printed words
Emphasise 'No Callers' – that includes all calling birds.

Six geese can lay for someone else. Don't get me wrong they're fine
But gagging geese are okay just so long as they're not mine.

A pear tree with a partridge? Well, our garden's rather small
And fruit and feathers everywhere? I'd not like that at all.

I couldn't be doing with billing and cooing from over demonstrative doves.

Oh. Don't worry about surprising me...
Just get me a pair of gloves.

Jean Purvis

(Written for Northallerton Talking Newspaper)

Wait a minute

Have you ever said something on the spur of the moment and known as soon as the words left your lips that they were all wrong and you should have kept your mouth tightly closed. I know that I have and have bitterly regretted it. I remember my grandma telling me, *"If you can't say something good don't say anything at all"* and I now say to my grandson, who can be a bit swift with the comeback remark, *"Count to five before you say anything"*. Actually, on reflection *"take a deep breath"* might have been more effective – counting to five seems like a long time to a young man in a hurry to do everything.

My grandma's advice assumes that you were going to say something hurtful. Of course, many times this is the case and, to revert again to the old sayings, *"a remark once made cannot be taken away"*. I wonder how many friendships have been lost because someone was a little too forthright in their opinions.

*O call back yesterday. Bid time
return*

William Shakespeare (Richard III)

But it isn't always the hurtfulness of a remark that may be the problem but the lack of thought. We all know that this is a danger. How often do you hear, *"Now, I'm just thinking out loud here..."*. We know that first thoughts are not always the best ones and we need time to let ideas simmer so that our brains can make sense of them. Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802), when asked if he found his stammering inconvenient replied, *"No, Sir, because I have time to think before I speak, and don't ask impertinent*

questions”.

Sheila Maxey, in two of her articles in 'Reform', our URC magazine, refers to this. Firstly, she was thinking about her increasing forgetfulness as she ages which resulted in a file on a difficult matter which she had intended to work on over a holiday break being left behind. She concluded in the end that this was the best thing that could have happened as while she relaxed and 'forgot' about the file her brain was still working and when eventually she came back to the problem it was with a much calmer and more detached outlook.

Her second example is of making time before speaking. She illustrates this by describing attending a course with two participants who needed the hearing loop system. This meant

that everyone had to use the microphone. So as she says, "*There could be no throwaway remarks. No back and forward debate or argument. Each speaker had to go and take the mike from the previous one – and meanwhile what had just been said hung in the air*". I love that phrase 'hung in the air' as if it twirled and twirled like a model on the catwalk

giving everyone a chance to make up their minds about it. She said that because of those two deaf participants she was made to listen with new depth.

Is this what we do in our conversations? Do we listen or just chatter? I know that when I was training new staff members at the advice agency where I used to work one of my well-used lines was, "*We are very good at having conversations but we are very bad at listening. You now have to make yourself good at listening.*" Actually, I have no reason to believe that I should change that line. For a conversation to be meaningful the participants must listen to what is being said to them.

We've all met the person who talks 'at' you, where you can never get a word in edgeways and you finish the 'conversation' feeling that you were just an excuse for the other person to let rip and that anyone would have done. In fact, on occasion you may even have been the one doing the talking!

Do we do that in our Church life? Are we so busy telling visitors what we do, how successful our activities are..... that we forget to listen to why they have come and what their needs may be?

If we are running a youth group are we so busy arranging activities, keeping order..... that we have no time to be quiet and listen to the youngsters' questions?

Do we run courses to teach participants what we want to share without finding out what they want or need to learn?

Do we go to God in all our neediness and with all our requests, with all our thanks, with all the things we have been doing and talk 'at' him and forget to listen to what he is saying to us.

*Three minutes thought would suffice to
find this out, but thought is irksome
and three minutes is a long time*

A.E.Housman

Oh, God will forgive you. He always does and He will listen to you as always but just think how much you are missing just by being too hasty and, to end with another snippet from my past, as the Bernard Cribbens' song, *Right, said Fred*, says "Now the trouble with Fred is, he's too 'asty. Now you never get nowhere if you're too 'asty..."

Sue Kennedy y

Elders' duty rota

If you have any problems and would like to speak with someone please contact the Secretary, your designated Elder or the Duty Elder as given below

Week beginning

December

6th Paul Bowes

13th Sue Bush

20th Jane Haslam

27th Judith Puttock

January

3rd Christine Roddam

10th Liz Styan

17th Paul Bowes

24th Sue Bush

31st Jane Haslam



Contact us



Ministers:	In vacancy	
Secretary:	Susan Bush	01609 882468
Treasurer:	Judith Puttock	01609 771282
Organist:	Carol Hogg	01609 883319
Bookings: For Rooms	Jane Haslam	01609 774641
For Church services	Christine Roddam	01609 776693
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Church:	Answerphone N.B. No incoming message facility	01609 779610
Website:	www.tsurc.org/	



**Zion
United
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Church**

~ Northallerton ~

We hope you have enjoyed the magazine and when we are able to open again, we invite you to worship with us at High Street, Northallerton at our 10 a.m. Sunday service.

Please note that the closing date for items for the February/March issue is 16th January