**Sunday 31st December 2023**: **CIRCUIT BIG SUNDAY**

*Churches throughout the Central Norfolk Methodist Circuit, and the morning online service*

*via the Zoom platform, are using this material today. A simple YouTube version will be available on the*

*Watton Methodist website, as usual.*

*The zoom service is at 10.30 am on the usual Circuit Worship link (text 07912379101 for details of link).*

**Welcome from Rev Jacqui**

Our tenth Big Sunday service falls on this 1st Sunday after Christmas which is also Christmas Eve.

The service is simpler than usual, using carols that may not have been sung over Christmas and with a ‘guest’ speaker in the form of our Local Preachers’ Secretary, Dee Moden!

**Opening Liturgy from Methodist Resources**

Some churches in our Circuit have been using the Methodist Resources provided for Advent this year which have included an Advent Candle liturgy. Although there is no longer a candle to light, the weekly liturgy continues until Epiphany (next week).

Christmas God, life for the world, Emmanuel, God with us, we have celebrated and rejoiced, marvelled at your gift and giving, now we worship you again.

Christmas God, **we greet and meet you**.

We have dreams and we have visions, we have yearnings and desires, we have hopes and fears, but in Jesus we find consolation and redemption.

Christmas God, **we greet and meet you**.

We are young and we are old, we are from north and south and east and west, we are strong and we are frail, we are well and we are ill.

Christmas God, **we greet and meet you**.

We’ve heard your message in unexpected places. We’ve met you when we were seeking and when we were not. We’ve heard you in a cacophony of voices. Our waiting has been fulfilled.

Christmas God, **we greet and meet you**.

Christmas Day is passed but Christmas is not over. Out of the ordinary has come the most extraordinary. Out of the waiting has come the gift of life. Out of the unexpected has come glory, redemption and revelation. In others we have seen you and simply pray this day, that in us, others see you too. **Amen**.

**Hymn** **StF** 208 **H&P** 109 **‘Let earth and heaven combine’** by Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788)

**Thanksgiving Prayer**

*For those using this Worship Sheet at home:*

Think of the past week and say both ‘thank you’ and ‘sorry’ to our loving God.

*For those leading worship in Church:*

Use a prayer of thanksgiving from the internet, from the Methodist Worship Book, from the Vine or from Roots. Or, of your own devising. Or, simply have a short time of silence for people to say thank you to God for particular blessings that they have received.

**Hymn** **StF** 210 **H&P** 105 **‘Love came down at Christmas’** by Christina Rossetti (1830 – 1894)

**Gospel Reading set for today:** Luke 2 v 22 – 40

**Talk**

This narrative, or account, in Luke’s gospel, focuses on the response of these two elderly people, Simeon and Anna, they were old faithful people who had loved God and had worshipped in the Temple for many years. They, like the people of their time, were expectant people, they trusted God, prayed and listened to HIM. They knew one day God would send a Saviour, a Messiah, coming to save the world from sin. Mary and Joseph had brought Jesus, as a first born son, to the Temple of Jerusalem, as was required by the law of Moses. Circumcision had taken place, and he had been named Jesus, not an uncommon name, but the name Gabriel had told Mary to give him. Now the purification ceremony was to take place as women were classed as unclean after birth.

How often have we found ourselves in the right place at the right time and wondered how that had happened just when we were needed? We call it ‘divine intervention’ or God nudging us! The same thing happened to Simeon, some instinct told him to go to the Temple at that precise time, and there was this child with his mother. He took the baby in his arms, and as he held him he just knew that this little child was different. He recognised that this was the child the world had been waiting for, what the Holy Spirit had revealed to him. God in human form, coming for all people not just a chosen few. The arrival of Anna, a prophetess, confirmed her prophecy too, that God, through this infant, would bring deliverance, hope and redemption. They could die happy as they had seen God’s word come to fruition. They both praised God for the fulfilment of his promise.

Here now we have many faithful older people in our congregations who work, and have worked tirelessly, like both Simeon and Anna, to bring God’s message to people over the years in many different ways. Sometimes I like to think we can compare them to trees and their different seasons, in the Spring of life young buds form, the promise of things to come. In the summertime as they grow, and blossom, they spread their branches yielding fruit, fragrance and shelter. Then in the Autumn years we see the richness they bring in the wonderful colours of experience, and we are captivated by their beauty. When the leaves fall their faithfulness continues down into the roots, and as part of their legacy others are nurtured into new growth. So, we remember and give thanks for all the faithful people, from Simeon and Anna to the present day, who have made a difference to our lives.

**Dee Moden (Local Preacher and member of Holt Methodist Church)**

**Hymn** **StF** 229 **‘Mary and Joseph came to the temple’**  by Andrew Pratt (b 1948)

*(The set tune is not too difficult but it can also be sung to ‘Bunessan’: ‘Morning has broken’)*

**Prayers**

*For those using this Worship Sheet at home:*

We pray for our world… for the church… for our communities… for our families & friends…

*For those leading worship in Church:*

There are lovely intercessions in the Methodist Worship Book Christmas Service (page…) or you may, again, want to use silence, or search for prayers for peace on the internet.

**Offertory** (and Lord’s Prayer if you want to use it)

**Hymn** **StF** 197 **H&P** 98 **‘Cradled in a manger meanly’** by George Stringer Rowe (1830 – 1913)

**Bible Reading:** Psalm 148

**Hymn** **StF** 190 **H&P** 92 ‘**Angels from the realms of glory’** by James Montgomery (1771 – 1854)

**May the blessing of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us, and all those we love, this day and always, Amen.**

**A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO EVERYONE!**