

Sunday December 29th 2024: CIRCUIT BIG SUNDAY!

Churches throughout the Central Norfolk Methodist Circuit, and the morning online service via the Zoom platform, are using this material today. The YouTube recording of the worship sheet is also available (on the Watton Methodist website from the 25th for use by individuals and churches.

The zoom link is <https://zoom.us/j/91505791496?pwd=sFRDQwcjtzXB5Q62Vtgx7jqrav2uRy.1> Passcode 078640



Words of welcome from Derek:

A very warm welcome to our Christmas BIG SUNDAY Worship. I challenged our Local preachers to think about something they love at Christmas, something that speaks about “traditional Christmas to them” which takes them beyond the tinsel and turkey and gets to the heart of the Christmas message. I have also listened to some of the comments from people as I have attended events in churches during advent and I hope that this time spent together is helpful to you all.

In the secular world, this period is often referred to as “the time between Christmas and New Year” and I have heard it referred to as being flat and boring, the turkey is almost eaten, the Christmas tree is shredding it’s needles all over the carpet, the children have got fed up with their Christmas presents, and the Christmas spirit has all but gone.

This isn’t the case for Christian people, for Christ has been born and for us, this is but the beginning of the greatest story ever told. I hope that some of our thoughts resonate with you and give you something to think about.

Video

O Holy Night <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p1UaKzv4irk>

Hymn StF 195 H&P 96

Christian’s awake, salute the happy morn

Opening Prayer

Led by Dee Moden

Gracious God,

We come into your presence today with praise and thanksgiving in this season of celebrating your most wonderful gift. We celebrate the birth of Jesus as baby and rejoice in the man he was to become. As we hushed the noise, we heard the angels sing, and as we heard the shepherd’s story, we felt the wonderment of this moment as time stood still. Today, in humble adoration, we bow our heads in awe of your great love for us, as we worship you in spirit and in truth. **Amen**

Merciful God,

As we stand in awe and wonder, we also know that we fall far short of what you require from us, you didn’t just call us to hear and believe the good news, you called us to share it. Forgive us Lord for all too often we fail to do that, we are happy to come to you, but sometimes reluctant go out in your name afraid of the challenge unsure of our ability. Lord help us to be confident in the knowledge that you are with us in all that we do, encouraging and enabling us every step of the way. Teach us then, not only to rejoice in your love, but through word and deed share it with those around us so that they too may come to know the true wonder of this magical and amazing season. **Amen**

So, as we meet together today as a circuit, we ask that you will be here with us. As we sing your praise let us feel your presence, and as we listen to your word through the gospel and in various other ways may we feel your love and receive a greater understanding and awareness of what it really means to belong to you.

We ask these our prayers through the precious name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour, who taught us to pray:

Our Father who art in heaven

Hallowed be thy Name

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,

On earth as it is in heaven

Give us this day our daily bread

And forgive us our trespasses,

As we forgive those who trespass against us,

And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil.

For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,

forever and ever.

Amen

Hymn StF206

It was on a starry night

Mole's Christmas

An excerpt from *Wind in the Willows* read by Aileen Fox

One of my favourite books is *Wind in the Willows* the adventures of Mole Ratty and Toad.

Mole had been lured away from spring cleaning to the outdoors and had met Ratty the water vole and had been enjoying new things and adventures. But something calls him back, he smells his home, and he returns with Ratty to a rather dusty and bare underground home, and he breaks down in tears when he sees the state of it. Ratty ever the optimist consoles Mole and sets out to make the best of things, when they hear a noise, and Mole realises it's the field mice carol singers.

They open the door "Very well sung, boys" cried the Rat "now come in all of you and warm yourselves by the fire and have something hot" "Yes come along" cried the Mole "This is quite like old times" but then Mole realised he had nothing to offer them. As he starts to cry Ratty steps in taking the eldest mouse to one side and giving him instructions and money to go and buy provisions.

On the Field mouse's return the large hamper is opened and they set about laying a feast under Ratty's direction and soon there is a huge supper for all to feast on. Mole is ecstatic feeling as though it is all a dream. He is given the gossip, asks about everyone, whilst Ratty just makes sure that every guest has plenty and that Mole has nothing to be anxious about. Eventually much later the field mice depart wishing the season's greetings to all and with their pockets stuffed with good things for their little brothers and sisters too young to join them.

Mole and Ratty sit by the fire and recount all the day's happenings until they become weary and depart for bed. Ratty falls asleep quickly but Mole lays thinking in just the frame of mind Ratty had worked so hard to get him to. Mole sees 'how plain and simple - how narrow, even, it all was; but clearly too, how much it all meant to him, and the special value of some such anchorage in one's existence. He did not at all want to abandon the new life, its splendid spaces, to turn his back on sun and air and all they offered him... the upper world was all too strong, it called to him still... he knew he must return to the larger stage. But it was good to think he had this to come back to, this place, which was all his own, these things which were so glad to see him again and could always be counted upon for the same simple welcome.'

Adapted from Wind in the Willows by Kenneth Grahame

Hymn StF 197 H&P 98

Cradled in a manger, meanly laid the son of man his head.

Gospel Lesson:

Luke 2: 1-20 Read by Beryl Flood

Video:

He Chose the shepherds <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=McaM1YMXOyE>

Hymn StF 222

Who would think that what was needed

Poem:

The journey of the magi by TS Elliott. Read by Jennie Fielding

A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.'
And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.

There were times we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
And running away, and wanting their liquor and women,
And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
A hard time we had of it.

At the end we preferred to travel all night,
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation;
With a running stream and a watermill beating the darkness,
And three trees on the low sky,
And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow.

Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,
Six hands at an open-door dicing for pieces of silver,
And feet kicking the empty wineskins,
But there was no information, and so we continued
And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon
Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.

Hymn StF 227 H&P 123

Brightest and best of the sons of the morning

Poem

One Hundred written by Sarah Cook 2009 Read by Pippa Cook

A Reflection written following the death of the hundredth British soldier in the Afghan war. 7th December 2009

One hundred empty chairs
At one hundred not full tables
Tell the story of the war that isn't done.
So many aching hearts,
So many unshed tears,
But so many smiles still making Christmas fun.

One hundred unpulled crackers,
One hundred still wrapped gifts,
Tell the story of the soul who's gone ahead.
So many sleeping children,
So many weeping wives,
Still with so many words of love unsaid.

But more than a thousand wounded
In a thousand beds
Sleep under medic watch at last tonight,
And a myriad prayers are said
As a thousand hands are held
And aching bodies carry on their silent fight.

A hundred thousand bodies
In a hundred thousand beds
Speak with twenty different tongues in desert sand,
And a hundred thousand families wait,
As emails zip back and forth,
To bring them home, alive and whole, as planned.

A million parcels sent
Brighten up the bleakest time

As a hundred thousand families wait, watch and pray.
But a hundred empty chairs
At a hundred not full tables
Will break a nation's heart this Christmas Day.

Sarah Cook (2009)

This poem is a poignant reminder that Christmas isn't all about celebration and over indulgency. For many, this Christmas will be a painful, sad, and lonely time.

Prayers of intercession



In the quietness, think about those who are finding Christmas 2024 a sad and cheerless time.

- Those who have lost everything, because of war, natural disasters, or poverty.
- Those who never had anything to begin with, street children, and those who had the misfortune of being born in the wrong place at the wrong time.
- Those who gaze on the empty chair at the table, a chair once occupied by somebody they loved and miss.
- Those who know that this will be their last Christmas, or the last Christmas they will spend with somebody they love.
- Those who have splashed out on all the trimmings and fear the arrival of the credit card bill in the new year.

In the sadness of all of this, we offer those who concern us to God, trusting that in the midst of all our pain and suffering, the Christ who lays in the manger is the God who give us hope, joy, and peace not only at Christmas time, but every day of our lives.

Amen

Dedication of Offertory

Hymn StF 212 H&P 110

O come, all ye faithful (all verses)

Blessing:

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