



Link

**December 2024
& January 2025**

The Magazine of the United Reformed Church
Stratford-upon-Avon



Worship, Witness and love for others through Jesus Christ

**The United Reformed Church
Rother Street
Stratford-upon-Avon**

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THOUGHTS FOR THE MONTH

Traditions at Christmas and New Year

It's all starting to kick off now! The Christmas season is beginning, now that we are in December.



We are starting to enter into our Christmas traditions. The Christmas songs and carols are now on the radio. The town's Christmas lights are up. The Christmas adverts on the television have already started. We are buying our Christmas presents. The smoked salmon and the Christmas pudding are stored away. You may already have ordered the turkey. The nativity scene will be going up soon. Parties are planned, Christmas cards are bought – some of us are wondering if we have got enough wine and spirits for Christmas Day?

As we get closer to Christmas the whole thing revs up more and more!

Traditions bring us joy. We love singing 'Silent Night', we treasure the lights on the Christmas tree. We get out the same old ornaments for the tree accumulated over the years – they bring back memories. We really enjoy getting together with the family over Christmas. Traditions are comfortable because they are familiar. They are comforting – like an old shoe is more comfortable than a new one. They fit well and don't cause discomfort.

Traditions are powerful, too. We humans are creatures of habit. Our lives are structured by habits. We get up, shower, comb our hair, clean our teeth and have breakfast. Traditions prevent us from re-inventing the wheel – they are almost automatic. As humans, much of our wisdom comes from knowing what works and what doesn't. We cling on to the things that work, the traditions that work and make us happy.

Traditions function as a way of fixing patterns of behaviour – in order to preserve what is best. We cling to the Nine Lessons and Carols, because we know it works. Traditions in organisations like churches and businesses keep us from straying from the values and productive patterns of the past. The people of Israel, for example, were commanded to commemorate Passover every year so that they would remember how God delivered them from Egypt. We in our church on Covenant Sunday renew our vows to God and to each other to reinforce the day-to-day practices of our faith. Traditions help us to preserve important truths and values.



BUT traditions can become empty shells that are devoid of meaning if we forget why we are doing them – tradition for tradition's sake, if you like. It's easy for traditions to become hobbies rather than guiding principles. It's like trying to teach a church to do new things: "We've always done it like this before" can sometimes be a mantra. We like to stick to our traditional way of doing things. We can become straight-jacketed by the past, by tradition, so that we are unable to move into the future. In this setting, previous traditions severely limit present possibilities. Sometimes if we can't break with tradition, if we cannot re-invent ourselves to be relevant to modern day life, then we may be doomed to die a slow death.



Also, we as individuals must avoid tradition for tradition's sake. Our individual lives change, and we can't always keep to the old traditions. We must adapt to new methods of working, new ways of living. We must not interpret each change as a loss. For instance, our physical bodies will change – those changes will affect our desires, our abilities and our lifestyle – sometimes dramatically. If we try to hang on to what we used to do, then we will be miserable. We have to change; we have to adapt and find new ways of living our lives that are again enjoyable and productive.

Traditions essentially focus on the past — the values of the past, the methods of the past, the glories of the past. They help preserve value in a world that's constantly changing. But if we are tradition-bound, then we are unable to embrace the present

or embrace change. Even worse, we might be unable to embrace Jesus himself. Christianity is a relationship, not a tradition. The essence of Christianity is not about the past (though we do learn lessons from the past) but about the here and now. We do have to remember the important facts of our faith. We must remember, for instance, what Jesus did for us on the cross. We must remember that we are forgiven, that we must love our neighbours.

Most importantly, our Christmas traditions, of course, remind us of the precious gift that God gave to us, in the form of the baby Jesus.

Amid all our Christmas Traditions, let's not forget the relationship we have, here and now, with Jesus. Sure, we can be happy with our celebrations and traditions, as long as they don't obscure the basic underlying tenet of our faith: that we live our lives with Jesus as our role model, and follow in his footsteps.

Perhaps our New Year's resolutions should include those facts as well!

Have a happy Christmas and a hopeful and peaceful New Year.

Peter

FAMILY NEWS

Katie is enjoying a holiday in Hungary, particularly visiting her sister who has been unwell.

It has been good to see Joan back in Church.

Jill and Rob are both experiencing health problems and particularly need our prayers.

Phil has continued to celebrate his 100th Birthday with a welcome visit to Church on 3rd November when he was presented with yet another birthday cake and enjoyed chatting to old friends. He has also been a guest of honour at a celebration at KES (he is an old boy) when he was presented with a beautiful birthday card signed by all the current pupils.

Ileen is looking forward to celebrating her 80th Birthday on 17th January.

FLOWER ROTA 2025

Firstly, very many thanks to all those who have supported flowers in Church over the past year in any way. I will be putting up the rota for 2025 at the service on 1st December. I invite you all to add your names at a chosen date (or more if you wish).

As noted, if you are not happy to actually put flowers in situ or indeed not physically able to purchase flowers, I will be very happy to do so for you, and put them in place.

Ileen Fisher

SEASONAL HUMOUR



WHAT'S ON AT THE BEAR PIT

The Railway Children: 6th to 15th December at 17.00 or 19.15



Matinees on 7th and 14th December at 13.00

A Bear Pit Theatre Company Production, written by E Nesbitt and adapted by Mike Kenny

A mysterious circumstance forces Bobbie, Peter, Phyllis and their mother to swap their privileged London lifestyle for an impoverished existence in rural northern England. As the children adapt to their new environment they find interest in the nearby railway. Their curiosity creates adventure and uncovers many characters that will help shape their journey.

On Saturdays the evening performance starts at 17.00, on weekdays at 19.15 and on Sunday 15th at 15.00

Tickets: £15 (concessions £12)

Nativity 3 – Dude: where's my donkey? on 21st December at



7.30pm

Bear Pit Community Cinema, Supported by Stratford Town Trust.

The pupils of St Bernadette's and the madcap Mr Poppy are back! When their new

teacher Mr Shepherd loses his memory as well as Archie the Donkey, it's up to them to save the day and reunite him with his fiancée Sophie in New York. Prepare for a race against time, fantastic flash mobs and plenty of Christmas fun on their greatest adventure yet.

Director: Debbie Isitt. Production Year: 2014. Runtime: 109 mins. Certification: U

Tickets £5 on the door

MUSLIMS DO MATTER



Like many of you, I found Peter's thoughts on the holiday in Uzbekistan very stimulating. I was particularly interested in his reflections on Islam. Like him, we have also come to the conclusion that Allah and our own God are basically one and the same.

As some of you know 15 months ago we met the only Muslim family in the village and became very involved with them. Indeed, we now consider that we have gained 5 erstwhile grandchildren aged from 5 to 17! We have learned a great deal about Islam and they have learned a lot about Christianity and I would like to reinforce some of Peter's points from our own Warwickshire experience.



Firstly, we must emphasise the importance of prayer. Prayer at regular times punctuates the Muslim's day and other activities are organised around it. This prayer habit is instilled in even young children and is central. Islam is also a "do as you would be done by" or "love your neighbour" religion. Charity and helping other people in need is imbued in a good Muslim. Having been given two settees from a local charity our Muslim friend

promptly gave one away to a lady with nothing to sit on! Given the demographic of our congregation you may also be pleased to hear that Muslims respect their elders for their wisdom and care for them enthusiastically. If you mention being under the weather chicken soup appears within the hour! It is of course halal.

This doesn't mean that there are not differences between us. If you want a good theological debate bring up the idea of the trinity. Enthusiastically monotheist Muslims find this most strange and we have had two interesting discussions which probably ended as score draws.

Relevant to the Muslim issue and again Peter refers to it, we heard Baroness Warsi at the Literary festival. Her latest book, which we are happy to lend, is called "Muslims don't matter." She spoke with much sorrow and some anger that people of her faith were tarred by politicians and the media with being terrorists or terrorist sympathisers. Muslim attitudes to women, for example, were those of the Taliban in Afghanistan whereas in fact these attitudes are rejected by most Muslims. How would we feel as Christians if our attitudes in the inclusive URC were lumped in with those of homophobic churches in the southern states of the USA ?

I would hope that with our commonalities of love for God and our neighbour joined with our prayer lives will make us call out Islamophobia when we meet it and the Baroness is correct in saying it is rife everywhere.

However, to end on a positive note reflecting change. Here in Walton last month the grand daughter of Lady Elizabeth Hamilton, Anglican Church warden, married the Sudanese son of an Imam. He spoke at the service and emphasised our similarities not our differences. Food for thought.

David Sampson

GREEN CORNER

Recycling

Did you know that 'Stratford Climate Hub' (30 Meer Street) takes many items for recycling that can't go in our blue recycling bins?

- eg:
- 'blister packs' (the plastic-and-foil things tablets come in)
 - 'dental stuff' (electric toothbrush heads, plus those tiny interdental brushes)
 - 'soft plastics' (bags, crisp packets, film etc)
 - 'coffee stuff' (pods, pouches etc)

The hub also has a bring-and-take area for: screws, nails, bolts, rawlplugs etc - you can drop off any spares you have and/or take anything you need.

The hub is open on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays 10am to 4pm.

And surely no-one is throwing batteries or light bulbs in the trash, right? These need to go back to stores that sell them, where there should be a collection bin.

Ann Jones



THE TRUTH ABOUT SANTA



Son: "Dad, I think I'm old enough now. Is there a Santa Claus?."

Dad: "Ok, I agree that your old enough. But before I tell you, I have a question for you. You see, the "truth" is a dangerous gift. Once you know something, you can't unknow it.

Once you know the truth about Santa Claus, you will never again understand and relate to him as you do now.

So my question is: Are you sure you want to know?"

Brief pause...

Son: "Yes, I want to know"

Dad: "Ok, I'll tell you: Yes there is a Santa Claus"

Son: "Really?"

Dad: Yes, really, but he's not an old man with a beard in a red suit. That's just what we tell kids. You see, kids are too young to understand the true nature of Santa Claus, so we explain it to them in a way that they can understand.

The truth about Santa Claus is that he's not a person at all; he's an idea.

Think of all those presents Santa gave you over the years.

I actually bought those myself.
I watched you open them.
And did it bother me that you didn't thank me?
Of course not!
In fact it gave me great pleasure.



You see, Santa Claus is THE IDEA OF GIVING FOR THE SAKE OF GIVING, without thought of thanks or acknowledgement.

When I saw that woman collapse in town last week and called for help, I knew that she'd never know that it was me that called the ambulance.

I was being Santa Claus when I did that."

Son: "Oh."

Dad: "So now that you know, you're part of it. You have to be Santa Claus too now. That means you can never tell a young kid the secret, and you have to help us select Santa presents for them, and most important, you have to look for opportunities to help people. Got it?"

Help each other this Christmas and...be kind.



CHRISTMAS QUIZ

1. Which country first started the tradition of putting up Christmas trees?
2. What was the coldest temperature ever recorded during a UK winter?
3. What are the chances of a white Christmas in the UK?
4. How many Christmas trees are grown in Europe?
5. How many mincepies are eaten in the UK each year?
6. Which UK King was crowned on Christmas day?
7. How many turkeys are eaten in the UK every year?
8. What is the best selling Christmas song?
9. What country has the most reindeer?
10. How many Christmas cards are sold in the UK each year?
11. In what year was the Queen's speech first broadcast on television?
12. In which US state would you find the town Santa Claus?
13. What gift did the Little Drummer Boy give to the newborn Christ?
14. What was Frosty the snowman's nose made out of?
15. What were Victorian mince pies originally made from?
16. What is the traditional Christmas meal eaten in Japan?
17. In folklore, which horned figure punishes badly behaved children?
18. Who sings the first line on the 1984 Band-Aid single: 'Do they know it's Christmas'?
19. Who plays the British Prime Minister in 'Love Actually'?
20. What well-known Christmas music became the first song ever broadcast from space in 1965?



200th Anniversary Celebration Weekend

Friday 6th & Saturday 7th December

at

**The United Reformed Church,
Rother Street,
Stratford-upon-Avon**

from 9.30am to 3.00pm

RNLI Souvenirs

Plants & Table decorations

Jigsaws and Books

Festive Goods



The brave volunteers of the RNLI have been saving lives at sea since 1824. Across the years many things have changed, but the courage and commitment of our lifesavers has continued to the present day, as we work towards our goal of saving everyone.

The story of the RNLI is one of courage and dedication. Across our 200-year history, RNLI lifesavers have answered the call to rescue - day or night. On calm seas or in ferocious storms. If someone is in peril at sea, the RNLI will do all we can to save them.

Since the charity launched its first lifeboat in 1824, the RNLI has saved more than 146,000 lives at sea. There are 448 lifeboats and hovercraft, 238 lifeboat stations, with over 5700 volunteer lifeboat crew members, in fact 97% of the operational crew are volunteers.



In 2023:

- 269 lives were saved by lifeboat crew members
- 86 lives were saved by lifeguards
- 10,734 people were helped by lifeboat crews
- 19,979 people were aided by lifeguards



A prayer from the A Rocha Wild Christian website:

TEACH US TO BE MERRY

Loving Father, help us remember the birth of Jesus, that we may share in the song of the angels, the gladness of the shepherds, and worship of the wise men.

Close the door of hate and open the door of love all over the world.

Let kindness come with every gift, and good desires with every greeting.

Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings, and teach us to be merry with clear hearts.

May the Christmas morning make us happy to be your children, and Christmas evening bring us to our beds with grateful thoughts, forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus' sake.

Amen.

CHRISTMAS QUIZ ANSWERS

DON'T CHEAT!!

- | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 11. 1957 | 1. Germany |
| 12. Indiana | 2. -27.2°C |
| 13. He played a tune on his drum | 3. 1 in 10 |
| 14. A button | 4. Nearly 60 million |
| 15. Minced beef | 5. 800 million |
| 16. KFC | 6. King William I in 1066 |
| 17. Krampus - in Germany | 7. 10 million |
| 18. Paul Young | 8. Bing Crosby's White Christmas |
| 19. Hugh Grant | more than 50 million sold |
| 20. Jingle Bells | 9. Norway |
| | 10. Over 3 billion |

Sunday Services at 9.30am

1st December	Holy Communion	Peter Horrocks
	Advent Sunday	
15th December	Carol Service at 6.30pm	Peter Horrocks
25th December	Christmas Day Celebration at 10am	
29th December	Morning Service	Tom Meldrum
5th January	Holy Communion	Revd Brian Mason
19th January	Morning Service	Sheila Brown

F&F Rota May

Please report any problems with the buildings in December to:

Tom Purves: 01789 293013 or Iain Kelso: 01789 299698 / 07770 688984

and in January 2025 to:

Sarah Salmon: 01789295976 / 07816 565371 or Ashley Pettifer: 01789 293578

Flower Rota

1st December	Jill & Rob
15th December	} Christmas arrangements
25th December	} Poinsettias
29th December	} Ileen
5th January	TBA
19th January	Ileen
2nd February	TBA

Link

The February edition of Link will be published on the 2nd February.

The deadline for submission to the next edition is Monday 27th January 2025.

Please send us your articles, pictures, humour etc.

Editors contact details:

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United Reformed Church, Rother Street

CHRISTMAS TREE FESTIVAL



**Friday 13th & Saturday 14th
December
From 9.30am till 3.00pm**

**Come and see the Church decked out with
over 30 trees, and vote for your favourite.**

**Santa will visit Saturday,
12md to 2.30pm!**

**Display by Heart of England
Woodturners.**

**NO CHARGE, but donations
welcomed.**

Refreshments available

