

Imagine!

December
2011



I magine Bethlehem some 2000 years ago. Does the picture you have bear any relation to pictures of Christmas we often get on Christmas Cards? It would have been heaving with people because of the Census. No rooms to be had; Travel Lodge and Premier Inn had long ago sold out their 'special room deals.' Imagine you are in the midst of the dirt, smells and madness that was Bethlehem at that moment in the country's history. The Romans, foreign invaders, were in charge and life wasn't easy; unless you were in the tourist industry the Census was adding to the everyday difficulties of just surviving.

Imagine you are Mary. Pregnant and full term; ready to give birth in the midst of the chaos that was Bethlehem at that time. Your fiancé had been busting a gut to find somewhere to stay, but to no avail. Imagine the anxiety and panic going through Mary and Joseph's minds as Joseph frantically searches? Imagine the relief when shelter is offered. Desperation takes away the shame of being where animals had been kept. At least this was a shelter and there would be privacy for the birth.

Imagine the feelings running through Mary's mind as she gave birth in that environment, with the Angel's words etched into her mind.

You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; his kingdom will never end. Luke 1:31-33.

What a wonderful God we worship. His Son born in the lowest, cheapest place there was. The Prince of Peace, the most priceless gift humanity has ever known, born in a stable.

Just imagine that!

David Keeble



Care Time



Rev'd Allen Morton (our URC minister) took early retirement at the end of October. We have been very blessed by his ministry with us over the past three years, and wish him and Daphne well as Allen settles into retirement.

Please remember any of our wider church family, including Allen and Daphne Morton; the Thomas family, following the death of Ivor; Cherry Lewis, following the death of her husband Ivor; Chris Coetzee and those no longer able to attend church.

Betty

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The next edition of **Imagine** will be available on Sunday 25th December. Please submit articles by Friday 16th December to: news@stanstedfreechurch.org.uk. Alternatively, please pass to one of the editors, or send to:

23A Bentfield Road, Stansted CM24 8HP. Thank you.

Editors: Alan Wheeler and Mike & Marion Dyer

Copies of this and previous editions of Imagine can be found on our website www.stanstedfreechurch.org.uk

What's on in December

Worship at Stansted Free Church

- 4th 10.30 am New Directions - Don McGregor
11th 10.30 am Rev'd Stuart Veitch - Communion
18th 10.30 am Carol Service & Gift Service - Worship Leaders
25th 10.30 am Christmas Day - Rev'd David Keeble

January

- 1st 10.30 am Rev'd David Mullins

Morning worship is followed by coffee. All are welcome.

Other Activities

- Thu 1st 8.00 pm Circuit meeting in the Hall
Tue 6th 8.15 pm Local Preachers & Worship Leaders in the Hall
Thu 8th 2.30 pm Bible Study in the Foyer
Sun 11th 11.30 am Fairtrade goods on sale after service
Mon 12th 6.00 pm Pilots in the Hall
8.00 pm Shalom Party - 7 Blythwood Gardens
Sat 17th 3.30 pm Celebration of Christmas at St John's (see p5)
Sun 18th 6.30 pm Carol Service at Water Lane URC
Carol Service at B Stortford Methodist Church
Thu 22nd 7.30 pm Village Carol Singing (see p6)
Fri 23rd 7.30 pm Village Carol Singing (see p6)
Sat 24th 11.15 pm Midnight Communion at B S Methodist Church

Gift Service 18th December

During our Gift Service on 18th December, there will be an opportunity to bring items for the Whitechapel Mission. As most of you will know, the mission provides thousands of breakfasts to homeless people each year, and also has the largest clothing store in London for the homeless. Breakfast cereals, tinned beans and tomatoes, tea, coffee, and toiletries are welcome, along with gloves, scarves and socks. If you are not able to be at the service, donations may be left in the vestry. Thank you.

Choir for a Day



Photo by Robert Eves, Sairento Photography

Judy, Fran, Marion D, Alan W, Mike and Betty joined 40 other singers at Bishop's Stortford Methodist Church on 12th November for an exhausting but very enjoyable day, culminating in a concert in the evening. The magnificent sum of £645 was raised for Help for Heroes. Conductor Hilary Eves was great to work with, and we are hoping to have an opportunity to repeat the experience sometime in the future.

Ivor Thomas

We were all sad to learn of the death of Ivor on 11th November, aged 99 years. He had been a church member for over 50 years, and had made a very big contribution to the life of the church, not least as organist and life elder. The church was full for his memorial service - a very fitting tribute for a lovely man who will be much missed by his family and friends.

Answers to Meaningful Christmas Quiz on pages 6-7

1c, 2b, 3a, 4b, 5a, 6c, 7c, 8b, 9b, 10a



With Candlelight, Bells & Sweet Aromas
come and join our

Celebration of Christmas Songs and Readings

with contributions from villagers,
local schools & churches

3.30 pm Saturday 17th December
St John's Church

**(please note change of venue
from previous years)**

*Why not bring your friends and
family and join the fun?*

Retiring collection for The Samaritans

Organised by Churches Together in Stansted



1. How many Christmas trees are decorated in the UK every year?
 - a. 1 million
 - b. 3 million
 - c. 20 million
2. When did we start decorating trees in the UK to mark the birth of Jesus?
 - a. 1000 years ago
 - b. 161 years ago
 - c. 500 years ago .
3. Christmas crackers were invented by:
 - a. Tom Smith, a London sweet maker in 1846
 - b. Charles Cracker, a dress maker in 1910
 - c. Charles Dickens. the famous author in 1840
4. Which of these is the oldest carol?
 - a. Once in Royal David's City
 - b. O Come all ye Faithful
 - c. Away in a Manger

5. What city was Jesus born in?
 - a. Bethlehem
 - b. Jerusalem
 - c. Nazareth

6. In what direction did the wise men see the star?
 - a. West
 - b. North
 - c. East

7. What was the first Christmas Tree decoration made from?
 - a. Sausage meat
 - b. Wood
 - c. Fruit

8. How many angels appeared to the shepherds?
 - a. One
 - b. Too many to count
 - c. Four

9. The real name of Father Christmas is:
 - a. Benjamin, the stocking maker
 - b. Saint Nicholas, the bishop
 - c. Peter, the fisherman

10. Where does the custom of giving presents at Christmas come from?
 - a. Saint Nicholas, who dropped gold down a chimney
 - b. The wise men who gave frankincense, gold and myrrh to Jesus
 - c. King Herod who wanted to visit the baby Jesus and be kind to him



Answers on page 4





CAROL SINGING

in aid of

The Samaritans

Registered charity number 259755

ALL WELCOME

MEET AT 7.30 EACH EVENING

*Come & join the fun singing your
favourite carols in Stansted*

Thursday
22 December

Meet at junction of Walson Way & Palmer Close (enter Walson Way from the mini roundabout in Church Road, and Palmer Close is first left). Finish in Peachey Walk which has rear access from Palmer Close.

Friday
23 December

Meet at junction of Cambridge Road & Croasdaile Road (opposite Jet garage) and finish at the Rose & Crown.

Followed by seasonal refreshments at 9 pm

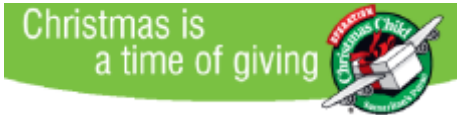
CHRISTMAS COMING

No star, no kings, no angels' song.
A baby, certainly, to wonder at.
The time, the place, unknown.
Yet shepherds, surely
Fishers and village folk,
Ordinary people,
We were there.

And afterwards, to honour Him
We wrote the stories:
A star, to greet the Star of David.
Shepherds, for a Shepherd-King.
A manger-cradle in a cave
For one who had no place to lay His head.
The homage of the Wise.
A tyrant's fear and cruel malice.
Tears at His birth, and gifts of prophecy
Foreshadowing His death.
In the world's dark night,
A heavenly Light.

Cherish these stories, telling us.
Maybe not how it was
But how it is
And shall be,
By God's grace
On closing hearts
In a hard world
Blazing the vision
For all wayfarers.

Bill Beattie
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OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD SHOE BOXES

A magnificent 330 boxes filled with goodies were sent this year, packed by St. Theresa's Seniors group and in our church hall. Thank you to everyone who contributed in any way. As well as receiving gifts to put in the boxes, £550.50 was generously given to pay for their shipping costs. Donors and packers were not just from Stansted, but from as far afield as Clavering (primary school), Bishop's Stortford (Methodist and URC churches) and Saffron Walden (knit & natter group). Thanks to all the knitters most boxes had a woolly hat and a puppet. For our children with their electronic gadgets a hand puppet may not seem much, but for a child who has suffered trauma it can be a source of comfort. Our boxes will be going to children in Liberia, where 85% of people live below the international poverty line. In case you think they don't need woolly hats there because it's too hot, those who have visited say it gets very chilly at night. So a big pat on the back for a great achievement. 330 children will have a wonderful box of gifts to open at Christmas because of your generosity.

Catherine Dean



The next **Traidcraft** stall will be after the service on Sunday 11th December and I have a wide range of Traidcraft goods suitable for Christmas presents. Catalogues are still available in the church foyer.

Brenda

fairtrade@stanstedfreechurch.org.uk

Sawston Free Church 200th celebrations

As part of Sawston Free Church's 200th celebrations, Libby Purves, the journalist and Radio 4 broadcaster, has kindly agreed to lend her Nativity Crib Collection. Entry will be by voluntary donation to the Teenage Cancer Trust (for the unit at Addenbrooke's) and Action for Children. The exhibition will run from Wednesday 14th to Sunday 18th December. Refreshments will be available in the OWLCafé.

GREEDY DAYS

These are the greedy days.
It used to be
That Advent was a longing fast,
A time to feel our need
In faith and tingling hope
And keen-eyed looking forward.
Now we cannot wait
But day by day and week by week
We celebrate obsessively
Clutching at Christmas.
When at last it comes,
The day itself,
Our glass is empty.
We have held the feast
Already, and the news is stale
Before it reaches us.
We cheat ourselves.
Yet - somehow - still we hope
In these spoiled days
That there may be a Child.

Bill Beattie

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Shalom

All Welcome - Meetings are 8 pm

12th Dec Christmas Party - 7 Blythwood Gardens
23rd Jan At Home - 7 Blythwood Gardens

Marion Dyer

Stansted Free Church

Methodist / URC

www.stanstedfreechurch.org.uk

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Sunday Service

10.30 am Morning Worship

Children's Work

Alternate Mondays 6 pm Pilots for children aged 5 - 18 years.

Valerie Trundle Tel 813433 Email: pilots@stanstedfreechurch.org.uk