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TAUNTON UNITED REFORMED CHURCH MAGAZINE

NO. 601

December 2022

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Taunton United Reformed Church



DECEMBER 2022 Magazine



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From the Editor



December is that time of year when, though mostly Advent, the Christmas season is well under way. This is when our thoughts turn to tinsel, toys, perfume, Scotch whisky and... also a birth, a birth many years ago and many miles distant.

It so happens that I am also celebrating the birth of a grandson, who arrived in November. He surprised everybody, not by his miraculous conception (so far as I know) but by making a break into the world two weeks early. If you twist my arm, I can show you a photograph of little Alexander.

The theme for this issue is Birth. We will have opportunity in the coming days to recall the birth of Jesus in as much detail as the gospel-writers give (which is not much), and I am aware that not everyone goes gooey at the sight of a baby or shares the experience of parenthood. So it is good that the articles on the theme offer us ways of looking at birth more generally.

Clare, on page 12, takes a look at the role of midwives in the Bible and personal experience, and she invites us to consider birth metaphorically in our own lives. On page 18 I attempt to swap sentiment for meditation based on a (mildly) scientific view of a baby's development.

Of course vulnerability is not just the experience of the very young. Current economic circumstances are highlighting the gap between those who have enough to live on and those who do not. The talk that was recently given about the Taunton Foodbank, a major mission in the area to address this need, is described in some detail on page 14. Then, as I write, the vulnerability to climate change of many in the global south hangs in the balance as leaders of rich nations consider 'loss and damage' payments (see page 11). And there is a report on our effort to support refugees of the war in Ukraine on page 9.

The next issue will bring in 2023 and I suggest the theme of **Hope and Fears**. What are yours? Why not have a go at writing a short piece?

Finally, a note to those who organise, or indeed contribute to, rotas. I shall be glad to receive rotas for at least the beginning of 2023 by the deadline for the next issue (12th December). Those who volunteer can help organisers by offering dates well before then.

Peter Henderson

Cover image: Detail from the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth by Johannes de Doper, about 1625

Forthcoming Church Services

Sundays at 10:30am at the United Reformed Church, Paul Street

4 December Morning worship led by the Miss Sue Ingham (includes The Lord's Supper)

11 December Morning worship led by Revd Viv Henderson

18 December Carol Service **at 4pm**

25 December United service at Temple Methodist Church

Weekly Activities

at the time of publication these are:

Wednesdays 9:30am - 12:30 **Work-Wise** in the church hall: offering support with all aspects of job seeking

Tuesday coffee mornings and prayers are on hold till the new year.

Other Notable Dates

Thursday 1 December Elders' meeting

Monday 12 December Magazine deadline

Monday 19 December First day of the Jewish festival of Hanukkah, (though the first Menorah candle is lit at sundown the previous evening), lasts to 26 Dec.



The Holy Family
© Ally Barrett
(www.reverendally.org)
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Pastoral letter



Dear Friends

Busy, Busy, Busy

Most of us can relate to those words especially during the run up to Christmas. At the present moment they are definitely part of my life. There seems so much to do. I admit to being frustrated, stuck in the office four mornings last week on church work. But I am thankful for those people who have taken on some of the work previously

done by Ron, our late Church Administrator. As we look to appoint a new Church Administrator, do you know of someone who might be willing to take on the role, six hours a week sometimes, in the church and sometimes from home. If you do, please speak to one of the Elders.

I am doing my best to delegate but I don't find it easy.

But what is our reason for being busy? Is it that we want to keep occupied so that we can push aside things that we don't want to think about, are we running away from something? I remember something my mum said, I think at the time it was to do with housework, but it can apply to anything. Do the thing(s) you don't like doing or don't want to do first and then you know they are done and you're not being bothered because they still need doing.

I wonder what was on Joseph and Mary's minds as they travelled to Bethlehem for the census and with the imminent arrival of their baby?

Does our busyness interfere with our time with God.? Does He get pushed aside because we think we have too many things to do?

I have learnt that I don't have to be busy all the time. When I retired I came in one day and thought what have I got to do now? The answer was simple: I did not have to do anything, and I sat down and did nothing for a while. Since then I make time, most days for sitting and doing nothing for a short time, and its surprising how therapeutic that is.

As we are now in Advent, with all the Christmas activities rushing in on us, take time for a few moments each day of being alone in quietness where you are able to listen to what your body and more importantly what our Lord is asking of you.

May the Lord be with you, your family and friends as we celebrate the birth of our Lord.

With love and best wishes

Sue

Descent

Down he came from *up*,
and *in* from *out*,
and *here* from *there*.
A long leap,
an incandescent fall
from magnificent
to naked, frail, small,
through space,
between stars,
into our chill night air,
shrunk, in infant grace,
to our damp, cramped,
earthy place,
among all
the shivering sheep.

And now, after all,
there he lies,
fast asleep.

Reprinted with permission of the author, Luci Shaw

Praying through December

There are different way of using these pointers:
 simply pray for every subject every day; or take one subject per day in turn;
 or move on from one subject to the next only after you think you have
 prayed it fully.

- C** We pray for creation and ways we can mitigate its demise.
- H** We pray for healers of body mind and spirit.
- R** We pray for all those who have different religious beliefs than ours.
- I** We pray for those who are ill.
- S** We pray for all who work in the Service Industries.
- T** We pray for teachers, trainers and tutors
- M** We pray for all areas of the media, that what is true is broadcast and reported.
- A** We pray for agriculturalists who supply our food, our fuel, and look after our natural environment.
- S** We pray and give thanks for our Saviour whose birth we celebrate this month.

Prayers this month are suggested by Sue Ingham.

Revised Common Lectionary for forthcoming Sundays

4 December	11 December	18 December
Isaiah 11:1-10 Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19 Romans 15:4-13 Matthew 3:1-12	Isaiah 35:1-10 Psalm 146:5-10 James 5:7-10 Matthew 11:2-11	Isaiah 7:10-16 Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19 Romans 1:1-7 Matthew 1:18-25
25 December <i>Christmas Day</i>	1 January	8 January
Isaiah 9:2-7 Psalm 96 Titus 2:11-14 Luke 2:1-20	Isaiah 63:7-9 Psalm 148 Hebrews 2:10-18 Matthew 2:13-23	Jeremiah 31:7-14 Psalm 147:12-20 Ephesians 1:3-14 John 1:[1-9] 10-18

PASTORAL TEAM

Our aim is to foster care and concern for each other in the congregation.

However, If you have a emergency and need help or concern, do not hesitate to contact a member of the Pastoral Team.

Mrs Isobel Tosh Robb, Mrs Meg Cardy, Dr Eryl Harris,
 Mrs Sheena Helliard, Miss Sue Ingham, and Revd. Janet Sowerbutts.

Church Family News



Carol singing

Please come and join us for Carol singing at the church porch on **Saturday 17th December** from 2.00 - 3.30pm.

Reform magazine

The monthly magazine 'Reform' is published by the United Reformed Church and is issued ten times a year. There is always a copy in the Dora Cox Room for anyone to read or even borrow for a few days. It is also possible to have a personal copy, which can either be sent directly to you or collected in church. The cost for this is £29.50 per year. Please let Pamela Bamber know by **Sunday 4th December** if you would like a personal copy for collection at the church.



Birthday Corner

Special greetings go to those in our wider fellowship who have a birthday in December. We hope that celebrations are not overshadowed by that other festival this month. May God bless you all.

- 7 Heather Parsons
- 17 John Cohen
- 18 Sue Ingham



Our Ukrainian Family

Our Ukrainian family, mum Mrs Olena Kofan, her 15 year old daughter Anastasia or Nastya, (She doesn't mind which we use) and mother-in-law Mrs Valetyna Bodhan, have moved into the property that the church is renting for them.

As you will be aware, the April 2022 Church Meeting gave the Elders their approval to go ahead with the Homes for Ukraine scheme. At the July 2022 Church Meeting a sum of £10,000 for the 6-month placement was set aside for the project. During the protracted process involved in the government's Home for Ukraine Scheme contacts have been made with multiple agencies and subject experts across the system and beyond to ensure that we, as Elders, comply with our church's wishes.

The government under its Home/House Payments scheme pays the host/ sponsor £350 per month to cover the cost of the Utilities - gas, electric, water and council tax. There is also an extra £1,750 Winter Months Payment, in addition to the Energy Bill Support Scheme of £400.

The family is responsible for the costs of food, telephone, broadband, TV licence and mobile phone charges. The mother has employment, and her mother-in-law has Pension Credit which will limit what they can or cannot claim from Universal Credit.

The only financial cost to the church is the rent.

The family are well aware and extremely grateful for the Church's generosity and like many are finding it difficult to accept help.

A written agreement between Somerset County Council, the Church and the Family will be signed once it has been produced by the Council. At present a verbal agreement is sufficient.

Monthly visits by two of the elders and representatives from SCC will take place and a full review will take place after 12 months.

Sue Ingham, church secretary

Social and Arts Events

Back on Sunday 6th November

We welcomed Mary Hart from the Taunton Foodbank. Mary is a longstanding volunteer and trustee of the Foodbank. See the article on page 12. We were joined by the Revd Clare Downing (pictured), past Moderator of General Assembly, who had led the morning service.



Sunday 4th December

The Christmas Celebratory Lunch takes place at the Winchester Arms, Trull.

2023

As usual we will not meet in January or February 2023 but hope to resume in March.

Sheila & Janet

Q U O T E	How silently, how silently,	the hopes and fears of all the years
	the wondrous gift is given!	are met in [baby Jesus] tonight.
	So God imparts to human hearts	
	the blessings of his heaven:	
		<i>Hymn by Phillip Brooks</i>

The Business Carol Service

for all who work in Taunton

will take place at

St James' Church, Taunton

Thursday 8th December 2022 at 6:15pm

Speaker: Major Lindsey Toy - "Christmas with the Salvation Army"

Organised by Taunton Team Chaplaincy, sponsored by Everys Solicitors

Christmas and climate change in Malawi

Christian Aid Christmas 2022 is drawing our attention to Malawi this year, a landlocked small country in south east Africa. Malawi has been described as 'the warm heart of Africa'. But it is one of the world's poorest countries. Sadly families are facing the worst of the climate crisis with both drought and floods this year. Christian Aid tells us the people are struggling to grow maize, their staple food. They are mainly subsistence farmers depending on small scale farming. Families are left with crops shrivelled by drought or drowned in the floods.



Mother of 5 Fyness tends her garden

One mum describes Christmas in the village. Her job is the traditional cooking of rice and chicken while the young people play football and villagers prepare for an evening of dancing. This year may be different as many families are struggling to survive.

Christian Aid invites us to 'give, act and pray with us this Christmas, because without gifts of love, it wouldn't be Christmas'.

Sheila Rudofsky

MAGAZINE DEADLINE

Contributions for the January 2023 magazine should be with the Editor

Peter Henderson - 14 Somerset Avenue, Taunton, TA1 5HU

Telephone: 01823 254668 - e-mail: tauntonurc.mag@gmail.com

by MONDAY 12th DECEMBER 2022 (or earlier) please.

The theme will be Hopes and Fears.

Birth

Through my time as a hospital chaplain on the neonate and maternity wards, my personal experience of two live and natural births, and my training as a doula (birth accompanier), I have long been interested in the history, culture, and all aspects of birth and midwifery. The word midwife means ‘with woman’. Miriam Therese Winter writes in her “A Psalm for Midwives”

You will know when it is time to bring to birth
the new creation. The signs will be all around you,
urging, insisting...
It takes labour, hard labour
to bring to birth something new

The image of a midwife can be traced back to biblical times, where we first read the story of two humble but influential midwives in the Book of Exodus. They are not nameless as many women are in the Bible and so perhaps we should be alert to that, to notice that these two are named. They have a presence, they have a role. The creativity and fearlessness of Shiphrah and Puah led them to take on the mighty Pharaoh.

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, ‘When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live.’ But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, ‘Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?’ The midwives said to Pharaoh, ‘Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.’ So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong.

Exodus 1:15-20 NRSV

By working together these two women were able to ensure the safe birth of the Hebrew children, which eventually led to the story of Moses and the exodus of the Hebrew people from their oppressors. Their story offers us a legacy regarding the power of women’s friendships and the courageous paths that have been forged because of them. I wonder if this understanding and the role of the midwife itself can help us to better understand our task as community and the new ways we are called to support one another through the unprecedented changes we have experienced in recent years and that are still to come in the years ahead.

Women’s friendships have empowered women throughout the Bible and history. Ruth and Naomi, Mary and Elizabeth, remind us of the impact the presence of woman has had on our journey. We will often weave stories into our conversations the memory of a grandmother, aunt, teacher or mentor who believed in us, guided us and left us with pieces of wisdom. We may not think of these women as “midwives” yet we know the influence and guidance they have given us. We have launched careers, pursued dreams, taken risks, “given birth” to projects and ideas. Like the two Hebrew midwives, we find creativity and courage in working together, rather than confronting the pharaoh alone.



Together we can help one another find courage to stay with chaos, live with uncertainty, clarify what is important, set healthy boundaries, and come to recognise a larger Mystery at work. The ancient art of midwifery, of enabling birthing, may help us wonder at what is being birthed in our selves, our family, our church, our community. We will need the supportive presence of spiritual midwives; we will need the lived experience of others as we struggle to stay with the pain, take risks, and let go of old images of who we are and who God is. The midwives’ role at birth is not to do the work for each other, but rather to be there as a reminder that none of us stands alone.

Who has “midwived” you emotionally, professionally, spiritually?

How have they made a difference in your life?

Who are what are the “pharaohs” that you need to beware of?

What might be being “birthed” in your life/in the church/in the world as we move into the season of the Incarnation, God with us, and beyond into 2023?

Clare Callanan

Taunton Foodbank

We welcomed Mary Hart from the Taunton Foodbank as after-lunch speaker on Sunday 6th November. Mary is a longstanding volunteer and trustee of the Foodbank, well-placed to give us a 10-year report.

She told us that, from small beginnings here at the United Reformed Church, the Foodbank has grown to help more people year on year. After eight months distributing food from the church hall, carrying food up and down stairs, the Foodbank moved to a large warehouse on the Belvedere Trading estate and developed the premises so they could both store and give out the food from the same building.

The Foodbank was led and managed entirely by volunteers for the first three years and was supported by this church whilst it became established. In 2015 Taunton Foodbank became an independent charity and employed a paid manager to take the work forward.

This tenth anniversary gives us an opportunity to look back and see what the Foodbank has meant to so many people.

The Foodbank runs on a simple model: food is donated by local people and provided to local people in crisis. All are clients referred to them by other agencies: the Job Centre, Citizens Advice, village agents, parent and family support advisors in schools, and Somerset West and Taunton Council are top the list of referrers.

When they started the Foodbank 10 years ago, they were advised to have 3 tonnes of food in stock before they opened. They had no idea what 3 tonnes of food looked like. After what appeared to have been a successful collecting day at Asda, they had less than half a tonne of food. They prayed about this, not wanting to delay opening. There was an appeal to local business and community groups and, of course, to churches. On the day they opened they had exactly 3 tonnes of food in stock.

Since then over 5,000 tonnes of food have been donated to the food bank. This has led to the need to find more storage space for food from time to time. Compass is a charity that operates from the same site as the Foodbank and has, over the years, helped with extra space to store food.

The number of people coming to the Foodbank for help settled down to around 3,300 per year, but they began to see a rise in late 2016; this was closely linked to the roll out of the new benefit Universal Credit which left people waiting for their payments for six weeks (and more).

They saw another leap in numbers during the first year of the pandemic when food was provided for over 8,000 people. Numbers fell back a bit last year but they are still providing more food to more people than prior to the pandemic and now there is a cost of living crisis.

Alongside this, over the 10 years they have given out over 2,500 school holiday boxes.

Clients' main reasons for coming to the Foodbank used to be problems with the benefit system; now more and more are coming, not because they have problems with the system, but they simply do not have enough money to manage: the payments are simply not keeping up with inflation.

In August this year the Foodbank entered into a contract with Citizen's Advice Taunton to provide a Cost of Living advisor. Kate has now been with them for three months and has helped 60 clients with a variety of issues. One of her main aims is to ensure that people are receiving all the money they are entitled to so that they will not need to keep on using the food bank. To date the income gained by clients she has helped is almost £14,000.

One example is that of a young woman with mild learning difficulties who had mistakenly reported the birth of her child as the child having moved in, 5 months previously; she was helped to correct the problem and so receive the child element of Universal Credit. Another is a man who was not aware that he is entitled to a 25% single person's discount of council tax



Staff face the future with confidence. God has continually met their needs as the Foodbank has grown and developed along with the growing needs of the clients that come.

The Foodbank has good stocks at the moment and is prepared for the high demand expected over the winter. Maintaining these stocks depends on the steady supply of donations continuing (though they have enough baked beans to last for quite some time!).

Mary said that they could not do what they do without the continued support of the local community and so they want to say a big Thank You to this church for getting the Foodbank started and for our continued support over the years.

Commitment for Life

Life-giving Faith | Defiant Hope | Generous Love

Helping United Reformed Churches work for a fairer world and for peace with justice, recognising that change and response starts with each one of us.

Envelopes for your donations and Information Leaflets are available in the Dora Cox Room. Please feel free to put in what you can, when you can, no amount is too small.

Revd Dr Kevin Snyman - Commitment for Life Programme Officer,
Suzanne Pearson - Commitment for Life Administrative Assistant

Moving Stories

News from our Partners around the World

FAIRTRADE EDITION

UK Retailers commit to Fairtrade

Commitment for Life supports The Fairtrade Foundation who work in partnership with 1.9 million farmers and workers globally to address the root causes of poverty. The good news is that more UK retailers are committed to Fairtrade. "It is inspiring to see that public trust in, and preference for, Fairtrade is at its highest ever," says Michael Gidney, chief Executive of Fairtrade Foundation.

Lidl is the biggest buyer of Fairtrade cocoa. It rolled out its 'Way 2 Go' chocolate across 400 stores. Aldi launched the Choco Changer, a new chocolate bar that commits to Fairtrade's Living Income Reference Price for cocoa. Aldi also provides opportunities for flower farm workers in Ethiopia to meet objectives on gender equity. Other Fairtrade cocoa conversions were made by SPAR. It introduced three new products on trial. Proper, building on their brand commitment as the 'only Fairtrade sweet popcorn' introduced two new Proper Chocolate Popcorn bars, while Asda launched a new FSI cocoa chocolate bar. 100 percent Fairtrade brand Tony's Chocolonely also launched in major retailers in 2021.

Since 2005, Greggs has sourced Fairtrade coffee beans for all its coffee products. It has since added bananas, apple juice, orange juice, sugar sticks, sugar syrup, hot chocolate, black tea, mint tea, and green tea as part of its Fairtrade commitments. In August 2021, Greggs announced a switch to using only Fairtrade chocolate in its own products, which include Milk Chocolate Cookies, Caramel Shortbread and Chocolate Brownies.

Prayer for Fairtrade

God of Abundance, help our church to support Fairtrade. Put into leadership business leaders with a conscience. Help them place people before profit.

We pray for Fairtrade across the world but especially in Zimbabwe, Bangladesh, and Israel and Palestine.

Amen.



Facts 'n Figures on Fairtrade



Fairtrade Fortnight

...will be 27th February - 12th March 2023

See www.fairtrade.org.uk/get-involved/Current-campaigns/Fairtrade-Fortnight

The wonder of life

Since the birth of my grandson, and the opportunity to hold this six day old bundle of robust vulnerability, I have been reflecting on how he had grown from almost nothing over the last nine months. I wondered how and when life really begins. It is an important question and tricky to answer.

I once met the then chair of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, the board of which makes decisions about the way fertility clinics and related research centres work. Their decisions include both regulation and ethics. It is demanding and often emotional work because my question lurks behind much of their thinking. The answer you arrive at, or prefer, will determine your moral stance on issues such as IVF, abortion and cloning, among others. If you can, do pray for these people.

With a baby in my arms - emotional work of a different kind - I am much less concerned with bioethics as I am with simply marvelling at the phenomenon of human life. My initial grounding as a scientist included very little biology (and that is now 40 years out of date) so I decided to read a little on what happens out of sight during pregnancy. I am astonished: I will share some of my wonder and and I promise not to get technical.

Inside the mother the fertilised egg will both divide and grow to produce not just the foetus but its own additional structure for womb service.

After six weeks not only has the heart developed, but it has started to beat (though it is too early to hear this); that means internal electrical signals arose somehow. About the same time there is the first electrical activity in the brain. After 10 weeks the other vital organs are fully functional. By now it is a human in miniature, though the body will now grow and various systems need initialising before it can survive birth.

As the baby's brain develops it produces first reflexes then co-ordination of muscles and hence breathing (for practice) , swallowing, and kicking.

By the time a baby is born it will have about 100 billion brain cells - a complete set - and these will have been produced at an average of 250,000 per minute. Now begins the adventure of learning how to live.

Truly, I am fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalms 139:14); and, for me, knowing the details only adds to the wonder and will keep me buoyant until the next visit.

Peter Henderson

ROTAS FOR DECEMBER

CHURCH FLOWERS

4 Dec -
11 Dec Pamela Bamber
18 Dec *Christmas arrangements*
25 Dec -

MORNING COFFEE ROTA

4 Dec Pamela & Alan Bamber
11 Dec Chris Trott & Sheila Rudofsky
18 Dec Pamela Bamber & Carol Rowswell
25 Dec Heather Parsons & Isobel Tosh-Robb

Sunday duties

	Duty Elder	Communion Elders	Zoom host
4 Dec	Frank	Stuart Sheena	Eryl
11 Dec	Stuart		Peter
18 Dec	Sheena	4pm	Eryl
25 Dec	<i>United service at Temple Methodist</i>		

**OFFICE HOLDERS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF
TAUNTON UNITED REFORMED CHURCH**

Car-Park..... Eryl Harris
 Christian Aid..... Sheila Rudofsky
 Church Heating Church Administrator (see page 1)
 Church Secretary..... Sue Ingham (07818 637155)
 Commitment for Life Contact..... Sue Ingham
 FINANCE - Treasurer..... Eryl Harris
 FINANCE - Covenant Collections..... Paula Powell
 Flowers Pam Elliott, Sheila Woolvin
 Letting Secretary Church Administrator (see page 1)
 Magazine Distributor Dawn Wright (01823 331800)
 Magazine Editor..... Peter Henderson (01823 254668)
 Prayer Handbook.....
 Property Stuart Trott
 Pulpit Supply Church Administrator (see page 1)
 Reform Magazine Pamela Bamber
 Social and Arts Group Janet Sowerbutts, Sheila Rudofsky (01823 617411)
 Sound Frank Callanan
 Sunday Coffee Organiser Pamela Bamber
 Sunday News-Sheet the Church Secretary
 Synod Representative Sue Ingham
 World Day of Prayer

SERVING ELDERS

Sue Ingham <i>Secretary</i> 07818 637155	Meg Cardy 01823 443245	Frank Callanan 07789 071935
Sheena Helliard 01823 333382	Stuart Trott 01823 281551	

Taunton United Reformed Church

Vision Statement

For the sake of the Gospel, we will be:

- ◆ a church that welcomes, whoever you are
- ◆ a church that cares and responds with action
- ◆ a church that works with others and plays its part in the community
- ◆ a church that knows and shares the love of God
- ◆ a church that is growing in faith and knowledge of God
- ◆ a church full of hope and joy