

Journey with



THE CONTINUING STORY OF THE CHURCH AT CARRS LANE



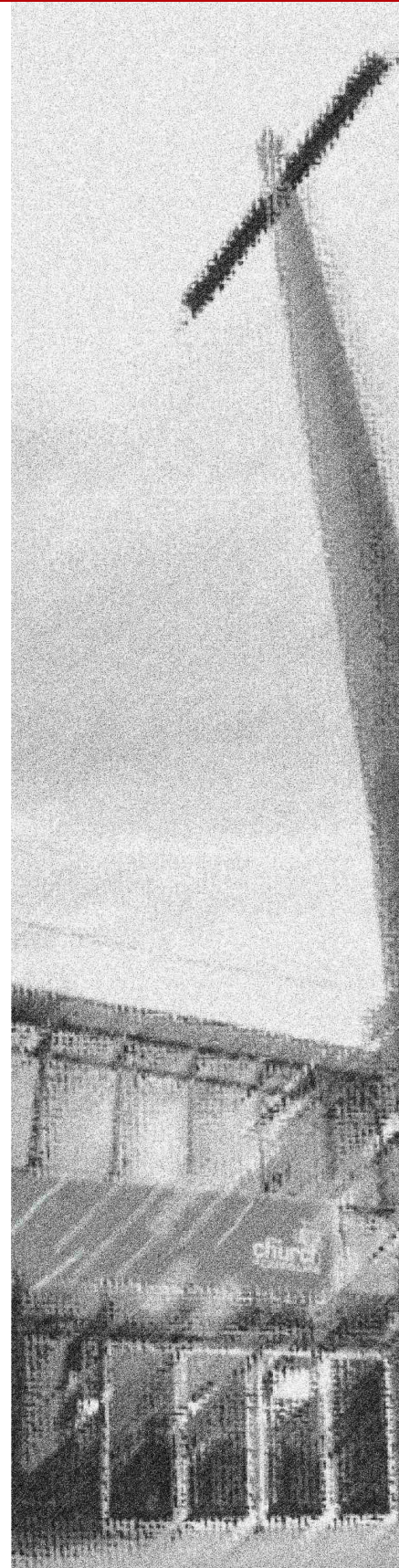
Welcoming Hope: into a broken world, the light of Christ will shine

Human Rights | Green Matters
Living with Dyslexia | Christian Aid News
Greetings | Advent and Christmas Events

United in Jesus | serving the city

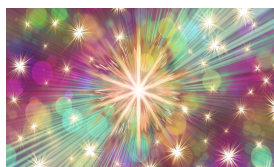
The home of a partnership of Christian ministries

Winter 2019



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Next issue of Journey (Spring 2020):

Deadline for contributions: Tuesday 18 February

Editorial Team: Pat Davies, Steph Neville, Lindsay Peniston

Pastoral Letter

Dear Friends,

As I write to you, I look at my desk and see a small cross with the image of an eagle and verse 31 of the book of Isaiah, chapter 40:



*Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles.*

December is a lively month. For Christians, it is the month of preparation, the Advent time that will culminate with the celebration of Jesus' birth. The celebration of the birth of a baby that, with his vulnerability, has saved the world, showing us the way to God.

For Business, Christmas is a time when traders seek to cash in on the festive season, trying to sell us material joy and happiness.

TV commercials show us how easy it is to create well-being around us: with the right food, sparkling beverages and presents there is no family who cannot be brought together, no friction that cannot be ironed out... at least until the beginning of January.

And yet, if I look around, near the Christmas decorations in the streets, I see more and more homeless people; if I listen to the news there are more and more refugees who are trying to reach the shore and if I look at the increasing use of food banks, it seems there are more and more neighbours who are struggling with poverty.

The light that comes into the world this Christmas will not illuminate the entrance of the food hall but will highlight the need for homes, food, security, the need for acceptance and peace.

And those needs are not only for a calendar month, those are needs that change an existence into a life lived with dignity and with equal opportunities for everyone.

On 20th November, it was transgender day of remembrance, a day to remember and honour brothers and sisters around the world who have lost their lives due to anti-transgender violence.

In 2019 more than 300 people lost their lives because of that.

A lot of people are suffering around us.

In her book on the Ten Commandments, the Jewish Italian writer Elena Loewenthal, talking about pain, says that pain disfigures people, making them unrecognisable, and we should not be judgemental. Pain can become an instrument of knowledge but there is no certainty that this will happen.

Pain does not make us better; it has no moral value. In the Ten Commandments there is one missing... this should be “do not cause pain”.¹

And I wonder if our call to follow the light that shines in the darkness this December could be to try *not to cause pain* by being active agents of reconciliation, more inclined to welcome than to say farewell.

Trying *not to cause pain* by making sure that people have a place to call home, have food and the right to stay in the UK, have the chance to live in freedom, no matter who they are and who they fall in love with.

The eagle from the little cross is still looking at me, as if whispering *Those who hope in the Lord...*

So, in this December, let us put our hope in the Lord who will renew our strength, giving us the courage *not to cause pain*.

Amen and Ciao

Cristina



1 Loewenthal Elena, *Dieci*, Giulio Einaudi ed., 2019, pg 105. My free translation.

DAILY DEVOTIONS



Daily Devotions from the United Reformed Church

Every morning the URC send by email, free of charge, a reading, reflection and prayer to over 3,000 people. The writers come from a variety of places and perspectives within the church.

Sign up via www.devotions.urc.org.uk



The Methodist Church

Daily Devotions from the Methodist Church

Prayer of the Day:

1. Visit <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/prayer/prayer-of-the-day/> to read the prayer of the day.
2. Follow <https://twitter.com/MethodistGB> #prayer to read the prayer of the day every day in your twitter feed.
3. Methodist Prayer Handbook available from Methodist Publishing for £3.95 plus p&p. Available annually from 1st August. <https://www.methodistpublishing.org.uk/>

Daily Bible Study:

Visit <https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/the-bible/a-word-in-time/>

Amnesty International Write for Rights Campaign 2019

December the 10th is Human Rights Day.

Once again it is planned that on Sunday, the 8th December the service will include the signing of Greetings Cards to Prisoners of Conscience as part of Amnesty International's Write for Rights Campaign



The focus this year is on young people. It is 30 years on 20 November since the UN adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. It has been ratified in every state in the world except the USA!

The Church at Carrs Lane has always had a commitment to Peace and Justice and has been involved in this event for about 35 years now, in different forms. We look forward to your continued commitment to this event.

Details will be explained during the service but it would be useful to bring a pen that day. Cards and information will all be provided for those who have not taken part before.

Thank you to everybody who took part in last year's campaign. More than 5.5 million messages were sent last year. The Church at Carrs Lane sent over 100 cards.

We know your messages of support mean a huge amount, because the recipients have told us so.

Nonhle Mbuthuma, a lands rights defender in South Africa, had more than 520,000 messages. She said:

“I want to thank Amnesty globally. The support they gave us is amazing and it makes a lot of difference. The thousands of letters we received shows that this struggle is not just about us, that we are not alone.”

Atena Daemi, jailed in Iran for criticising capital punishment said:
“I am wholeheartedly grateful to Amnesty International and all the people around the world who have showered me with compassion and kindness and spared no effort in supporting me.”

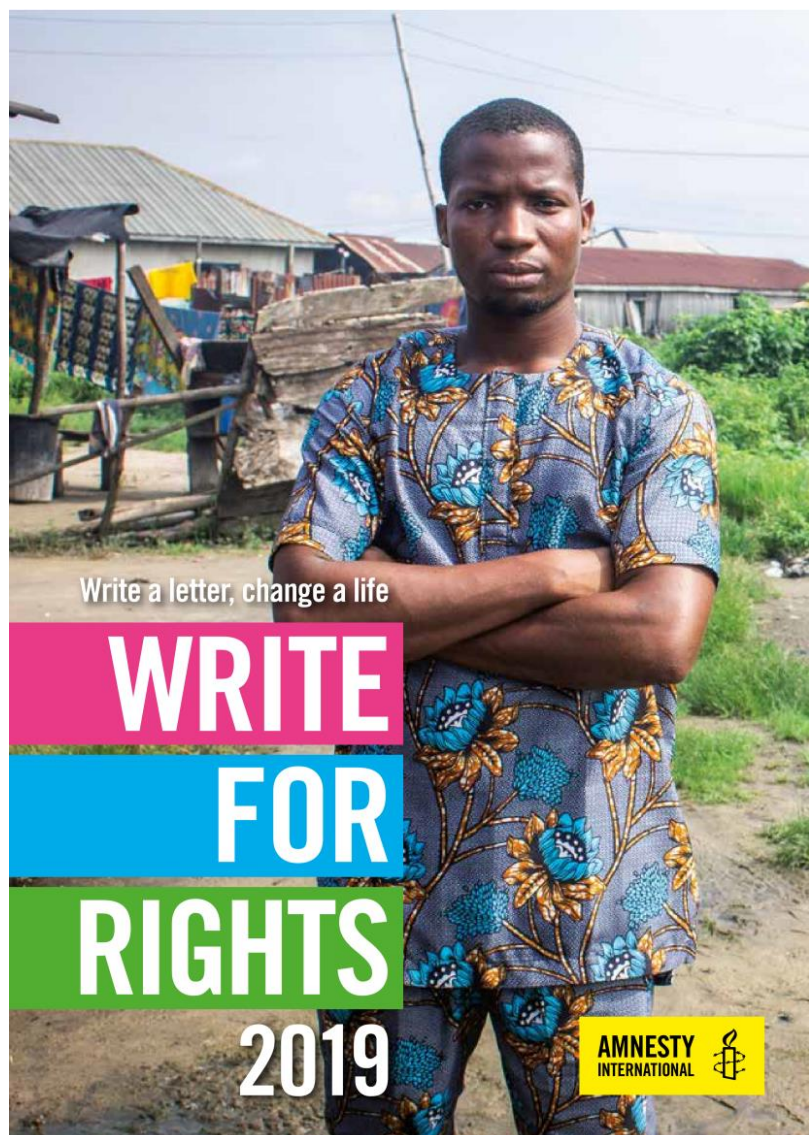
There are many other messages received from people to whom we sent cards last year.

Further information can be found on www.amnesty.org.uk

Do not hesitate to ask me for further information. I am only too happy to give it to you.

I do hope that you will feel able to take part in the Campaign again this year.

Christine Rowntree



Christmas Concert for Human Rights

11am - 1pm Saturday 7 December

Carrs Lane Church, Birmingham City Centre, B4 7SX

This promises to be one of our best concerts ever with a wonderful, varied programme, including:

- Azaad dhol drummers
- Kate McWilliam of Quill, violin
- Liz Brown, poetry
- Michael CT Lam, baritone
- Jake Wakelin, guitar
- The Choir with No Name
- Moseley Voices choir

Plus speakers from *Freedom from Torture* and *Birmingham City of Sanctuary*.

Adults £8, under 16s free - all profits to *Amnesty International* and *Freedom from Torture*.



A Greener Christmas

Here are some ideas/thoughts we have gathered on Christmas presents with sustainability and concern for the planet in mind. Christine Tudor Jones writes:

1. A travel cup

I bought myself a very durable metal travel cup a few years ago in which I bring my first coffee of the day to work. I use it for refills the rest of the day. I present it at coffee shops and it travels well in the car and on trains and buses. More attractive versions which I've given as presents are made from bamboo, plastic or glass and cork. Bamboo is particularly sustainable: it's a high yielding grass needing no pesticides or fertilizer. Bamboo cups are sealed with a resin so can't be micro-waved. (CTJ)

2. Tea mug infuser

Unless the packaging says otherwise, you can assume that most paper-based tea bags contain a plastic 'glue' to hold the bag together. This is yet another way for micro plastics to end up in our bodies and the environment and a reason why we shouldn't put them in our compost bin. Notably some companies (e.g. Clipper, Pukka, Tetley's catering) are now producing biodegradable bags, and others (e.g. Co-op) are researching polypropylene-free alternatives. However, I was given a very attractive alternative recently: a mug with a lid, an infuser which sits inside it and packet of loose-leaf tea.

3. Make up a hamper

Jan Scott writes: Last Christmas I made up a 'hamper' for each of my children and their partners from goods bought at our Fairtrade shop - food, soap, gift, etc all in a jute shopping bag (to discourage use of carrier bags). My daughter is very keen on all things 'eco', but my son is not yet quite as keen, but they both appreciated the gift (especially the chocolate biscuits).



Green Matters: Caring for God's Creation

Saving Heat

Winter is here and our energy bills rise as we set about staying warm. Growing up, I recall the whole family living in the one room with a fire during waking hours in winter. The spread of central heating has brought one of the greatest changes in my lifetime including greater carbon footprints, so here are 4 things one can do to reduce those footprints and still stay warm.



1. Draw curtains early, even before evening in bedrooms and other rooms not in use. Curtains are as good as double glazing.
2. Use gas for heating rather than electricity if you have the option. Despite increases in renewable electricity, more than twice the carbon dioxide is still emitted by electricity than gas.
3. Turn temperature controls down in bedrooms and set boilers to come off before you go to bed. All rooms take a while to cool down.
4. Put on that extra sweater or cardigan.

Recyclable Christmas Crackers

I came across recyclable crackers for the first time last Christmas. They are 'Spirit of Christmas Crackers' made by Duni. Duni donate 7% of the price to the Homelessness Charity, Shelter. Everything is recyclable – except (I hope) the jokes.



Big New year Recycle

This January we will again be collecting unwanted wool and shoes. There will be collection boxes in the hall foyer. The **wool** will go to the group at Selly Oak who knit it into shawls and layettes for Ethiopian women and their children, and the unwanted **shoes** will go to Solihull Welcome, the drop-in centre at St. Augustine's who assist asylum seekers awaiting a decision on their application to remain in the UK.



RSPB Bird Watch – Advance Notice



The annual RSPB Birdwatch will take place over three days, Saturday 25th to Monday 27th January. Since 1979 the RSPB have invited people to spend just one hour watching for the birds that come into their gardens and let them know which species have come and the maximum number of each species at any one time. Almost half a million people sent in results last year and the results help show which species are endangered and need help. Last year song thrushes, lovely birds, fell in numbers again.

Richard Balmer
Solihull Methodist Church



Excuse Me

Once upon a time
there lived a blue world full of nattering apelings.

They spent their time shrieking at screens
and turning trees into black smoke
and turning whales into coins
and digging holes in the planet
and figuring out how to kill millions of each other at a time.

They'd spend all day yipping and yammering
about who owned what things,
about whose things were the best things,
about whose thoughts were the best thoughts,
and then when they were alone at night
they'd sit quietly under flickering electric lights
and wish that everything was dead.

And then, one day,
in the midst of the whooping and the howling,
the burning and the bulldozing,
the hating and the hurting,
life finally got a word in edgewise.

"EXCUSE ME," life said,
from underneath the arguments,
from behind their insecurities,
from the spaces in their DNA strands,
from the depths of their being,
from their heart of hearts.

And the apelings stopped and stared,
every last one of them,
and they saw it all for the very first time.

They stared at each other,
at their flesh and their hair
and their eyes and their hands
as billions of tears
streamed down billions of faces.

They stared at the world,
at the birds and the trees,
at the sky and the dirt,
at the oceans and mountains,
and they all fell to their knees.

They opened their mouths to talk about what happened,
and nothing came out but poems and love songs.
They tried to remember their old illusions,
but it kept giving them fits of laughter.

They wept and they hugged,
and they helped each other up,
and from then on they walked gently upon the earth
as though caressing a dear lover.

Life is made of miracles,
and brimming with thunderous beauty.
The scales fall from our eyes,
and the callouses from our hearts,
and our war with our world ends forever
when we let life get a word in edgewise...

*By Caitlin Johnstone
Used with permission*

Hallowed or Hackneyed...Words in Season?

The annual season of Christmas carolling is already upon us. At this time of year it seems everyone, Christian or not, imbibes in a nostalgic wallow in familiar tunes and words, many of which are completely incomprehensible, despite being well loved. The onslaught begins at least two months before Christmas and, along with 'Jingle Bells', the likes of 'O Come, All Ye Faithful' ring out in a variety of renditions from every radio station and countless shops and other public places. It is a taken-for-granted, life-accompanying feature of the time of year, a far cry from *'heavenly music, floating o'er all the weary world'*.

The words are so familiar to most people, including those who have never encountered them in church, that they are accepted without question. They are part of our culture and even those who pay their annual visit to a midnight service on Christmas Eve - as one very famous atheist admitted - go because they love the carols. Singing about abhorring not the Virgin's womb or bringing our hearts' oblations simply does not touch the sides as the voices bellow forth. Pausing to think, two hundred years after the words were written, about the implications of *'he leads his children on to the place where he is gone'* makes hair stand on end! Yet 'Once in Royal David's City' is always there in the top ten favourite carols, the other nine often being equally predictable.

What adults choose to sing is up to them, but there is one carol that stands out for me as deserving of criticism in this overused stock of national treasures and it is one that is consistently foisted on children. 'Away in a Manger' frequently provides the 'ah' moment in school concerts and church nativities. Ranked as joint second favourite by Gallup Poll in 1996, it is guaranteed to appeal to listening, adoring adults. But seldom is the dubious theology of this piece even noted, let alone questioned.

In the first of its three simple verses of rhyming couplets, it patronises 'little Lord Jesus' and domesticates the cosmos; in the second, it undermines Jesus' humanity, presenting him as a baby who does not cry and, worse still, couches the event of his birth in flat-earth imagery, imploring him to '*look down from the sky*'. The phrase reinforces a naïve and infantile perception on impressionable young minds, deserving of more thoughtful nurturing. The last verse gives the thinking child perhaps the greatest threat of all with 'fit us for heaven, to live with you there'. In the minds of many children who have been naïvely comforted after the death of a loved one, heaven is where dead people go, so this last petition is menacing. Slippery theology, indeed!

The origin of the words is unknown; it is anonymous, although in its first appearance in 1832 it is entitled 'Luther's Cradle Song'. Claims that it was originally written by Martin Luther for his own children have been denied both for lack of evidence and a conviction that it was a wholly American creation. It was being performed as a recitation in a Sunday School Christmas celebration in 1883 in a church in Nashville and, by 1891, when its popularity was reported to be sweeping the USA, it had at least four musical settings to maximise its appeal.

Adult emotional attachment to 'Away in a Manger' has caused it to become hallowed in our national psyche as the ultimate children's Christmas anthem. It deserves no such place. What may have been a delight almost two centuries ago now feels to me to be banal, trite and thoroughly inappropriate. Its 'season' is past, so please can we discharge this particular little gem from service?

Julie Grove

Warning! Dyslexic at Large

Hello, I am Malcolm and I am Dyslexic.

So what is Dyslexia all about then? Well it can be very challenging at times but also very creative. My son David who was the first person in our family to be officially recognised as having dyslexia said once, “when you have lived with something all your life, you don’t know any different and presume everybody is like you. It’s only later you realise other people aren’t like you and are different”.



As a child I was very talkative but played up at primary school and it wasn’t until I went to a prep school in Solihull that I came up against discipline in the form of Mrs Knight in the kindergarten. Then I had to learn. I don’t remember things being very difficult for me.

Yet it was only when my mother had a very interesting conversation with a teacher who said “Malcolm has no problem when he is talking, it’s only when he is writing things down it is as if there is cotton wool in his brain that stops it getting through to his hands”, that my parents heard about my difficulty of writing things down. No body then would have given my condition a name. I could have fared worse. Many children find themselves being called thick and risked expulsion from behaviour problems.

However, I struggled at my boarding school, the stress of which made my letters home to my parents indecipherable. Later I managed to get good 'O' Level passes, although it took 3 attempts to pass English Language.

At that time in the 60s there was no understanding about handicaps and Neurodiversity. You just got on with it. I was never going to become an academic.

I worked for 40 years in a landscape business, where my talents for designing gardens compensated for my dyslexic tendencies that challenged my secretaries, who had to decipher my notes and correct my spelling.

Dyslexia is almost an umbrella condition that covers many manifestations. There's some word blindness, poor spelling, handwriting issues, being clumsy, don't know their left from right, poor memory, mistyping, cannot write something like a card knowing you won't make a mistake, poor at maths etc.

When posh class kids failed at school and their parents discovered their children had dyslexia, it was referred to in a Guardian article as a 'middle class illness'.

It's a mixture of great things that make it a gift and others that are a curse. Gift, you see the world in pictures, you are very curious, your mind works overtime, but you also can have poor attention ability, so you can be easily bored, and it is easy to drift off into a world of your own.

When they test people for the condition, the scores for the many tests are surprising. They are all over the place. Scoring very high in some things, very low in others.

It's like one of those graphic equalisers you had with your hi-fi with its row of sliders that you adjusted to personalise your music

or speech by moving the various sliders up and down. For most people their sliders are roughly in a straight row, a Dyslexic's would be all over the place. Some set very high and others scraping along the bottom.

So you could be a genius. But of course at the same time you would be labelled as thick, below par. And the trouble was you believed you were thick. Yet somehow you knew something was wrong but it didn't have a name, so you acted up at school and played the fool.

To be fair in the Guardian article there will have been children with more serious issues which made their being Dyslexic seem an irrelevance. But it held you back and of course pushy parents wanted their kid to do better and if they got a label it made it feel better. Johnnie will never do very well because of his/her Dyslexia.

When our son David was tested by Margot Lewis, one of our church members, he was so pleased his condition had a name. Margot restored David's belief in himself and he went on to University and now is in senior management.

Someone one once asked David when he would grow out of Dyslexia. He should have said, 'When am I going to grow into it'. He has developed his own strategies to limit the adverse effect of his condition...

You have to get by in this world, don't wear your label all the time around your neck. You want to get on in spite of your condition.

I was very grateful to two boys at the boarding school who taught me how to write properly. I learnt typing on my Grandfather's portable, but the cost was the heavy use of the erasure.

When I got my BBC Microcomputer around 1982 it changed my life. Later I started to write for a local magazine, the programme even counted my 750 words. You just kept typing and then went back and revised and corrected until the article was ready. Technology can still be a hindrance or in my case a great benefit.

I am very grateful to an application on Word that allows the programme to make corrections on regular typos and also can be used to add extra text if you type in a code or start of a word. I use it every day to put Malcolm correctly at the foot of my letters. Without it I would be Maloclm or something else.

Although I read a lot of books (slowly), when reading long articles I tend to scan the text to get the meaning. It is easy though to miss out a serious point, by missing a key word that fails to pop up out of the page.

For me life is seen through pictures. I can see so much in my minds' eye. In recounting events I see them. It is perhaps not surprising that I like taking photographs.

I am not typical, yet I am typical because we are all different. Even those who are Neuro neutral are all different. Each has their foibles, hang ups and things they don't share with others.

I regard myself as fortunate. I have had an interesting life and invent things in my own mind. I have not been held back at school, which catered for the sons of Somerset farmers, missed out on going to Oxbridge or becoming a statesman. No genius yet but I am always hoping one of my bright ideas will change the planet.

Malcolm Veitch, 19 November 2019

Birmingham to Dolgellau

The annual Walking Weekend happened in October - you remember the weekend when it rained for ever? Even Noah would have been tempted to start working on Ark 2!

A very wet journey from Birmingham to Dolgellau - oh how it rained! And rained.... But all 25 of us arrived safely. The hotel was excellent and the food was good and plentiful. We were the only guests which meant that we had plenty of lounge space.



Saturday morning saw more rain, so walking was postponed until early afternoon. Amazingly, the rain did stop and the sun came out which meant that we were able to enjoy walking in the

beautiful countryside. Some of us climbed the path on the Torrent Walk - dicey underfoot, but such an incredible force of water thundering down the gorge made the effort worthwhile. Spectacular! And the rest of the folk found a 'hill' to climb!

Sunday was dry, sunny and clear (but the mud persisted!) The serious walkers climbed near the Mawdach Estuary and were rewarded with fantastic views across the river and mountains. A less energetic foursome took a trip on the Tallylyn Railway from Abergynolwyn to Towyn – again wonderful views across the valley and a short walk along the promenade at Towyn for a breath of sea air before the return journey.

Evenings were spent eating excellent dinners, and then playing various board games – competition was fierce! Or we just chatted.

All in all this was a great weekend, in spite of the rain. But then with good friends and fellowship, how can we not enjoy the event?

Next year we will be at Brecon – please see Kate Leo for details.

Ann Parkin



Thank you for your amazing work for Christian Aid Week 2019

At the end of Christian Aid Week this year we were delighted to share with you the news that Jebbeh had given birth safely to a healthy baby boy. This wonderful news is testament to the generosity of our supporters and volunteers like you who came together in support of vulnerable communities like Jebbeh's in Sierra Leone. Thank you so much for your support.



The total is in...

An astonishing £7.56 million was raised during CAW 2019!

- Over 10,000 churches took part in celebrations supported by 40,700 amazing volunteers in churches and communities across the UK and Ireland.
- Over 7,500 of you signed our petition urging the chancellor to use his influence to drop the healthcare debt for the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone.
- 33,678 resources were downloaded from our website and 2,079 Big Brekkie packs were ordered.

All of these individual actions from delivering an envelope to donating at your church's coffee morning, bring us closer to our aim of transforming the lives of the poorest communities in our world. **Thank you.**

But the story doesn't end there...

Your gifts have such an important impact. Over the past year, Christian Aid has helped provide vital healthcare in Sierra Leone:

- Over 58,000 people have access to well-built health clinics, helping nurses to save lives.
- 64,000 people have received hygiene training, helping mums and children to fight off illnesses.

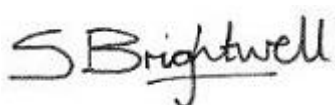
1,300 women are able to save and pay for things like transport to their nearest clinic, through community savings groups.

As we reflect and are encouraged by our results in 2019, we are also busy planning for Christian Aid Week 2020. We are delighted to share with you that our focus country will be Kenya where we will explore the challenges faced by communities affected by climate change and some of the work happening to transform lives in Kitui and Makueni counties.

And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds (Hebrews 10.24)

We look forward to telling you more about this in the new year and exploring together inspired by Hebrews above, how we can demonstrate our love for each other as global communities in joyful giving and prayer, supporting them to lead a full life free from poverty.

Yours sincerely,



Sophie Brightwell,
Christian Aid Week team

Published with permission from Christian Aid



Help mothers use their God-given gifts to escape poverty

Mothers like Ranjita are strong, determined and resourceful.

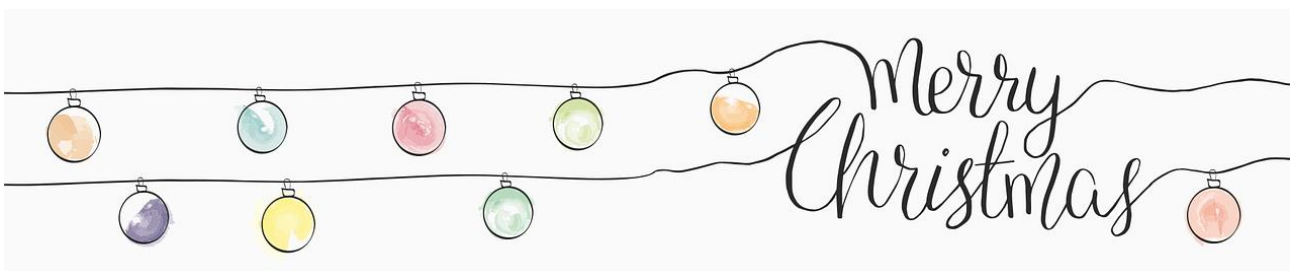
Given the opportunity, they could use these gifts to build a better life for their family.

Christmas Appeal 2019

Can you give to Christian Aid's Christmas Appeal 2019 in lieu of Christmas Cards to your church friends?

Please see Pat Davies to give your donation or Lindsay Peniston, Clerk to the Trustees, Tues-Thurs 2-4pm (but not in the week beginning 9 December).

Thank you!



Christian Aid Carol Singing

This year we will be singing on the main concourse at New Street station from 16.30 to 18.30 on Monday 16 December. This will ensure a dry, warm and well-lit venue and a fantastic acoustic, and passengers heading to or from their trains will hopefully be a receptive audience from which to collect. Singing will be in four parts (soprano, alto, tenor and bass) and will be unaccompanied. Network Rail limits the number of singers to 25 so I need to know broadly how many people will be able to join in the singing. Children are welcome to sing (with parent or other responsible adult). We need collectors too, who must be adults. I've split the session into two 1-hour periods, 16.30-17.30 and 17.30-18.30. If you can sing for either or both of these sessions, I'd be much obliged if you could let me know:

by email on davidlangton1955@hotmail.co.uk,

by phone on 07841 223588

or in person at St Philips after a service.

Recognising that we shall be a more exposed to the public gaze in this location, I thought it would be useful to offer a rehearsal prior to the day for anyone who would like to run through the carols we'll be singing. That will be on Thursday 12 December in the school hall of the Bluecoat School in Harborne B17 0HR starting at 19.30.

Many thanks. David Langton

Carrs Lane Lectures in Radical Christian Faith 2019

REPORT

The 2019 lectures' day was held on Saturday 5th October, with speaker Revd Canon Mark Oakley, Dean of Chapel at St John's College, University of Cambridge. Formerly Canon Chancellor at St Paul's Cathedral, Mark is a gifted communicator, both in person and in writing. His title was 'Faith...the Art of Unease'.



He gave three lectures: '*The Collage of God: Faith, Doubt and Guessing at God*', in which he shared his personal journey describing himself as a 'theological beachcomber'. The central metaphor of his title defines a collection of images, words and ideas which have no fixed shape and do not fit together like a jigsaw, yet when it holds together it has integrity. Its threads are: truthfulness (which, he says, the Church proclaims whilst avoiding real honesty); praying (like opening the hand to sunlight); service, selfless giving of oneself to others (Why, he asks, does the Church not recognise the sacred benefits of friendship?); laughter which promises transcendence through playfulness but which is so often stifled by the Church. These are all the stuff of relationship. The last thread is preaching, the discovery of what is believed and 'the thunder that clears the air'.

In his second lecture, '*Poetry: the Native Language of Faith*', Mark pressed home the need to pay attention to the language we use in church, describing poetry as 'soul language' and worship as 'poetry in motion'. Poetic language comes from a stilled-ness, a rootedness which distils our human experience; it is the language

of formation as opposed to information; it is evocative, expressing truth in ways far more profound than literalism ever could; it is stretched to convey complex ideas: 'Whatever the Atonement means, it should never be put on a fridge magnet'.

Mark's third lecture, *'Are You Sitting Comfortably? The Art of Unease and the Spiritual Life'* signalled a change of tone...and by the end we were sitting anything but comfortably! He railed against modern society's preoccupations with image and falsity, slowly injected until it is eventually believed and, if challenged, becomes conspiracy. He cited the dangers of projection and distortion, identifying much of the baggage we as individuals, as communities and as societies each carry around, in Jungian terms, the 'shadow'. All of this, combined with a general lack of honesty - which he calls 'Truth Decay' - leads to polarisation and division. It is fostered by political leaders who campaign in graffiti and govern by tweets, all of which is an abuse of language. And the Church is not exempt from his criticism. He concluded with: 'The question is not, is the Church dying but is the Church giving its life for the world?'

The audience of 100 - who came from locations far and wide, including Abergavenny, Burnham on Sea, Chester, Derbyshire, Devizes, Ledbury, Leeds, Leicester, Lichfield, Stafford, London, Malvern, Shrewsbury, Somerset, Staffordshire, Stourbridge, Stratford-upon-Avon, Tamworth, Wiltshire, Worcestershire, Wrexham and from all over the West Midlands - was riveted. There was a buzz during the reflection times and lots of questions followed. People had travelled from all over the country, but they obviously thought the journey worthwhile. The comments then and since have been glowing. He was definitely a hit!

Some of Mark's expenses and speaking fees were met by The Montgomery Trust, for which we are extremely grateful. There was also a busy book stall on the day with four of Mark's titles on

sale: *The Collage of God*, *The Splash of Words*, *A Good Year* and his latest publication: *By Way of the Heart*, all discounted on the retail price thanks to a very helpful publisher's discount. A total of 125 copies were sold.

So, enormous thanks to those who helped in the preparation and on the day, without whom it wouldn't be possible to mount such an ambitious event which, year after year, puts the church on the map. As well as a worthwhile experience for those of us who were there, the day has realised a surplus of £1,121.50. All good!

Julie Grove



Christian Aid Concert

Friday 6 December 2019 at 7pm

St Philip's Cathedral, Birmingham

Hear talented young players from the Young Strings Project celebrate Christmas with their annual Christmas concert which raises funds for the Christian Aid Christmas Appeal.

Tickets £10 on the door.

For information email kormerod@christian-aid.org

Notes from the Organ Bench

Tim Batty talks about the recent exchange visit to Germany, and also what's coming up in Advent.

Carrs Lane Choir & Friends' Exchange Visit to Germany: Thursday 19-Monday 23 September 2019

This year, seventeen of us visited our friends in Ernstweiler - a suburb of Zweibrücken - in southwest Germany, for the 46th year of our biennial exchange.

Thursday, 19/09/2019

As in previous years, we decided to travel the entire journey, en-masse, by train - mainly in the interests of minimising our respective carbon footprints. Our planned journey involved four trains: Birmingham (departing 09:50)-London; London-Paris; Paris-Saarbrücken; Saarbrücken-Zweibrücken (arriving 19:44 local time). It was something of an eventful journey, with difficulties at the Eurostar check-in; a bag being stolen (along with tickets for the return journey!) in Paris; and a cancelled Paris-Saarbrücken train causing us to miss our connection to Zweibrücken: we had to get off at nearby Homburg instead and ask our hosts to come and get us!

We were very grateful to Cristina Cipriani and Andrew Leo for their linguistic abilities and knowledge of the French and German



train networks and getting us to where we needed to be. Also, a big thanks to Donald Payne for organising the tickets in the first place.

Figure 1: Fine dining aboard the ICE to Saarbrücken

Friday, 20/09/2019

Our hosts had organised a group visit to Musée Lalique in Wingen-sur-Moder, France. This is a modern museum dedicated to René Lalique (1860-1945), who built a reputation as a master jeweller and glassmaker / designer specialising in Art Nouveau and Art Deco. The museum was built on former glassworks, and all of us in the group were captivated by the extraordinary work of this artist.



Figure 2: Demonstration of glassmaking

After a delightful lunch, we were bussed a short distance to another glass museum: this one was more focused on the practical side of glassmaking, and included a live demonstration of making an ornament, from start to finish.

We headed back to our host families for a quick meal before a combined choir rehearsal that evening, in preparation for the service on the Sunday morning.

Saturday, 21/09/2019



Figure 3: Exploring the Schlossberg-Caves

Up bright and early for breakfast, and then we headed to the Schlossberg-Caves in Homburg. A former sand mine, the qualities of the sand here were prized by the local glassmakers it was supplied to.

After a guided tour of the mine, we were left to our own devices to find our way back out of the labyrinths. All emerged into the sunshine eventually!

The group then split up for the afternoon; a large party of us went to a “Brauhaus” for a hearty lunch; all sorts of typical German cuisine were sampled, before heading to a local park / lake to walk it off.

Back at our hosts’ homes, we had a couple of hours to ourselves; some had a nap, while yours truly had to re-acquaint himself with the organ in the Christuskirche, Zweibrücken before tomorrow’s service. Then, around 19:00, we all gathered in the community hall of a local Catholic church (St. Pirmin), kindly lent to us for our traditional evening of food, music, and improvised dramatic sketches! Much fun was had by all.



Figure 4: Lunch at the Brauhaus



Figure 5: Martin, Ben and Peter as monks!

We also presented a gift to our German friends, on behalf of the whole Church at Carrs Lane: a breadboard inscribed with a design using pyrography, which had been beautifully crafted by Nathan Roberts, one of the staff at The Church at Carrs Lane and Carrs Lane Conference Centre.



Figure 6: Our gift to the choir and congregation of Christuskirche, Ernstweiler

Sunday, 22/09/2019

We gathered at the Christuskirche in Zweibrücken for a short choir rehearsal at 09:15, in preparation for their Harvest service at 10:00. As usual, the choirs sang four pieces - two separately, and two combined. Contrary to British practice, this congregation sat in the pews while singing the hymns and stood up during

prayers. Also a talking point was their serving of a single grape each, rather than wine, during Communion - a Harvest tradition for this congregation.



Figure 7: The combined choirs preparing for the service

We had the afternoon to ourselves to spend with our hosts; some people went to a barbecue, some explored Zweibrücken, others stocked up on favourite German products!

In the evening, we had another party, in the church hall of the Christuskirche; more wonderful food, and time to properly catch up with our German friends.

Monday, 23/09/2019

And then, all too soon, it was time for us to head back to Birmingham: another four trains, but this time proceeding with comparatively little incident, for which we were thankful. We started out at 10:13 (local time) and arrived back in Birmingham shortly after 19:00.

Tired, but content, it had been a wonderful few days: we packed in so much, thanks to the splendid organisation of our hosts. The food was incredible, both in taste and in quantity - they really know how to cook! The friendships fostered through this exchange are really special, and we hope that it can continue for many years to come.



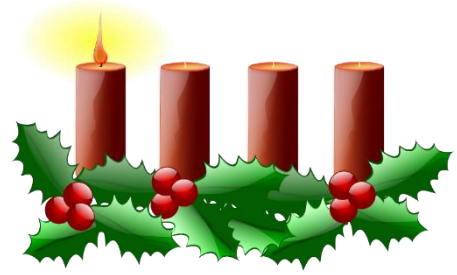
Figure 8: Final goodbyes, at Zweibrücken station

Looking ahead, we're hoping to host them in 2021, but in recent years it has become increasingly challenging to organise, particularly due to accommodation and transport arrangements. Also, due to age, the number participating has been slowly declining each time, although we were delighted to take a couple of "newbies" with us this year. It would be good to have even more new people involved. It's important to emphasise that the exchange is not just for the choir: anyone in the congregation is welcome to join in, and we'd love to talk to anyone interested.

One other thing of possible interest is a new German class that Cristina Cipriani has recently started, meeting a couple of times per month at Carrs Lane (details on the notices). This is for anyone, not just those interested in the exchange.

It was a privilege to be involved in the exchange once more, and I thank all who took part for making it so special.

Advent Antiphons



One of our choir members, Peter Searle, has set a number of traditional Advent texts to music, and this year the choir will be singing his arrangement of “O Morning Star” on the First Sunday of Advent. Peter explains a little about these texts:

The O Antiphons, so named due to the vocative 'O' introducing each one, have been a part of Advent liturgy since the very early Church, being sung or recited during services. Each antiphon gives a title for, and states attributes of, the Messiah and also refers to Isaiah's prophecy of Christ's coming.

*O Wisdom, coming forth from the mouth of the Most High,
reaching from one end to the other,
mightily and sweetly ordering all things:
Come and teach us the way of prudence.*

(Isaiah 11:2-3, 28:29 NRSV)

*O Adonai, and leader of the House of Israel,
who appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush
and gave him the law on Sinai:
Come and redeem us with an outstretched arm.*

(Isaiah 11:4-5, 33:22)

Note: Adonai is a Hebrew word referring to God.

*O Root of Jesse, standing as a sign among the peoples;
before you kings will shut their mouths,
to you the nations will make their prayer:
Come and deliver us, and delay no longer.*

(Isaiah 11:1 & 10)

*O Key of David and sceptre of the House of Israel;
you open and no one can shut;
you shut and no one can open:
Come and lead the prisoners from the prison house,
those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.*

(Isaiah 9:7, 22:22, 42:7)



*O Morning Star,
splendour of light eternal and sun of righteousness:
Come and enlighten those who dwell in darkness and the
shadow of death.*

(Isaiah 9:2)

*O King of the nations, and their desire,
the cornerstone making both one:
Come and save the human race,
which you fashioned from clay.*

(Isaiah 2:4, 9:6, 64:8)

*O Emmanuel, our king and our lawgiver,
the hope of the nations and their Saviour:
Come and save us, O Lord our God.*

(Isaiah 7:14)

I hope you enjoy it: we've certainly enjoyed learning this brand-new music.

Tim Batty, Church Musician

Any Questions? With Gretta Vosper



Q: I have read a lot of Bishop Jack Spong's books and cannot see how someone with his beliefs can ever claim to be a Christian. Can you help me?

A: I understand your confusion around Bishop Spong's claim to be a Christian and hope that I can help you lay the quandary

aside.

You see, I am a Christian, too. But I'm also an atheist. And I have been an atheist for most of my life, though I didn't claim the term until several years ago. Few, these days, would be comfortable hearing me identify as a Christian, and I don't do it publicly very often. They believe there needs to be a defining line: you're this or you're that; you cannot be both.

But Jack and I refuse that line. I grew up in the church, too, though my belief system developed far more loosely than either yours or Jack's. My Christian upbringing was decidedly in the camp which yours would have dismissed or maligned as un-Christian or heretical.

My Sunday School curriculum taught me that God was love and Jesus was this cool guy who taught us that we needed to love one another. As a teenager, I delighted in the psychedelic "Live Love" stickers and adorned my school binders with them. When I entered theological college as an adult, I was relieved when my studies provided the foundations over which my beliefs had already been floating: the Bible was a collection of stories which were written by many different people over millennia; God was a concept we needed to wrestle with as we formulated our own truths; and Jesus was a man who lived a long time ago and taught

us some challenging and interesting things, but wasn't perfect. None of us is.

The stories of Christianity, indeed the stories of all religions, are woven and wrapped around human truths; it isn't the other way 'round, as many religions continue to proclaim. Awe and wonder, conviction and repentance, gratitude and appreciation, sorrow, lament and need: all these are human truths and human realities.

Over the course of our history, in every corner of the world, we've sought solace and encouragement, meaning and destiny. We've done it through the tools our religions have handed us, simply because they were there for that use. Jack and I know those tools inside and out; Jack much more intimately and comprehensively than I. We see the world through the templates of Christianity. We engage with it through the roots of our faith.

While my congregation no longer celebrates Palm Sunday or Easter, we live the Biblical story that was woven of the truths and metaphors that reside at the heart of human existence: the dreams we have and the elation we know when we achieve them; the desolation of rejection and betrayal when they crash against the violence of reality; and the gift that it is, for each one of us, when we pick up the thread of someone else's broken dream – an end to violence against women; the forgiveness of crippling national debt; the fight for the future of our planet – and carry it forward. These are basic themes of the human journey; Christianity got them right when they wove the story of persecution, passion, death, and resurrection. The stories bring us back to face and accept those truths in our own lives.

Jack's world is informed, as is mine, by those stories. For decades now, he has looked beneath them and worked to untangle the threads that have held them together. And at the end of his work, he has, every time, grasped the one thread that was worthy of you and me and humanity and lifted it up, offering it to

us to hold and use as we will. He calls himself a Christian because he lives his life through the stories to which his life was and remains bound. I am so grateful for his efforts there and for the gift and permission he has given to me to do so as well.

Revd Gretta Vosper

About the author: The Revd Gretta Vosper is a United Church of Canada minister who identifies as an atheist. Her best-selling books include *With or Without God: Why The Way We Live is More Important Than What We Believe*, and *Amen: What Prayer Can Mean in a World Beyond Belief*. She has also published three books of poetry and prayers. In 2017 Gretta was the speaker for our Carrs Lane Lectures in Radical Christian Faith event.



Handel's Messiah

Saturday 14 December 2019 at 7pm

St Philip's Cathedral, Birmingham

**Performed by Birmingham Cathedral Choir
conducted by David Hardie. #BhamMessiah
#Christmasatthecathedral**

Admission on the door £15 (concessions £13)

GREETINGS

The following send good wishes for Christmas to their friends at Carrs Lane:

Tim Batty
Diana and Phill Cullum-Hall
Julie and Chris Grove
Christine Tudor Jones
Julie and Peter Redwood
Simon and Christine Rowntree
Amina and Martin Stokes
Christine Tudor Jones
Malcolm and Anne Veitch
Chris and Ruth Yorke



And a 'thank you' message ...

A Big Thank You to our Carrs Lane friends for the card you signed celebrating our Golden Wedding - and for the piece from Liz Cummings published in the last issue of 'Journey'.

The fifty years do seem to have passed very quickly! We are very grateful to Carrs Lane for the part you have played in those years, and in the 50 years of ministry we celebrated on 19 September. We have shared a very special 50 years.

With every good wish for Christmas and the New Year!

Pat and Peter Peirce

CARRS LANE FAIR TRADE SHOP



Carrs Lane
FAIR TRADE SHOP



TRAIDCRAFT
Fighting poverty through trade

We would like to thank all our customers, whether from Carrs Lane or not, who regularly buy Traidcraft products from us and, of course, our volunteer team for their hard work. This has been a challenging year, difficult at times as we waited for both the new products and the familiar ones. Among these were the luxury cookies which now have eco-friendly packaging in line with Traidcraft's themes for every decision they make and every product they sell. Our customers have been very patient indeed.

Traidcraft Exchange is encouraged and grateful for your financial support whether it is loose change in our Donations box or a larger donation.

The staff at **Traidcraft plc** appreciate our understanding and our loyalty to Traidcraft. The highlight of the year was certainly the AGM and the Service held in Newcastle Cathedral Church to celebrate Traidcraft's 40th Anniversary. The Church was packed with people from all over the UK. Not only did we look back but we looked forward to the future. It was a very meaningful service with great hope for the future.

Our team is looking forward to serving you and your friends in the New Year.

Joan Davies

A Note on Church Flowers

I hope you've enjoyed the flowers we've had in church every Sunday this year? I know they mean a lot to many of us, although I'm also aware that, for some people, they matter less... perhaps they'd be missed if they weren't there?

I'm always very grateful to have a name on the rota for each week if possible, with a number of people using the opportunity to make the gift in memory of a loved one or a treasured occasion. There's one name that has appeared against the first Sunday of the year on every list I've produced over the past 40-odd years: Margaret Pratt. Margaret is the daughter of a longstanding church member from a different era called Doris Savage – definitely *Mrs Savage* to those of us joining the church in the mid-1960s - who was a stickler for The Right Thing always!

Margaret is now well into her nineties but was always keen for a chat around this time of year when she telephoned to ask me to do the flowers yet again in memory of her mother. This year, however, the message came from her son Richard to tell me that his mother is now in residential care but was insistent he contacted me and continued her gift to the church. It's been a difficult time for all of them but he and his sister are very keen to continue the family link with Carrs Lane, which must go back more than 100 years.

Richard also told me he had found some of his grandmother's things whilst clearing out his mother's home, including some items relating to Carrs Lane, the most interesting of which is the Minute Book from the Carrs Lane Homes Committee from 1946-1951. There is also a number of press cuttings about the now not-so-new church building. They will ultimately go to the archives in the library but if anyone would like to see them first, please let me know. And I'll be making an arrangement for Sunday 5th of January for Margaret as usual, in memory of her mother...and we'll think of them both!

If you would like to be included on the flower rota for 2020, either to pay for flowers or – better still – actually do them, please let me know. I'll be delighted...

Julie Grove

Aston University Music Society presents

A Christmas Festival

Saturday 7 December at 2.30pm

at The Church at Carrs Lane

Free entry and refreshments

Donations welcome in aid of Tabor House

Midlands Hospital Choir presents

Carols for CLIC

Friday 13 December at 2pm and 7pm

at the Town Hall, Birmingham

Tickets from £12.75 (adults) or £6 for children

Order online at www.thsh.co.uk

Family Christmas Concert

Saturday 14 December at 6.30pm

at Selly Oak Methodist Church

Langleys Road B29 6HT

Ring 0121 550 1107 for tickets

Tickets £10 (£8 concessions). Children FREE



Welcoming HOPE...

*into a broken world,
the light of Christ will shine*


Invitation

*to ADVENT and
CHRISTMAS
WORSHIP*

at

**The Church at Carrs Lane
Birmingham B4 7SX**

www.carrslane.co.uk

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Welcoming Hope...

**into a broken world,
the light of Christ will shine...**



The Advent Promise
Sunday 1st December



*The Promises and
Challenges of the Prophets*
Sunday 8th December
(Amnesty Sunday)



Prepare the Way
Sunday 15th December
(Carol Service)



Magnificat
Sunday 22nd December



Hope Born Among Us
Christmas Day



Exile to Egypt
Sunday 29th December
(Gift Sunday)



Epiphany
Sunday 5th January
(Covenant Sunday)

Worship begins at 10.30 am



Informal Lunchtime Communion
Wednesdays at 1.15pm



Prayer at 7.30am and 7pm, week
days until Dec 22, (Fri: am only)

Everyone is welcome!

JOURNEY OF THE MAGI


the
church
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A spectacular Christmas treat by Springs Dance Company

Tickets:

Adult: **£10**

Child: **£5**

Family:

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Dance, drama and pantomime, hilariously funny yet thought-provoking, great for people of all ages, a bridge between contemporary life and Jesus's birth...

at The Church at Carrs Lane

Saturday 21st December at 3.30pm

0121 643 6151; www.carrslane.co.uk

Running time:

90 minutes with

a 20 minute

interval

Contact details for The Church at Carrs Lane, Carrs Lane, Birmingham, B4 7SX

Email: clerk@carrslane.co.uk Telephone 0121 643 6151

www.carrslane.co.uk FB: www.facebook.com/carrslanelife