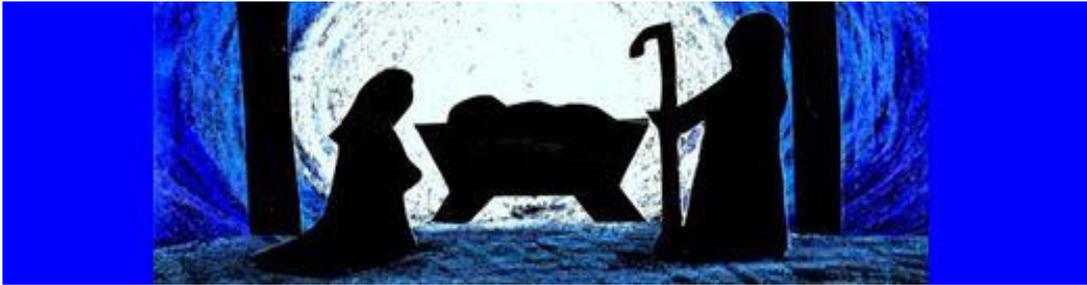


Open Space

SAINT STEPHENS SOUNDWELL

DECEMBER 2018

A star is born...



I AM sure that 'Away in a Manger,' sometimes attributed to Martin Luther, was written before the author had children of his own.

THE cattle are lowing, the Baby awakes, but little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes. Real new-borns cry. Real new-borns mess their nappies. Real new-borns wail at the top of their lungs.

If we are to understand what happened in Bethlehem, we must believe that when the Baby awakes, he bawls, at least that he sobs a little, because that is what Christmas means at its very core.

Let me explain...

I have a son who has grown up on a diet of superhero films – Batman, Spiderman, Wolverine, Wonder Woman, and Thor, to name but a few.

I think his favourite and mine happens to be Superman. You know the story.

The baby born on the disintegrating planet Krypton is sent by his parents in a space capsule to earth. The boy grows up to be Clark Kent, mild-mannered reporter for the Daily Planet, and no one can tell that Kent isn't Superman, until you get him around a phone booth.

Then there are reruns of Star Trek.

At least once or twice a season an alien masquerading as a human finds his way aboard with the evil intent of commandeering the Starship 'Enterprise.' He looks like a human, but don't be fooled.

Now you must understand that what happened in the stable in Bethlehem was not pretend. That night God took on humanness and became human. No, he didn't lose any of his divinity—the angels' grand proclamation on the hillside sheep fields is testimony to that.

The virgin birth, rather than being at the periphery of the Christian faith as some would claim, is right at its core.

It explains who Jesus is. 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you,' Gabriel explained to Mary, 'and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.' (LUKE 1:35 NIV).

The key is found in the angel's words to Joseph. 'Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.' (MATTHEW 1:20–21 NIV).

'His people'...did you catch it?

The only way God could deal with the mess made by the First Adam was through a Second Adam. (ROMANS 5:12–19)

'For this reason,' explains the writer of Hebrews, 'he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.' (HEBREWS 2:7–18 NIV).

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Open Space
DECEMBER 2018



Mission Partners
with St Stephens:

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St Stephens

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St Stephens
SOUNDWELL

The Genuine Spirit of Christmas

REVD SHEILA MELOT, Seniors Minister at B&A Church, asks what our Christmas services are saying to our communities:



DISCUSSING Christmas with other church leaders I identified three different approaches to this time of year and the services in our churches.

In all cases the leaders acknowledge that our society celebrates a mid-winter festival which many call 'Christmas'. They also recognise that many people have a sentimental love for what they knew as children, including the carols they sang and the story of the baby in the manger.

And as many schools still teach the story and some carols, this sentimental love continues to find expression through the generations.

Having identified the context for what the Church offers at Christmas, the leaders then differ greatly in their response.

For some, it is important to emphasise the distinctiveness of Church but in doing so they express contempt for the secular celebration of mid-winter.

Sermons take issue with the feasting, the consumerism involved and the sentimental attachment to the 'Christmas story'. They proceed with church services for believers, which others can of course attend, but as outsiders looking in.

Other leaders take the opposite approach, saying this is our chance to meet with people that we don't normally see. So as long as we can get people into our buildings, we'll enter totally into the spirit of the secular and sentimental Christmas and not 'spoil' it with any serious theology.

Personally I don't find either approach satisfactory.

In the dynamic between 'connecting' and 'challenging', each has gone too far in one direction or the other.

The third way is the one which I think is the most likely to bear fruit missionally.

It connects by acknowledging the secular reality, appreciating the importance of midwinter celebrations, and also recognising that the Christmas story and the carols we sing are now part of the heritage. They don't just belong to the Church, but to a much wider segment of society.

So we should not claim them for ours alone, leaving the non-churched with Frosty the Snowman!

Sentimentalised it might be, but the story of Jesus' birth is known and loved by many who have no idea of the significance of the Incarnation.

It makes sense to meet these people where they are, sing the carols with them, and in re-telling the story, challenge them to respond to Emmanuel – God with us.

We can make our Christmas services so full of the genuine spirit of Christmas with the message we proclaim, the welcome we offer and the way we model worshipping God, in the spirit of here's something we can share together.

In doing so we will convey the meaning of Jesus' birth that will break through any sentimentalism and make a difference to people's lives, if they will receive it.

HEALTH & SAFETY

Inauguration

JUST TO let you all know, the new Health and Safety group recently had their inaugural meeting.

Our remit is to make a full risk assessment of our buildings plus land, and where necessary make adjustments or obtain appropriate equipment etc.

As this is going to be a major piece of work we thought we would initially concentrate on the main body of the Church.

We are well aware that the mere mention of the words 'Health and Safety' has the effect of raising people's hackles, but because we love you all, we want to ensure that you are as safe as possible when on Church premises.

For example, emergency evacuation procedures, such as in the case of fire, will be examined and published.

So please, if you do have any questions, worries or concerns do not hesitate to speak to one of us.

Gill, Sandra, Bron, Lorraine

PARISH GIVING SCHEME

Update

IT WAS on Sunday 7th October that our attention was drawn to a new way of giving to St Stephens. As we heard, the Parish Giving Scheme is a nationwide service allowing us to make regular, planned donations to by Direct Debit from our bank.

The pilot by the PCC which was launched in March resulted in 18 'subscribers'. I am now delighted to let you know that, since October, a further 27 parishioners have signed up, making a grand total of 45. This is very good news for us all.

There is no time limit on this initiative ... please have a word with me at any time if you would like to join in. It also goes without saying that if you have decided to continue giving by way of weekly envelopes, that is fine too. It's good to have a choice!

What a joy it is to give to the work of our Lord in this place! Thank you! **Lin Cooper**

A star is born...

<Continued from page 1

God could not wink at our sin forever, and be just. Nor could he just whisk it away in a momentary act of divine dis-regard. There was no sterile way to deal with the ugliness of sin, and we humans were powerless to erase sin's stain, much less understand its devastation.

So, like a parent who risks his life to protect his children, God Himself came to rescue us. *No play-act, this.*

The divine Son of God was no hologram or apparition. He became flesh (JOHN 1:14) because there was no other way.

In the early church there were heretics who claimed that Jesus just pretended to be human. Spirit (good) could never mix with flesh (bad), they taught.

The Apostle John jumped on that with both feet.

'Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the anti-christ...' (1 JOHN 4:2-3 NIV).

You see, if 'no crying he makes,' is Jesus as just a convincing humanoid, then what was that on the cross?

Did it really die?

Moreover, if Jesus did not live as a real human, filled with the Holy Spirit, what makes us think God can give us power to live for Him in this world?

There is a universe of difference between Star Trek's Mr Spock lifting his hand in the Vulcan greeting of 'Live long and prosper,' and Jesus lifting his nail-scared hands to bless his disciples.

When Spock says that 'human emotions make no sense whatsoever,' we chuckle. After all, those pointy ears are a giveaway; how could he understand?

When Jesus says, 'I care,' we realise how true that is, and drop to our knees in worship.

In a world where 'celebrity' has taken top spot, we need to remember more than ever, that in Jesus, the true 'star' is born.

He is *'the way and the truth and the life'* (JOHN 14:6 NIV) he was then... and is now more than ever!

May the cry of the healthy screaming from the stable break into your life this Christmas and may Jesus be the 'star' of all that you do and all that you are, not just at Christmas, but every day!! **LISA**

Ivor & Wayne's confirmation

CONGRATULATIONS are in order from us all at St Stephens, to brothers Ivor and Wayne on the occasion of their confirmation.

IT was also great to see so many from St Stephens in attendance at the Service of Confirmation to support Ivor and Wayne as they joined with 20 other candidates from several other churches in the diocese, on the Monday evening of 26 November at the newly refurbished and warm and cosy Christ Church in Downend, on a cold autumn night.



Rumour has it that the Downend Christmas street lights had also been turned on especially in celebration!

Bishop Lee presided in full regalia and addressed the candidates and congregation in his sermon taken from Luke 15:11-32 focussing on the subject of 'Family and Home' and afterwards, led the candidates around the church on a procession during the last hymn of the evening, before they were all gathered on the front stage for their photos!



DECEMBER CYCLE OF PRAYER BEGINNING SUNDAY OF EACH WEEK

02	Prayer Ministry Team	Pam Davis, Ros Davis Bernard Denyer, Margaret Dodge Annie Drysdale-Groves	Rudge Close Seymour Road Sherbourne Close
09	Those sharing in Home Communion	Margaret Dyer, Bob and Nancy Emery Ken Fox, Lynn, Bernard & Brett Francis Julie, Shaun, Josh & Hollie Fudge	Soundwell Road Spring Hill St Clements Court
16	Cleaning: Ivor Harris & volunteers	Matt, Jenny & Lauren Gait Sheila Galsworthy, Pat Garner, Brian Grant Dave, Sarah, Adam & Katie Gray	St Stephens Close St Stephens Road Stanley Park Road
23	Baptism Preparation	Emma, Neil, Charlie & George Grigg, Jan Halton, Enid Harris Geoff and Joyce Harris	Stanton Close Station Road Sweets Close
30	Marriage Preparation	Ivor Harris and Teri Young Wayne Harris and Nicholas Topps Ruby Harrison, Carolyn Hawkins, James Head	Sweets Road The Close The Crescent

DECEMBER DIARY

REGULAR WEEKLY GROUPS:

TUESDAYS	01.30pm	} See & Know (For toddlers & carers) (Term time)
WEDNESDAYS	01.00pm	
THURSDAYS	09.00am	
	01.00pm	

SERVICES AND OTHER GROUPS/MEETINGS/EVENTS:

02 SUNDAY	08.00am	Holy Communion (Prayer Book)
<i>First of Advent</i>	10.00am	St Stephens Community Worship
	11.00am	Café Central ('til 12.15pm)
	12.30pm	Baptism
	06.00pm	Masons Carol Service
03 MONDAY	08.00pm	Choir practice
05 WEDNESDAY	10.15am	Holy Communion
	07.30pm	Ministry Team meeting at Sandra's
08 SATURDAY	09.00am	Dad and Me! (Church Hall)
09 SUNDAY	08.00am	Holy Communion (Prayer Book)
	10.00am	St Stephens Community Worship
		with Gift Tree for Sisters of the Church
	11.00am	Café Central ('til 12.15pm)
10 MONDAY	09.30am	Retreat Memory Café
	08.00pm	Choir practice
12 WEDNESDAY	10.15am	Holy Communion
13 THURSDAY	08.00pm	Ladies Group Carol Service (Church)
16 SUNDAY	08.00am	Holy Communion (Prayer Book)
	10.00am	St Stephens Community Worship
		Café Central ('til 12.15pm)
		CAROLS BY CANDLELIGHT
18 TUESDAY	02.30pm	Deerhurst Christmas Holy Communion downstairs
19 WEDNESDAY	10.15am	Holy Communion
	02.30pm	Deerhurst Christmas Holy Communion upstairs
	07.30pm	Scouts Carol Service
23 SUNDAY	08.00am	Holy Communion (Prayer Book)
	10.00am	St Stephens Community Worship
		Café Central ('til 12.15pm)
		02.00pm
24 MONDAY	02.30pm	Christingle Family Fun
	04.00pm	Christingle Family Fun
	11.30pm	Midnight Communion
25 CHRISTMAS DAY	10.00am	Christmas Day All age family service
26 WEDNESDAY	10.15am	St Stephen's Day Holy Communion
30 SUNDAY	08.00am	Holy Communion (Prayer Book)
	10.00am	St Stephens Community Worship
	11.00am	Café Central ('til 12.15pm)



JANUARY 2019 PREVIEW

03 THURSDAY	08.00pm	Ladies Group (Church Hall)
06 SUNDAY	08.00am	Holy Communion (Prayer Book)
	10.00am	St Stephens Community Worship
	11.00am	Café Central ('til 12.15pm)
08 TUESDAY	07.30pm	PCC

FROM THE REGISTERS

SINCE OCTOBER

Baptisms:

NOVEMBER 18: **Freddie Mitchell Packer.**
Please hold mum and dad, Leanna and Mitchell, and big sister, Ava, in your prayers.

NOVEMBER 25:

Arthur Selkirk Reay-Jones
Florence Mary Reay-Jones

Rose Ellen Reay-Jones.

Please hold mum, dad, Jess and Rob, their family and friends, in your prayers.

Marriage:

OCTOBER 27: **Nik Keevil and Adèle Grace** were married at St Stephens. We wish them every happiness in their new life together.
Please hold them in your prayers.

Sacristy Team

WE urgently need servers and helpers to administer the chalice at our Holy Communion Services.

If anyone is interested in joining our team please see Lisa or Trish.

CHRISTMAS SERVICES

16 SUNDAY

Carols by Candlelight

6.30PM

24 CHRISTMAS EVE

Christingle Family Fun

2.30 & 4PM

Midnight Communion

11.30PM

25 CHRISTMAS DAY

Community Worship

10AM

26 ST STEPHEN'S DAY

Communion 10.15AM

SAINT STEPHENS SOUNDWELL



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• **Revd Sandy Cooper**
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E&OE

OPEN SPACE

Send items for publishing to: waypastlate@gmail.com