

NEWSLINK

DECEMBER, 2022 - JANUARY, 2021

CANTON UNITING CHURCH



Adoration of the Magi by Gentile da Fabriano,
altarpiece originally in the Church of Santa Trinità, Florence (1423)

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Dear Friends,

December/January 2022

We all have the experience of waiting for guests to arrive at our home. To prepare for their arrival, we clean the house; we buy special food that suits them; we make sure their room is tidy and has special touches to help them feel at home. We look forward to their arrival.

Years ago we prepared to welcome friends to our home on the Wirral. We knew they were coming from the north of Scotland so we anticipated they would arrive late in the evening. Perhaps 8 p.m. they said to us, having calculated the distance on a map. We were ready. When they did not arrive shortly after 8, we put the girls to bed. We busied ourselves, hoping they would arrive any minute. By 11 p.m., when they still hadn't arrived, Martha went to bed. David, always the night owl, stayed up to wait. They arrived long after midnight.

In Advent we enter that period in the church calendar in which we prepare for the coming of the Christ Child. We are waiting and preparing for all that is before us. We know the celebration begins, or has its highlight on Christmas Day. Like children we may look forward to the gatherings and the rituals all year long.

But this year we may be wondering how to do this differently. We may be scaling back our celebrations with sensitivity to the needs of others. With crisis after crisis unfolding, we also may be wondering how to hope in these challenging times. Where is our joy? When will peace truly come? Where is God's visible? How do we embody God's love found in the Christ Child?

Emily Dickinson wrote a poem about hope—a fragile thing with feathers that sings despite the storm. We find this poem quite moving; however, in the past year, we have come across a different image of hope—something less fragile and more resilient. The image is of stubborn hope that refuses to move or give way in the face of challenge. One reflection on stubborn hope is found below:

So may we know the hope that is not just for someday but for this day—
here, now, in this moment that opens to us:
hope not made of wishes but of substance,
hope made of sinew and muscle and bone,
hope that has breath and a beating heart,
hope that will not keep quiet and be polite,
hope that knows how to holler when it is called for,
hope that knows how to sing when there seems little cause,
hope that raises us from the dead— not someday but this day,
every day, again and again and again.

Jan Richardson

Right now, as we prepare for the birth of Jesus, and we face into climate crisis, and we wonder how we, or our loved ones, will pay energy bills and/or mortgages, and we recover from illnesses and face new diagnoses, it seems this stubborn hope may be what we need to enable us to simply get through the day.

God's hope isn't just for a nice day at some point in the future. It is no longer fragile and tender. Hope is the ability, the resilience, to face into this day, doing the work that needs to be done, being friends and carers; following Jesus and being voices for change, hands that offer support, hearts that don't turn cold.

With all this is before us this week, this month or next year, may stubborn hope, God's hope, give us the strength we need to find joy in each day, in whatever lies before us, trusting that we are not alone and when necessary, embodying God's love for those who cannot hope themselves.

Peace,

Martha and David

The mission of Canton Uniting Church: Offering Glimpses of God

The following reflection has been developed from the congregational responses gathered from three Sunday services held in September/October 2022. These services were opportunities for the members and friends gathered to reflect on our experiences of God and our hopes for sharing God through the life of the church. Worship is central to life of the church. We are using this experience to help us understand who we are as a community in addition to the worship life of the church.

Based on our responses, it seems the majority of us experience God's presence through nature and other people. If this is our experience of God, can we use both nature, i.e. our garden, and people, i.e. ourselves and our church community, to share God with our community?

The initial question was 'How do we encounter God?'

We are fortunate to have a variety of people who are aware of God in many ways. God is with us in the communities we have developed and in the natural world around us. When we stop a minute, it is clear we see God in a variety of ways and contexts. We are grateful for these glimpses of God. Following on from the above, if God is with us in these many and varied ways, then God shows up in our community in the same variety of ways.

The next question was therefore 'How does CUC point to God for our community?'

When we work in the garden, we highlight God as Creator and Carer.

- The creation is embodied in the growing of food and creating a beautiful place as well as in the ability to freely share food with our neighbours. As we develop the garden space, it can become an oasis in a busy and lively community.

When we are welcoming strangers, we embody our belief that all humans are created in God's image.

- Whether we offer invitations to people we meet to come to CUC, or we offer friendship as strangers come to church, the ability to welcome people is key.
- To enable welcome:
- Do we need to have meals or coffee mornings to create space for people to encounter each other outside Sunday morning?
- The music group and the youth group are ways people deepen relationships, but what about those who aren't musical or young?
- Community programmes—the building is already used in a variety of ways for programmes. In addition, we are beginning to develop a gardening programme for, and with, community support.
- How do we let people know what we are doing?

Music

- Music is an essential element in the life of our congregation.
- As a community, are we using our gifts of music and art in the best way we can?

Further questions which arise from our initial discussions:

What does our neighbourhood need?

- How can we discover the needs of our neighbourhood?
- Once we do, do we have the capacity to respond?
- In the face of the economic crisis, do we offer a warmth bank? How do we staff it?
- The work of our garden can be a way to respond to community need to be fed—literally and spiritually. Both can happen on Sunday and in the developing garden space.

What staffing do we need to fulfil our vision?

- As CUC develops its mission, through the garden and/or other programmes in the building, staffing remains a key concern. Many of our community still work so they are not available in the day—the times we might like to offer programmes. Do we pay someone to staff our garden or our building?
- As staffing is an issue, it seems important to focus what we do rather than try to have so many things happening which we cannot support.

Do we expect people to come to us?

- One assumption behind many of our suggestions is that if we put on a programme, people will come. Perhaps they will; however, more and more people have no connection to a church and/or interest in worship. What we do/offer outside of Sunday morning is that glimpse of God for those who don't know God.
- Alongside this glimpse we are able to offer, we want our building to continue to be a place where people feel welcomed and included.

How do we use social media to connect with people?

- Social media is available to tell our story, invite strangers, and welcome them into the community. How can we use it?

What is the role of creativity in our mission?

- What is the continued role for music, art, poetry, etc. in connection with our neighbour?

As a next step, there would seem to be two questions to ask ourselves to develop the life of the church.

- What are the resources this church has - to show God's love and share God's presence with others?
- In what conversations would members of the congregation like to participate in order to continue to develop our resources/gifts as a community? Conversations after church, mid-week meetings, bible studies, prayer circles, Sunday worship, church meetings, buddy group meetings, online discussion?

DIGITAL MINISTRY

The URC Synod of Wales is working on an application for a special category minister who would be responsible for supporting digital ministry. The main objective is to enhance digital literacy within the local churches. On 15th November, the Synod sponsored an online Zoom meeting, when issues were explored.

There are two distinct possibilities for development – the Church online and online church.

THE CHURCH ONLINE involves the use of technology to enhance the more traditional forms of Church. Worship may be streamed live from a traditional church, say, to those who are housebound or otherwise unable to get to the physical place of worship. Or it may be recorded for others to watch at a later time. Or church meetings and elders/deacons meetings may be held online.

It was noted that, because of Covid, online usage had moved on in 18 months to what would otherwise have taken 5 to 10 years. There are some obstacles, including restricted levels of expertise in many local churches (we are fortunate to have Richard!) and navigating copyright requirements.

Recommended strategies within local churches include a **team approach** with a view to expanding expertise, and **focussing on aspirations** looking for technical solutions rather than trying to understand all the technical capabilities up front.

Digital ministry within the Synod – strategically located within Wales - would provide support to local churches, following these strategies. Typical support would be **drop-in sessions for help on technical issues**, and organising **opportunities for sharing experiences**.

AN ONLINE CHURCH is a community whose worship and other activities including pastoral care are based around a digital framework. The meeting heard about such a community called YourChurch, that was started by mostly URC people during the pandemic and has now been going for just over two years.

YourChurch's starting point is to recognise opportunities and constraints in an online environment. In worship, they make much use of discussions in break-out 'rooms', where many people can talk more easily than in 'buzz' groups in a physical church building. On the other hand, hymn singing together does not work well in a live Zoom service, so they look to other musical contributions. Pastoral care can be through text messaging or telephone or simply asking after people before/after online worship. Discipleship is nurtured by an online course that is similar to Walking the Way. They have eco-church status.

Whereas the traditional church can relate to its local community, YourChurch can experience the perspective of the universal Church, with participation from people overseas; they had a virtual pilgrimage to Bethlehem. They are not trying to create a template for others, nor do they set out to provide a resource for other churches; they are not an entrepreneur looking for customers – they are pioneers in a new way of being church, open to all. Consistent with this approach, they do not record their services.

Needless to say, YourChurch does not fit easily into the 1972 structures of the United Reformed Church! However, there is much goodwill; North West Synod are acting as sponsors, and the central Faith & Order Committee is looking for the best way to give them official recognition as a church in the URC.

A digital minister in the Synod could support any group wanting to set up a new online community.

MY THOUGHTS It seems to me that the Synod's efforts to obtain specific digital ministry should be encouraged. No doubt local churches would get there in due course, but a full-time support person will surely help to build on the momentum of the last three years. And who knows what might come out? Maybe an online worship for students in which our young people can participate when they go away to college?

Ken Woods

Christmas Greetings

<p>This past year has been both joyful and difficult for the Georges. Thanks to all our church family for love and support throughout the year. We wish you joy and blessings this Christmas and in the year ahead. Xx</p>	<p><i>Nadolig Llawn i holl deulu yr Eglwys! Boldog karácsonyi ünnepeket! A Merry Christmas to all!</i></p> <p><i>Cariad mawr, Hugh Barbara a Bence xx</i></p>
<p>Joy and peace to each and every one of you! Christmas hugs, from Eva Elliott</p>	<p>Christmas Greetings to all!</p> <p>From Audrey (T)</p>

<p>Best wishes to all the Church family for a happy and peaceful Christmas and New Year.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Alan</p>	<p>Happy Christmas and Peaceful New Year to all at CUC.</p> <p>From, Sian, Steve, Josh, Harri, Toni and Rhys. Xx</p>
<p>Wishing everyone at Canton Uniting Church a Very Merry Christmas, and a Healthy and Happy New Year.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">From Jan (Richens)</p>	<p>Wishing you all Peace and Joy at Christmas and throughout the New Year.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">From Bronwyn</p>
<p>May Peace and Joy be yours at Christmas. Wishing you every blessing in the New Year.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">With love from Fred and Rowena</p>	<p>Warm Christmas Greetings to all our Church family, and we wish you every blessing in the New Year.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Doreen & Roland</p>
<p>Wishing our church family a Merry Christmas.</p> <p>With best wishes, The Atherton family</p>	<p>Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all at our church family.</p> <p>Fiona, Rob, Isobel and Alistair</p>

Christ Climbed down
from His bare Tree
this year
and ran away to where
there were no rootless Christmas trees
hung with candycanes and breakable stars

.....
Christ Climbed Down
from His bare Tree
this year and softly stole away into
some anonymous Mary's womb again
where in the darkest night
of everybody's anonymous soul
He awaits again
an unimaginable
and impossibly
Immaculate Reconception
the very craziest
of Second Comings.



James B. Janknegt, *Nativity*, 1995

from a poem by Lawrence Ferlinghetti

Happy Re-birth from Tom and Marieke

Prayer Call**December**

1st	Eva Elliott
2nd	Calum Ellis
3rd	Alan Farnham
4th	Advent 2: The Bible Society
5th	Ceri and Phil George
6th	Linda Gibbs
7th	Rachel, Kate, Evan and Emily Gill
8th	Bronwyn Gregory
9th	Rob, Fiona, Isobel and Alistair Harding
10th	Jean Hawkins
11th	Advent 3: Prisoners of Conscience
12th	Barbara Jones
13th	Sian, Joshua and Harri Jones
14th	Elinor Kapp
15th	Olaide, Taiwo, Ore, Korede and Nifemi Kassim
16th	Jenny Keenor
17th	Beverley, Christopher, Ioan and Evelyn Kibble
18th	Advent 4: Those who hear God's call
19th	Cindy Lim, Arwyn McCabe, Nye Buckle and Caian
20th	Ann and Tom Lloyd
21st	Angie Luther
22nd	Millie McQuade
23rd	Audrey Morgan
24th	Barbara, Hugh and Bence Morgans
25th	Christmas Day: The Salvation of the World
26th	Michael and Katie Munnick, Isla, Leo and Tate
27th	Danielle Phillips, Laura, Will, Cian and Ruby
28th	Mandy and Steve Phillips
29th	Abigail, Matt, Brooke and Toby Powell
30th	Julie Richards
31st	Janice Richens

January 2023

1st International Peace

2nd	Lucy Robinson and Andrew Wilson-Dickson
3rd	Barbara Smith
4th	David and Malou Smith
5th	Audrey Takle
6th	David and Joy Thompson
7th	Alison Walker
8th	The homeless
9th	Liz Williams and family
10th	Kenneth Woods
11th	Rita, Francis, Gloria, Gabriel and Michael
12th	Tom and Marieke Arthur
13th	Chris and Megan Atherton
14th	Geraint Atherton
15th	Christian Unity
16th	Gwyn Atherton
17th	Lowri and Amelia Baldwin
18th	Keith Bick
19th	Doreen Cassam
20th	Debbie Cheshire, Paige and Lola
21st	David Cooke
22nd	The economy
23rd	Clive Curtis and Constantino Dumangane
24th	Fred and Rowena Davies
25th	David Dean, Martha McInnes and family
26th	Ann Dobbins
27th	Marc and Alison Dummer
28th	Gareth Dyer
29th	Climate change and the environment
30th	Hiroko, Richard and Emily Edge
31st	Toni Edwards

February

1st	Eva Elliott
2nd	Calum Ellis
3rd	Alan Farnham
4th	Ceri and Phil George

Pastoral News

We pray for Bev Kibble and her family, on the death of her mother, Cath Blakemore. Cath was a much loved member of the church family.

Tom Arthur is at home and is recovering slowly.

Dave Thomson is out of hospital, and is staying with his daughter, as Joy is herself in hospital at the moment with gall bladder problems.

We give thanks for Phil George's presence in church last Sunday. It was wonderful to see him back in church.

We continue to pray for Millie McQuade and her daughter, Helen, who have both been unwell. They are being looked after by Caitlin and Natasha.

We remember Barbara Jones and Toni Edwards and in our prayers.

We remember Norah Morgans, being cared for at home by John, and by her family.

We think of Barbara Morgans, still suffering from post-Covid fatigue.

We pray for Alison, who recently tested positive for Covid.

We pray for all members of the church family who are unable to worship with us regularly.



Georges de La Tour,
c. 1644
Adoration of the
Shepherds

Sunday Lectionary Readings for December, 2022 until January, 2023

4th December: It's not me

Isaiah 11.1-10; Psalm 72.1-7,18-19; Romans 15.4-13; Matthew 3.1-12

John the Baptist fulfils the role of Isaiah's prophetic voice, preparing for the Lord's coming. The preparation is repentance, and learning to 'bear good fruit' by depending only on God. When the Lord, the Messiah, comes, he will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. Our readings all speak of a message for the whole world. In their different ways they reflect the glory of God, especially as revealed in Jesus. Our gaze is drawn away from concern with ourselves to see a bigger picture – it's not about us, it's about Jesus

This week we explore what it means to point to Jesus.

11th December, 2022 The Wobble Moment

Isaiah 35.1-10; Psalm 146.5-10; James 5.7-10; Matthew 11.2-11

John the Baptist sends his disciples to ask whether Jesus really is the promised Messiah. Jesus invites John to look at his words and deeds – they fulfil Isaiah's prophecies; and he affirms John as the messenger, foretold by Malachi, sent to prepare the way. This week, we flash forward from the preparatory ministry of John the Baptist (see last week's Gospel reading) to find John languishing in Herod's dungeon and doubting whether Jesus is the promised Messiah. How does John deal with those doubts? And how should we deal with ours?

This week we explore how we navigate our doubts.

18th December,2022: Significant Other

Isaiah 7.10-16; Psalm 80.1-7,17-19; Romans 1.1-7; Matthew 1.18-25

In a dream, an angel tells Joseph that Mary's child is from the Holy Spirit. He is to take her as his wife and name the child Jesus, the Saviour. By Joseph's adoption Jesus becomes the promised Son of David, named 'God is with us'. Joseph is the last named in the list of Jesus' antecedents given by Matthew at the beginning of his Gospel but, as husband to Mary, not as Jesus' biological father. He is entirely silent throughout this and, indeed, all of the Gospels, and he fades from the scene almost immediately after the opening chapters. But his actions are a vital and significant part of God's story.

This week we explore what it means to play your part in God's story

25th December, 2022: Christmas Day

Isaiah 52.7-10; Psalm 98; Hebrews 1.1-4; 2.5-12; John 1.1-14

God's Word is light shining in darkness; it is the source of all life and of all things. The Word was always in the world, rejected by some but received by others. This Word became flesh and, John says, we have seen his glory. And those who receive him, who believe in him, become children of God. Much of the time, Christmas may focus on Matthew and Luke's stories surrounding Jesus' birth. John's more poetic and visionary account, while making no reference at all to the baby Jesus or Bethlehem, helps us to put those stories in context, to unpack their meaning and, more importantly, their implications and consequences.

This week we explore John's take on Christmas: 'and the Word became flesh'.

1st January, 2023: Opening Doors

Ecclesiastes 3.1-13; Psalm 8; Revelation 21.1-6a; Matthew 25.31-46

The very well known 'A time to be born, and a time to die' is the first of 14 pairs of contrasting actions, all of which have their season or proper place in human life. But, the writer says, none of them, nor anything else humans do, will help you know the entirety of 'what God has done from the beginning to end', so the best thing to do is to take pleasure in what you do and be happy and enjoy yourself for as long as you live. The reading focuses on a variety of times and seasons in our lives, prompting questions about how we empathise with one another. The Gospel passage challenges us to look outwards as well, seeking out those in our community who are in difficult circumstances and putting in place ways to support them.

This week we explore the question: What is it time to do now?

8th January, 2023: Let's do this

Isaiah 42.1-9; Psalm 29; Acts 10.34-43; Matthew 3.13-17

Jesus comes to the river Jordan and is baptized by John, who is reluctant because he thinks Jesus should baptize him. The Spirit descends on Jesus and a heavenly voice calls him God's beloved Son.

The baptism of Jesus is a wonderful image of Jesus' submission. Jesus knew that to demonstrate his obedience he needed to go through John's water of repentance. As he came up out of the water, he heard the words that showed God's attitude towards him: 'my Son...with whom I am well pleased'. In the light of this, we explore our commitment to God and how it shapes our behaviour and attitudes.

This week we explore starting with the right attitude.

15th January, 2023: Come, See, Tell, Repeat

Isaiah 49.1-7; Psalm 40.1-11; 1 Corinthians 1.1-9; John 1.29-42

John the Baptist identifies Jesus as 'the Lamb of God', and the one who 'baptizes with the Holy Spirit'. Later, two people try to find out more about Jesus, and he invites them to 'Come and see'. These first two disciples believe they have found the Messiah and bring others to Jesus. The Gospel passage is one of witness. John has seen something of what his cousin is to become and is quick to impart the information to his disciples. Andrew and his friend are intrigued, so Jesus invites them to spend the day with him. Andrew is so impressed that he brings his brother Peter to meet Jesus too. There is a clear message here – we are not to keep what we discover about Jesus to ourselves.

This week we explore being invited to meet Jesus.

22nd January, 2023: About Turn

Isaiah 9.1-4; Psalm 27.1,4-9; 1 Corinthians 1.10-18; Matthew 4.12-23

After his baptism, Jesus calls people to repentance, to turn away from darkness and towards the light. The disciples' response to Jesus' call is immediate. Jesus makes his way through Galilee, teaching, proclaiming the good news of God's kingdom, and healing the sick. Jesus starts his ministry by declaring that the kingdom of heaven is near. But, to be ready to accept it, we need to repent. The first people to follow – Peter, Andrew, James and John – did just that. They left their fishing nets and turned towards Jesus. Their former lives were no longer the priority; and then the adventure really began! The same can be true for us, if we are willing to re-orientate our lives as followers of Jesus. This is the true meaning of repentance.

This week we explore the meaning of Jesus' call to repent.

29th January, 2023: Walking Humbly with your God

Micah 6.1-8; Psalm 15; 1 Corinthians 1.18-31; Matthew 5.1-12

Jesus draws huge crowds to listen to him. He declares God's blessing with something of a reversal of fortunes on those who are suffering, and also on those who are merciful, pure in heart and peacemakers. There are plenty of practical guidelines throughout the Bible on how we should live. To help us to truly 'walk humbly' with God, through all that life throws at us, we will need to focus in on what God really requires of us.

This week we explore opportunities for growth in darker times.

5th February, 2022: Restore the streets

Isaiah 58.1-9a,(9b-12); Psalm 112.1-9; 1 Corinthians 2.1-12,(13-16); Matthew 5.13-20

Using metaphors of salt and light, Jesus teaches that true disciples witness to the gospel in what they say and do, not by merely believing it; and true discipleship cannot be hidden from those around us. He says that he did not come to abolish the Jewish Law, rather to fulfil and transcend it. If we are to challenge the issues that cast a shadow over our world, we must be sure that we practise what we preach. Rather than turning to God and closing our eyes, how can we make a difference and help him with the work of restoration and revitalisation?

This week we explore the call to revitalise our communities.

The First Christmas

c	q	w	f	r	a	n	k	i	n	c	e	n	s	e	p
e	h	r	t	y	d	r	e	h	p	e	h	s	u	i	l
g	o	r	a	s	d	f	g	h	j	k	l	z	x	c	e
a	m	l	i	n	b	d	e	c	e	m	b	e	r	b	l
b	q	d	n	s	a	f	g	h	y	r	d	v	b	h	c
r	f	w	n	a	t	i	v	i	t	y	m	p	r	p	a
i	g	s	k	i	o	m	a	r	y	h	o	n	l	q	r
e	h	d	e	t	e	n	a	z	a	r	e	t	h	w	i
l	j	e	e	a	u	j	e	s	u	s	z	q	j	e	m
i	r	r	p	p	p	o	m	d	f	u	r	y	l	r	m
d	a	t	e	t	e	s	s	y	t	d	g	i	k	t	a
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n	s	h	z	w	y	p	h	n	z	r	y	o	u	u	g
k	f	j	c	x	g	h	j	s	i	i	h	y	g	i	e
e	b	e	t	h	l	e	h	e	m	t	o	b	v	o	r
y	a	w	i	s	e	m	e	n	s	d	f	g	h	p	k

nativity	Nazareth	shepherd
Jesus	donkey	sheep
Mary	wise men	manger
Joseph	frankincense	miracle
Gabriel	myrrh	December
innkeeper	gold	

CANTON UNITING CHURCH was established in 1995 when New Trinity United Reformed Church joined with Llandaff Road Baptist Church and in 2013 joined with Grand Avenue United Reformed Church Ely which in 2005 had united with Saintwell URC. We are committed to ecumenism through our links with Cytûn, the Covenanted Churches and Churches Together in Canton. Our previous minister was the Chair of the Committee of the Covenanted Baptists which, with the Church in Wales, the Presbyterian, Methodist and United Reformed Churches seeks to bring about the goal of uniting together.

CONTACTS

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USUAL WEEKLY DIARY & MONTHLY EVENTS -

The Wednesday evening prayers on Zoom have finished.

CANCELLED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE

AND FINALLY ... Please hand in material for the next Newlink to Hugh Morgans by the end of the Morning service on **Sunday, the 21st of January, 2023.**

