

# Ponteland Methodist Church Cornerstone Happy Christmas



**December 2023/January 2024**

## MINISTER'S LETTER

The winter solstice is the darkest time of the year. Dark when we get up in the morning: dark in the early evening before getting home from work. Nature seems to have gone to sleep. The leaves have fallen and our gardens seem dead. 22nd December is the shortest day and longest night this year.

At this darkest time of the year the pagan god 'Sol Invictus' was prayed to by our ancestors, and as early as the 2nd century, the Romans prayed to their gods that the 'Unconquered Sun' would rise again and warm the earth and bring things back to life. Darkness and Light. Death and New Life. These are not just metaphors but they touch the very deepest hopes and fears "...of all the years". The hopes and fears of every generation and every person's life "...are met in thee tonight". It is no accident that the Christian Church celebrates the birth of the true light at the darkest time of the year. He is the light that darkness could not overcome. He is not the 'Sun' but the 'Son'. As Isaiah prophesied:

*"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;  
on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned..."*

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,*

*and the government will be on his shoulders.*

*And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,*

*Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."* (Isaiah 9:2,6)

There will always be a struggle between darkness and light. We know it on a personal level within ourselves. We know it in the wider world as well. Nowhere is that more graphically seen than in the destruction and war being waged in the Middle East. Bombs and bullets, terror and violence seem to be the only language being used in these lands of the Bible. And the innocents suffer. Who could fail to be shocked by the sheer terror on the faces of children and families as hostages are still missing and homes, schools and hospitals are destroyed?

The story of the birth of Jesus resonates with the story of humanity at its darkest hour. Matthew Guite's poem 'Refugee' puts it well:

*We think of him as safe beneath the steeple,  
Or cosy in a crib beside the font,  
But he is with a million displaced people  
On the long road of weariness and want.*

*For even as we sing our final carol  
His family is up and on that road,  
Fleeing the wrath of someone else's quarrel,  
Glancing behind and shouldering their load.*

*Whilst Herod rages still from his dark tower  
Christ clings to Mary, fingers tightly curled,  
The lambs are slaughtered by the men of power,  
And death squads spread their curse across the world.*

*But every Herod dies, and comes alone  
To stand before the Lamb upon the throne.*

In the darkness we hold on to the hope that the Light has  
dawned, we give thanks for the coming of the Prince of Peace.  
Have a blessed Christmas and wonderful new year.

*Jona*

### **CHRISTMAS BALLAD**

From West and from North and from South and from East,  
we all are invited to share in a feast;  
You won't find here presents, or wine or rich food;  
the usual things to enliven the mood.

For this one is different, so let us prepare,  
to shed all the trappings that easily snare;  
And share in God's moment of grace and of light,  
that chases the gloom of deep winter's dark night.

The bright morning star has shone bold on a place,  
where neighbouring shepherds are shining of face;  
For they are the ones who first heeded the call,  
to search for a baby, the Saviour of all.

Come now, let us join them, with nothing to bring  
except for our carol which gladly we sing;  
To honour God's Son at His wonderful birth,  
who brings joy and peace to all humans on earth

**Rev David H MacDonald**

## **UPLIFT**

I thought Lincolnshire was flat,  
how wrong I was about that.  
Alighting in Lincoln, we see the Cathedral.  
Passing the shops, we climb a steep hill.

We stop halfway to sit on a seat,  
resting with a snack for our treat.  
Welcomed through the magnificent door,  
we pay the charge and look round in awe.

Another sit down, amazed by its size  
we take in the grandeur, with surprise.  
Stained glass windows fill space with light  
and kaleidoscopic colours enchant our sight.

Stations of the cross carved in light wood,  
beautiful sculptures of sacred sainthood.  
Crafted with skill, reflecting God's gift,  
this space certainly gives the soul an uplift.

**Rosemary Gray**

## **CHRISTMAS PRESENTS**

### **What would you like for Christmas?**

A little girl went to visit Father Christmas in the local garden centre grotto. He welcomed her with a smile and the question of what she would like for Christmas.

The little girl gasped and stared up at him in horror. "Didn't you get my email?!"

### **Christmas gifts**

Grandfather was talking to his granddaughter, "When I was a child all we got for Christmas was an apple and an orange." The little girl clapped her hands in joy. "Brilliant! I'd love a new computer and a mobile!"

## DEBORAH'S STORY

I'd been midwife in Anathoth for some years before that Autumn when old Elizabeth, the wife of the Priest Zechariah, sent for me and told me she was pregnant. I was amazed, for I'd known her all my life and it was well known that she was barren – and she was forty-eight years old if she was a day! “Are you quite sure? Let me have a look at you!” I said to her, thinking it might be some sort of a growth. But she was quite right, all the signs of early pregnancy were there. “Of course I am right!” she protested. “My old man had a vision, right there in the Temple, and we were promised a son. He's going to be famous, too!”

Well, all firstborn sons are going to be famous in the eyes of their mothers, so I let that one pass. I kept a good eye on Elizabeth over the next months and made sure she looked after herself and took proper food and rested in the later stages. “You really could do with a younger woman to come and stay with you and help you and your husband,” I told her, for Zechariah was on the sick, having totally lost the use of his voice. That meant he was around in the house instead of fulfilling his Temple duties at Jerusalem, for the High Priest wouldn't let any priest who wasn't in his eyes “complete” anywhere near the sacred places. Men! They've no imagination!

Six months on, Elizabeth had a young cousin come down from the north country to stay with her for three months. I told her that was a good thing. Mary, her name was, a nice kid in her teens and very helpful. “She'll see you're all right until your child is born,” I said to Elizabeth; “You mean my son is born,” she insisted.

The girl from Nazareth was wearing a marriage veil, very new it was too, and I soon spotted on my early visits to check on the expectant Elizabeth that Mary was showing early signs of pregnancy: she was positively glowing with the joy of it. She explained that they were not very well off, and her man back at home was the village carpenter and could not afford to be away from his work. She shyly said, “The baby's special, I've been told!” Another one of them!

Well, I delivered Elizabeth's boy in due course, no problems. At the naming ceremony the father gave him the name JOHN to the surprise of all present. Zechariah then sang a psalm he had

composed – yes, his voice had come back – praising the Lord God and predicting that little John would grow up to be a prophet, not a priest. Mary went back up north and I heard nothing of her, so I hope she had a good midwife and a comfortable place when her time came, she was a caring girl and would make a good mother.

Recently I retired to Jerusalem, about five miles from Anathoth, so saw little of the family, though I heard recently that young John, who would be in his teens now, had taken himself off to one of the desert communities and was living rough.

*Luke 1:39-56*

**John M Gill**





## GRAEME DANBY CONCERT

The show is coming to Ponteland Methodist Church on Saturday April 13th 2024. The show is called The Donkey, The Whip-pet and The Giant Leek. It celebrates the life and music of the composer Eric Boswell who lived in Northumberland until his death in 2009.

**Graeme Thompson**

### 10 REASONS WHY ENGLISH IS WEIRD

- 1) The bandage was wound around the wound.
- 2) The farm was used to produce produce.
- 3) The dump was so full that it had to refuse more refuse.
- 4) We must polish the Polish furniture.
- 5) He could lead if he would get the lead out.
- 6) The soldier decided to desert his dessert in the desert.
- 7) Since there is no time like the present, he thought it was time to present the present.
- 8) A bass was painted on the head of the bass drum.
- 9) When shot at, the dove dove into the bushes.
- 10) I did not object to the object.

## SAILOR'S TROUSERS

We fancied a trip to the Dordogne, which part of France so many people enthuse about.....but a British Airways flight via Heathrow and Toulouse was by no means a certainty, until practically the last minute. An early start had us sitting in Heathrow at 8 o'clock in rather too much time for the 2.15pm flight! My knowledge of our destination was limited to its part in the schoolboy question, "Why do two French cities remind you of a sailor's trousers?" They are Toulon and Toulouse. The latter surprisingly is the fourth largest in France and where they make the Air Buses.



We did not anticipate series of history lessons either. The courier said, "It's not a holiday you know; it's an endurance test." Every day there was a trip to visit a fortified village or a mediaeval town, all of which had seen momentous times. If it was not the Simon de Montfort leading Crusades against the protestant Cathars, it was the Wars of Religion, the Hundred Years War, the Revolution and Napoleon. The English fought the French throughout history it seems and not just Henry the fifth and Wellington. Maybe we had forgotten all that.

We had five nights in Toulouse-Lautrec's home town at the Grand? Hotel D'Orleans in Albi. Sure enough there was Joan herself at the end of the street, although French do have the habit of renaming their streets every few years! The old city all brick-built and a warren of extremely narrow streets - rather like the Shambles in York - with corbelled and half-timbered houses and dominated by a vast fortress of a Cathedral – also red brick. Its interior held the finest mediaeval statuary of the saints and exceedingly intricate and delicate almost lace-like stonework, the finest in Europe, we were told. Nearly uniquely it had been spared from the ravages of the Revolution. Its walls were completely covered with highly-coloured three-dimensional geometric shapes. The elaborately decorated vaulting had not needed any restoration since it was painted 500 years ago. The important background pigment was the vivid blue woad.



In the area between Albi, Toulouse, and Carcassonne many merchants had grown rich from trade in the dye of the locally grown plant. As a former textile person I should have known all about woad [as worn by Boadicea and her ancient Britons and grown and milled in East Anglia until as late as 1932]. In the late 1500s Indigo supplanted woad, following introduction to Europe from the East Indies [where else?]. Less important now than formerly, Indigo is still principally used to colour cotton jeans. One day we'd lunch in the impressive fairy-tale triple-walled Carcassonne. Orders for omelette and chips –though not ours – were delayed while the eatery proprietor went off for more eggs and spuds! Our last two days were centred on Racamadour, a gorge village clinging to a cliff side and on the pilgrim route to Saint Iago de Compostella in Spain, which our cycling friend John Wall followed a year or two back. Several modern footslogging pilgrims were identifiable by the scallop shell marked with a cross, stitched to their backpacks. A pleasant visit to Sarlat and a boat trip on the Dordogne River completed our trip. This was 2010... I had almost forgotten why I recorded that and who I might have sent it on to.... Happy memories.....

**John Waddell**



*Sara preferred to let people work  
out the hymns for themselves*

# THE ~~IN~~JUSTICE *Advent Calendar*

For Advent 2023 Transform Trade is again partnering with a hand-picked selection of world-changing organisations to provide you with 24 simple ways to make the world a better place. It's not too late to sign up at <https://www.transform-trade.org/injustice-advent-calendar>.

Every day until Christmas you will be emailed information about an opportunity to stand up against injustice - this could be anything from signing a petition relating to a human rights issue or a simple way to help nature and biodiversity in your local area. It'll always be free and always take less than five minutes to complete.

Amidst all the shopping and planning, wrapping and festivities please join me in making a difference this Advent.

If you haven't yet got all your Christmas cards or are struggling to find the perfect present, don't forget to head to <https://store-transform-trade.org> where charity cards and "Gifts for Life" are still available.

**Bev**





## THE OPEN DOOR

An easy recipe that makes a comforting bowl of soup. I'm sure you could use left-over turkey instead of chicken.

**Judith**

### Chicken Noodle Soup

20g butter  
4 carrots, thinly sliced  
2 leeks, finely sliced  
2 celery sticks, chopped  
2 cloves of garlic, crushed  
10g grated fresh ginger  
1.2 litres chicken stock  
100g medium noodles  
2 cooked chicken breasts, or left-over roast chicken  
Juice of 1 lemon



In a large pan melt the butter. Add the leeks, carrots and celery, season with salt.

Gently fry for 10 minutes, stirring regularly.

Add garlic and ginger and cook for a minute.

Add the stock and bring to a simmer.

Cook for 10 minutes.

Crumble the noodles into the soup, add the chicken and lemon juice.

Season to taste. Simmer for 2-3 minutes until the noodles are tender.

**We will be taking a break over Christmas  
Closed on Dec. 18th, 25th and Jan 1st  
Reopen on Jan 8th  
We wish all our customers a very happy  
Christmas**

## ELECTRIC GATES ARE WONDERFUL. BUT...

Some streets in Ponteland still have overhead power cables. There are lots of trees in Ponteland and occasionally they shed branches which can result in damaged power lines. It is there-



fore not unlikely that occasionally you may return home after a day out to find your house in darkness. This means that your electric gates will not open - and you forgot to take the key with you. So you borrow a neighbour's ladder and climb over the wall and get into the house

to get the bunch of house keys. It is difficult to get back over the wall without a ladder, so you crawl under the hedge, only to discover that the gate key is not in this bunch of keys. You then crawl back under the hedge and go back in the house to find the spare gate key, then you (again) crawl under the hedge and try and open the gate. Even with the help of a neighbour this proves very difficult. Eventually too much force is used and the key breaks in the lock.

A quick ponder: now what do you do? The tree surgeons have turned up to remove the broken branches and they assure you that the electricity supply engineers will be along soon to reconnect everybody.

Time for another think - what next? Why not go and find somewhere warm and get a coffee while you wait? Eventually you get a phone call from your neighbour to tell you that the power is back on. You go home and the gates work.

Next job is to get electric gates replaced by simple manual gates!

**Anonymous!**

*(Editor: This is a true story!)*

**CHURCHES TOGETHER IN PONTELAND**  
**Monthly Prayers 2023**  
**Always at 12.00**

Monday 11<sup>th</sup> December Ponteland Methodist Church

Meetings consist of a brief introduction and prayers from the different churches. Usually no more than 30 minutes.

**Contact** John Doherty 01661 821013

**MEN'S FORUM**  
**Thursday 7.30pm**  
**PROGRAMME 2023**

**Dec 7** 'Scams – Awareness and Prevention'. Chris Balfour -  
Age UK Northumberland.

**Jan 11** Annual dinner

**Alan Groves**

**WHAT'S ON**

Tues Dec 5, 6pm - BB Carol Service

Thurs Dec 7, 2pm - Women Together Advent service

Thurs Dec 14, 9am - Toddlers Christmas Party (with Santa visit!)

Thurs Dec 14 7pm Bedlington Salvation Army Concert

Fri Dec 15 5pm Pizza Friday

Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> 4pm - Family Carol Service

Christmas Eve 10am - Worship led by Geoff Orrock

Christmas Eve 3pm & 5pm - Dressing the Crib services at St Mary's (led by Rev Paul & Jona)

Christmas Eve, 7pm - Readings and Carols at St Mary's

Christmas Day, 10am - Family Celebration

**Next Year**

Monday 1<sup>st</sup> Jan 2024 12noon Wheelbarrow Race

Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> Jan 2024 9am Bouncy Church

Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> Jan 12noon, WPCU service at PMC

Friday 26<sup>th</sup> Jan 2024 5pm Pizza Friday

Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> Jan 4pm Ecumenical WPCU service at St. Mary's  
(Week of Prayer for Christian Unity)



## EAST SIDE STORY

Our November “strollers” walk was on Saturday 4th November. One glance at the outdoor world early morning revealed a blanketing fog but, undaunted, seven met at 10am in the Church car park.

We had planned a walk in Saltwell Park, so a change of plan was indicated and Matthew checked out a new venue and unbelievably the east coast was clear and sunny. He had travelled up from Seaham earlier and was astonished to find fog inland - it is more usual for a drenching seafret to be the cause. So it was decided to go to Whitley Bay.



As we approached the coastal strip, lighter skies were appearing and even a hint of blue and by the time we arrived at our destination, the day was brilliant and absolutely windless.

In true usual pattern we enjoyed coffee at Valerie's in the Spanish City, but we decided to have our refreshments indoors although

the outdoor seats were very popular with our walkers.

After coffee we strolled along the prom which was hugely popular with children on skates and scooters and every variety of dog seemed to be having an airing. The horizon was crystal clear and with an incoming tide the waves were fairly vigorous and the resultant salty air most refreshing.

Our next stop was for lunch at the café right on the promenade which we call the “art café” as it always has a lovely show of delightful pictures. We felt sad to see the Sycamore Gap tree featured in some, all painted prior to the extremely upsetting act of vandalism.

Some of the group then continued along the prom whilst one or two decided to simply relax in the comfort of the café. We all met up again to stroll back to the cars and return to Ponteland around about 3pm.

A most enjoyable day proving West is not always best!!

**Jean Tweedie**

## NEWS FROM METHODIST WOMEN IN BRITAIN

On Saturday 25 November I was inducted as the President Designate for Methodist Women in Britain, Northern District. The ceremony took place at Brunswick Methodist Church and involved the handover of a cross on a chain from the departing President, Rev Marie Beard, who led the service.

Lynne Graham, the current President, explained how the fundraising for Children's Cancer North had raised over £14,000. She announced that she will be raising money for "Médecins sans Frontières" and the Methodist charity "All we can" in the next year.

Rev Stephen Lindridge spoke about women in the Bible who had important roles in the lineage of Jesus. He encouraged us with his words and inspired us to continue God's work today. The service ended with Communion and a faith lunch followed. I feel very encouraged by the support I have received from the ladies from Ponteland Church Women Together. Thank you so much.

The first year of my office will involve some preparation for my fundraising years and I look forward to working with the Ponteland ladies in organising some events. I am also grateful for a team of craft workers who are busy knitting, sewing and painting articles to sell for my chosen charities.

Please get in touch if you would like to help as I feel sure this will be a challenging period and I will need your support.

**Rosemary Gray**

## Pizza Friday

**15th December  
21st January  
5-7.30pm**



## GARDENING FOR DECEMBER – JANUARY 2024

This is the issue when I wish everyone who reads GARDENING “the compliments of the season” with particular emphasis on looking forward to a New Year when the mistakes of the past can be corrected and something NEW tried.

We are told that 2023 will be recorded as the warmest year on record. It may not be the wettest but we have had heavy rains this autumn that have left ground conditions that are currently (writing on 20<sup>th</sup> November) unsuitable for any form of cultivation yet there are plenty of jobs to be done, some more urgent than others. If you haven't lifted dahlias, begonias with corms and gladioli, please make a special effort to do so as any severe frost

will damage the tubers and corms. The deciduous trees are gradually releasing their leaves with many still to come. Margaret has been very active collecting leaves, twigs etc. as the last collection day for the green bins will be past before you read this.



Bulbs should have all been planted – I can

remember one year when I planted about 200 tulips in the ground in January and they were very successful. Mr Trugreen has put on the winter dressing and treated any obvious patches of moss. We haven't been able to take the last cut of the grass because it has never been dry enough. One year we cut it in January before we went for holiday in New Zealand. If it was to dry a little it could still be in time to plant bare-rooted shrubs, fruit trees and roses. If you are not committed to buying any of these leave it until the spring but buy potted specimens of whatever you wish to plant as they will establish better. For anyone moving into a new house this is the time to plan how you would like your garden and try and decide on plantings. One tip is to visit nurseries/garden centres each month to see what they have in flower - shrubs and perennials - and make one purchase of each as perennials can be grown on for one year, then divided and added to extend the borders for the following year.

If you have a vine it can be pruned once all the leaves are off and you can see how you wish to construct the main framework inside the roof of the greenhouse. If you plan to plant a vine organise it so that the root is outside the greenhouse with plenty of ground to

expand in. We don't know where the root run of our vine is so it is never purposely fertilized or watered. I saw a suggestion of planting a vine in a pot in the corner of a greenhouse and let the root run in the soil of the greenhouse. This completely restricts any other planting in the soil of the greenhouse and putting down flagstones. Other outdoor pruning of apples, pears, currants etc can be undertaken once the leaves are off. Do not prune plums in the winter.



The new seed catalogues are out so it might be time to peruse these and select your seeds for 2024. Small seed treatment at harvest and packaging has allowed seeds (carefully saved) to still have good germination for two to three years so check the dates on unused or partly-used packets to see the “sow by” dates. To test the viability of

partly-used packets sow, say 10 on a piece of moist kitchen roll, place in a suitable sized polythene bag and place in the airing cupboard (we put a little radiator in ours when the hot tank was taken out) and check daily for germination. The germinating plants need to come out onto the kitchen windowsill if you are going to grow them on. One nurseryman raising primulas told me that they had developed cabinets and germinated all their plants this way.

Reading the literature Bob Brown (writing in *Gardening Which?*) praises the merits of crab apple *Malus x Zumi* “Golden Harvest” as suitable for the birds (if you haven’t picked the fruit to make crab apple jelly) which come to it “lastish” followed by spring flowers. It is such a good pollinator it is often planted in apple-growing areas.



***MERRY CHRISTMAS AND  
HAPPY GARDENING IN 2024***

**Syd Cowan**

## **VILLAGE NEWS**

### **Proposal for new homes at top of Western Way**

In October 2021 Esh Living/Karbon Homes made an application to provide 65 varied homes. The claim was that they would be affordable. The plan has been refused as the land is in green belt and the position is unsuitable. The site is not accessible to local services.

### **Some pre-Christmas Events**

Santa's Sleigh will travel through Ponteland and Darras Hall on 1st and 2nd December. Santa will visit the Christmas Market at the Memorial Hall on Sunday 3rd December. The Rotary Members will tour pubs and clubs collecting for charity on Friday 8th December, the usual carol concert with the Bedlington Salvation Army Band will take place in our Church on Thursday 14th December. Proceeds will be going to Children North East and the Salvation Army.

### **Ponteland Leisure Centre**

Our Ponteland Sports and Leisure Centre has just been ranked second in Sport England's quality assessment. Morpeth was ranked first and Blyth came third.

### **Rotary Plant Trees**

Rotary Ponteland Members and Friends participated in a tree planting session on Rotary Way on Sunday, November 19 in association with Northumberland County Council.



**Jennifer Hardy**



## **FAMILY NEWS**

Please remember the many friends who are unable to worship with us now.

We have friends in Grange Lea, The Manor, Royal Hampton and Briardene, many of whom are unable to worship in church now. Henderson Court also has a sizeable number of Methodist residents, some of whom struggle to join us.

Other friends living alone, who are now unable to worship with us, need our support.

We also need to pray for families known to us who are facing significant caring pressures as they home care for a relative.

Please pray for the **Lisle** family, as they support Angela's father, following his recent accident.

### **WOMEN TOGETHER AUTUMN PROGRAMME 2.00pm AT CHURCH**



7 Dec Advent Service – in Church - Rev Jona Sewell  
21 Dec Informal Gathering - Stobert Room  
11 Jan Journeying into the New Year, Maureen Lloyd  
25 Jan Rosemary Gray  
22 Feb About Lent - Geoff Orrock.  
ALL LADIES ARE WELCOME.

### **OPEN DOOR BIBLE STUDY GROUP**

MEETING ON THE 2<sup>ND</sup> & 4<sup>TH</sup> Mondays at 2.00pm.  
We plan on continuing asking "Who is David?" There is the opportunity to share a bowl of soup prior to meeting.

**Chris Cogan**

## Preachers December

3rd 9.00am Sewell (BC)  
6.30pm Forrester  
10th 10.00am Sewell  
6.30pm Coulthard  
17th 10.00am LA  
4.00pm Sewell (CS)  
24th 10.00am Orrock  
3.00pm at St Mary's  
31st 10.00am Wood  
6.30 No service

## Preachers January

7th 9.00am Small (BC)  
6.30pm Sewell  
14th 10.00am Sewell (Cov)  
6.30pm Forrester  
21st 10.00am Gray  
6.30pm Woolley  
28th 10.00am Sewell  
4.00pm at St Mary's  
(WPCU)

1<sup>st</sup> Ponteland Boys' Brigade & Girls' Association

## Carol Service

*'An Unexpected Christmas'*

Ponteland Methodist Church

Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2023 @ 6.00 p.m.

All are welcome to join us for our  
annual Christmas Celebration



Refreshments will be served in the hall after the service



## From The Editors

*Don't forget that copy for the February edition of Cornerstone should be with the editor by **Friday 26th January 2024**. The editor's email is [andrew73anderson@gmail.com](mailto:andrew73anderson@gmail.com). The editorial committee is Andy Anderson, Jennifer Hardy, Jona Sewell and Viv Whyte.*