

Dear Friends

Christmas is just around the corner. I know it is a well-worn phrase that time seems to go faster as you age but surely this must be true. Despite the news headlines and the genuine concerns that many families and individuals are facing, the message of Christmas is always one of hope. A reminder that light can and does shine into the darkest of places. The Christmas story presents us with a pregnant teenager, leading to a potentially broken betrothal or engagement, who is hastily packed off to some elderly cousins in the country, that a few months later leads to an arduous journey and a risky birth in unfamiliar and potentially life-threatening surroundings. At first glance, it doesn't pave the way for a happy ending and could, of course, be the story of any young girl, in any country, in any century, and yet it is a story of faith, hope, and love. A story that draws us on a path that leads to God. God at work in the lives of ordinary people, enabling them to see the possible in impossible situations. It is a story of faith, trust, and love. It is a story that has stood the test of time and best of all it reminds us that God is always at the centre of humankind, feeling our pain, understanding our anxieties, hearing our questions, sharing our joys. Christmas reminds us that we are never alone, never abandoned, so whatever you are currently facing, tasked with, challenged by, or looking forward to, I pray that you may sense God's light and presence.

On behalf of Rev Julia and myself, I would like to thank you for supporting and encouraging us with all the Sunday reflections that we have recorded and posted on the Circuit YouTube Channel, and before Julia joined us, all the ones that I recorded and posted on my own YouTube Channel, as we initially responded, in the best way we could think of, during the Covid lock down. We have received some wonderful comments over the 2 ½ years (yes it really is that long) and have experienced a loyal following. However, the time now feels right to end these weekly reflections and therefore the last one will be on Christmas Day. We will keep the YouTube Channel open for a while, just in case we need it, so you can look back and re-listen, or catch up on ones you might have missed, and in due course the Circuit will make a final decision about the future of the YouTube Channel.

I kindly request your prayers for several things around the Circuit. Reeth and Gunnerside School, one of two Methodist Schools in our Circuit, are due a SIAMS and OFSTED inspection this academic year so please hold the headteacher, the school staff, the governors, the parents, and the pupils in your prayers. The Circuit is working towards employing a School Chaplain to be in post in the Spring and to bring this about the small working party tasked with this have a tight timeline, so please pray for God's guidance. The small Circuit Property Team have worked tirelessly since I came into post in 2019 focussed on selling several empty Chapels, in addition to all the other property related responsibilities, to release funds for the work, mission and outreach of the Circuit. To date, we have successfully sold, Bainbridge, Middleham, Barden and Harmby. The process is often complicated and long because we are, as Circuit Trustees, legally bound to follow the rules of the Charity Commission alongside meeting the legal conditions for Methodist Church purposes, however it is worth the effort because for the first time in many years there are some funds in the Circuit enabling us to consider outreach projects like the School Chaplain post. We currently have Aysgarth Chapel sale about to complete, please pray that this will indeed now get over the finishing line as there have been a few hurdles. Ravensworth Chapel has also presented some unforeseen challenges and after a whole year the buyers, back in August, decided not to pursue the sale. I hope by the time you read this that we will have a solution that will lead to a quick sale. You will also know that the old Leyburn Manse in St Matthews Terrace is in the process of being sold. Again, please pray that this will not cause us too many headaches.

Finally, as we approach Christmas, a time when we often see folks in our services that may not attend regularly, as well as a time for us to invite neighbours and friends to services, may God bless all with love, light, hope and joy.

Emmanuel – God is with us! (Matthew 1: 23)

'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.' (John 1: 5)

Wishing you all a peace-filled New Year. *Rev Melanie Reed* (Superintendent).

Additional dates for your diary

Wednesday 7 th December @ 7pm	Local Preachers Meeting on Zoom
Sunday 11 th December @ 6pm	'Blue Christmas' St Matthews Church Leyburn
Tuesday 13 th December @ 7pm	Carols at Leyburn auction Mart
Thursday 15 th December @ 7pm	Circuit Meeting on Zoom
Sunday 18 th December @ 7pm	Carols with Leyburn Band at St Matthews Church Leyburn
Wednesday 18 th January @ 3pm	Week of Prayer for Christian Unity united service at St Matthews Leyburn
Wednesday 8 th February @ 10am	Leyburn Church Council
Wednesday 8 th February @ 6pm	Melmerby Church Council
Thursday 9 th February @ 2pm	West Burton Church Council
Wednesday 15 th February @ 7pm	Local Preachers Meeting on Zoom