

**Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit**  
**SERVICE AT HOME – Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> December 2023**  
**Advent 2 - Prepared by Mrs Pat Fry**

This year the Methodist Church has devised a programme for Advent on the theme “Out of the Ordinary”. We are invited to let an everyday object stimulate our thinking.

We are reminded that Jesus entered the “ordinary” world of his day, living in an occupied country: born to parents forced to travel away from home on the orders of the government, then fleeing for their lives; growing up in an ordinary home in a small town, learning his father’s trade; mixing with ordinary people. The extraordinary truth that God engaged with ordinary human beings in their ordinary, everyday experiences.

We are reminded that ordinary, everyday acts of kindness can have extraordinary results.

As you read this, I expect you are sitting in your ordinary home, perhaps in a familiar chair, looking at the usual everyday scene that is your home, perhaps looking at your familiar garden. But you are now going to do something extraordinary – engaging in prayer is an extraordinary thing to do, for we are invited to engage with our Creator, with the Source of all that is good, the Spirit that is the very breath of life.

So take a moment to gather your thoughts, relax, let tension go, and listen to your own breathing for a few moments, take time to be still. Open your hands, open your mind to one greater than any other, before whom we can only wonder, and in whose eyes each one of us is loved.

**Prayer**

Loving God, You know, as we know ourselves, that we are not perfect, our personal stories may be complex, and we are not always our best selves.

Loving God you know we live in a world where there is violence, pain and so much that is wrong. Give us courage to be honest before You, so we may learn from our mistakes and grow in wisdom.

Thank you that your mercy is as deep and full as we each need. May this time be a time of blessing and renewal. Amen  
adapted from Susan Durbar, URC prayer manual

Our first hymn is new to me, but it expresses the theme of the extraordinary truth of God in Jesus coming among us

**StF246 He came to earth in poverty**  
(no YouTube found)

He came to earth in poverty,  
a child uniquely holy,  
forsaking heaven’s majesty,  
to live among the lowly

*Emmanuel means God has come,  
a child of human birth –  
and here with us he made his home,  
the Son of God on earth*

A servant toiling with his hands,  
his sovereignty concealing,  
our daily lives he understands  
with perfect fellow-feeling.  
*Emmanuel means....*

In meek obedience stooping down  
to taste humiliation  
he freely took a thorny crown  
for reconciliation  
*Emmanuel means.....*

Emmanuel! Our God is near,  
our every sorrow sharing,  
he knows our feelings – he is here,  
our human frailty bearing.  
*Emmanuel means God has come.....,*  
Martin Leckebusch,, born 1962

**Prayer of Thanks**

We take time now to thank God for the ordinary everyday blessings we often take for granted:

Gracious God, we have so much to be thankful for, even on the dark days. In Jesus you engaged with everyday human life, the good, the bad, the dull routine, the moments of delight. So now we say a heartfelt thank you for the things that we enjoy.

Recall a television programme or a book you have enjoyed this week.

Hold in your mind a tune, a song or a piece of music you find comforting or uplifting.

Think of a meal you enjoyed this week,

Think of a place you feel comfortable

Think of a scene where you felt a sense of wonder.

Think of a conversation or an encounter, a letter or a phone call this week that lifted your spirit

Thank God for someone who has showed you friendship or kindness this week.

Gracious God, In Jesus you engaged with everyday human life, the good, the bad, the dull routine, the moments of delight. So we have brought our prayer of thanks for your gifts in everyday experience.

May we play our part in sharing showing of the kindness and friendship we have experienced.

Amen

### **A picture**

The illustration chosen for today's theme, is rather too old fashioned to be an everyday object nowadays, but it symbolises today's message: A feather duster.

I guess no-one really wants to display a picture of a vacuum cleaner nozzle or the sort of brush that goes down the back of a radiator at the front of the church! The point is a feather duster can reach the cracks and crevices that nothing else can, and gently remove the clinging cobwebs from those awkward to reach corners. It's a different image from the one Isaiah chose in our Old Testament reading, but the message is the same.

### **Reading Isaiah 40:1-11**

Isaiah may have been thinking on a grand scale, about bad decisions by governments, sharp practice in trade, communal unkindness.

There may not be much we can do about bad decisions by governments; but the challenge to each of us is to clear out our own cobwebs. Perhaps negative or unkind thoughts, or bad habits, or closing our eyes to what we don't want to see.

Perhaps we need to make an effort to give thanks for something each day, or to understand someone else's point of view, or to say a thank you or sorry to someone we meet.

Ordinary things, that can make an extraordinary difference. So, take a moment now to think if there is one thing you could address this week, and offer that to God, asking for the help of the Spirit to follow it through.

The next hymn I have chosen is not an Advent hymn, but is a much loved hymn about finding God in our own everyday experience.

### **Hymn StF668 Teach me my God and King**

<https://youtu.be/N9ykXQ7euL8>

Teach me my God and King,  
in all things thee to see,  
and what I do in anything  
to do it as for thee.

For those who look on glass,  
on it may stay the eye,  
or if it pleases through it pass  
and then the heaven espy.

All may of thee partake ,  
nothing can be so mean,  
which with this tincture "For thy sake"  
will not grow bright and clean.

A servant with this clause  
makes drudgery divine,  
who sweeps a room as for thy laws  
makes that and the action fine.

This is the famous stone  
that turneth all to gold;  
for that which God doth touch and own cannot  
for less be told.

George Herbert 1593-1633

We came now to our New Testament reading, the very first words of this year's Gospel: Mark.

The familiar Christmas stories come from Luke and Matthew. Both writers give us detail about Mary and Joseph's experiences, and those who came to worship the new baby. Both writers give detailed genealogy, explaining Joseph's ancestry linking Jesus with both King David and

Abraham. And carol services traditionally end with John's beautiful poetry celebrating Jesus as God's Word. Mark is never included, yet the first line of his Gospel gets straight to the point;

"The beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

And then he leaps straight into the story, telling how John the Baptist told people to prepare to meet the messiah God would send them very soon.

### **Reading Mark 1-8**

John the Baptist takes up the message we read earlier from the prophet Isaiah: time to clear out the cobwebs, to sort out our priorities, to think about how we live our lives in the light of God's ways.

I know Eric will be thinking about John the Baptist and his message in more detail next week, so now I invite you to think a bit more generally about Mark's gospel, in a sense the most ordinary telling of the extraordinary Good News.

It's the shortest, the first to be written down, and at first sight it reads like an eye witness account, or a news report. There's a breathlessness, an urgency about it as it moves quickly from one event to another. Deeper study shows that it has been very carefully and thoughtfully put together, with a clear purpose to get the message across that this Jesus who lived among them is indeed the Son of God, Isn't that the heart of the message of Christmas? Yet there is so much that is not grasped in the Christmas celebrations that go on around us.

Sometimes young children's questions can get us thinking. My daughter teaches five-year-olds. When they started learning the songs for the Christmas nativity play, songs about angels singing glory hallelujah, and the shepherds bowing down to worship the newborn baby king, she was surprised by the questions.

Please Miss, what does Hallelujah mean?  
Please Miss, what does highest heaven mean?

Please Miss, what is worship?

Please Miss, how can they bow before the baby, when a baby cannot stand up and bow?

How would you explain those words to a five-year-old who had never been inside a church or experienced Christian worship? (I'll put her answers on the back page at the end)

And when you have pondered that, think too how many adults around us don't know what worship is. How do we start to talk about our faith, the Good News of God coming among us, God being real in our everyday experience to people who have never learnt to think like that? It's a challenge to talk about our faith in everyday words, avoiding the churchy language that people may not be familiar with, or worse, misunderstand.

Mark's message is very clear, as his Gospel unfolds. Jesus is the Son of God, worthy of our worship, and that means showing proper respect to Jesus and his teaching in the whole of life, not just spending time singing hymns and saying prayers together, important though they may be. Mark's call is to discipleship, to a costly total commitment in response to God's love shown in Jesus.

It's a challenge to demonstrate in ordinary everyday ways that we follow in the way of Jesus. It's the small thoughtful actions, the readiness to forgive, the refusal to hold a grudge that are all part of Christian discipleship, recognising Jesus worth, the root word of worship.

### **Prayers for ourselves and others**

Long dark evenings lead us to think of people who feel themselves to be in darkness for many different reasons.

So let us pray for people experiencing the darkness of war, the fear and despair that engulfs them. Focus on one place in the news headlines, pray for wisdom for governments and all who have influence; pray for staying power for aid workers.

**Into this place of desolation, come Lord Jesus, bring your light.**

At the other extreme we think of people surrounded by the bright lights of plenty but who have lost sight of God. Pray that the message of Christmas may touch their hearts, and pray for all those who bear Christian witness, that they may be faithful, perceptive and find words that convey meaning.

**Into this busy place, come Lord Jesus, bring your light.**

Focus your thoughts now on one person or situation you know, experiencing a dark time. hold them before God, and pray that they may sense God's loving presence.

**Into this place of need, come Lord Jesus, bring your light. Amen.**

Now bring your prayers together, uniting with fellow believers throughout the world in praying the words of the Lord's prayer in whatever form or language you love.

**Hymn StF222: Who would think that what was needed**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwCyLamhFrk>

Who would think that what was needed to transform and save the earth might not be a plan or army, proud in purpose, proved in worth. Who would think despite derision that a child would lead the way? God surprises earth with heaven, coming here on Christmas Day.

Shepherds watch and wise men wonder, monarchs scorn and angels sing; such a place as none would reckon holds a holy helpless thing. Stable beasts and by-passed strangers watch a baby laid in hay: God surprises earth with heaven, coming here on Christmas Day.

Centuries of skill and science span the past from which we move, yet experience questions whether with experience we improve.

While the human lot we ponder lest our hopes and humour fray God surprises earth with heaven, coming here on Christmas Day  
John Bell b.1949, and Graham Maule b.1958

### **Blessing**

God of grace as you have shown your extraordinary love to us, teach us to love. As we look forward to celebrating Jesus coming among us, enliven us to reflect the living Christ and be channels of hope in a broken world.

Hold people you care about, hold your church family in your mind as you say **The Grace.**

**The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen**

### **Answers;**

**Instant off the cuff Answers given to five year olds, *simplified dictionary definition in italics***

**Hallelujah**, It's a word from the Bible, their way of saying this Baby is the most special person ever born.

*Dictionary: Hebrew word meaning praise God*

**Highest heaven** you know what high means so it's saying the angels came from somewhere high up in the sky.. Heaven is a special place Christians believe in.

*Dictionary: 1. (ancient) the sky, the vault where the sun and moon are 2. Where immortal souls live 3. God's dwelling place 4. Place of great delight*

**Worship** Showing respect, saying this baby is wonderful and very special.

*Dictionary: reverence, showing due respect, adoration, recognising worth.*

**How can you bow before the baby does?** The word before has two meanings, it can mean something that happens first, or it can mean in front of, so here is just means they bowed in front of the baby

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