

January
2025



Trinity
United Reformed
Church

The Messenger

Minister's Letter

Dear Friends,
“New Year, New You.” That’s the advertising message for so many things around this time of year, isn’t it? Whether the advertisement is selling gym memberships, diet plans, smoking cessation classes, or even going back to school, this is the message we get from our pop culture year after year. And whether it is a result of the advertising—or the cause for it—many of us think of the new calendar year as a time for change.

But, we’re not as good with the follow through as we are with the good intentions. Recently, the makers of the fitness tracking app, Strava, analyzed over 800 million user-logged activities and have determined that the day most people are likely to give up on their New Year’s Resolutions is January 19th (Strava calls it “Quitter’s Day!”) So, for all the planning, and membership fees, and other investments we make in trying to change ourselves, most of us won’t make it through 5% of the year without giving up.

Change is hard.

But one area of our lives where we don’t have to worry about

change is when it comes to the promises of God. God’s promises to us do not change with the calendar or the latest fitness trend. And so, for the next few weeks, instead of focusing our energy and attention on making (and in all likelihood breaking) promises to ourselves, I’d like for us to focus instead on ways that we can better attune ourselves to God’s unfailing promises.

I think we all know most of these promises—things like the promise of new life, faithfulness, blessing, freedom—but we might not always remember that, in order to fully receive these promises, we need to make efforts to open ourselves to be able to accept these graces from God.

Maybe this means making more time for Bible reading and prayer. Maybe it means making an extra effort to join the next Bible Study group. Maybe it means volunteering to help out with what’s needed around the church. Maybe it’s prayerfully considering if you’d like to serve as an elder next time around.

There’s really no limit to the ways in which we can make

ourselves more aware of God's presence in our lives—and more attuned to the movement of God around us. Every little action adds up to big changes.

So, whatever you decide to strive for in the new year, I pray that you decide to take God along for the ride. After all, He is the source from whom all of our blessings flow.

Happy New Year!
Brian



Advanced Notices

Every Thursday

Trinity Leisure Club takes place in the Roope Hall from 1pm until 3pm. Anyone is welcome to attend to play a mixture of board games and card games.

Coffee Morning and Indoor Sale

Saturday 11th January 2025, 10 am - 12 noon

Heath and Havering Communion

Wednesday 8th January, 5:30 pm at Nelmes URC, Hornchurch

February Messenger

Please send in all articles for the February issue of The Messenger to handhurc@gmail.com by **Wednesday 22nd January**. Any late articles will be kept for the following month. Thank you.



Are you in need of some

TLC

Trinity Leisure Club



Join us for tea, biscuits
and indoor games.



£1 per session

Find us in the Roope Hall
Trinity Church, Upminster



1- 3 pm

Every Thursday

Trinity Leisure Club (affectionately known as TLC) meets every Thursday from 1pm until 3pm in the Roope Hall and everyone is welcome.

We play board and card games and enjoy a chat over a hot drink and biscuits or sometimes even cake! Some people bring their knitting but, whatever your preference, it's a fun afternoon in pleasant company. At only £1 per session (proceeds to the church and charity) it's an inexpensive afternoon out.

Why not give us a try or bring some friends and get some TLC!

Christmas decorations

I think we can all agree that the church looked splendid with all its decorations over the Advent and Christmas period. Many thanks to those who gave up their time to put up the tree and the candles and those who arranged the Advent ring and the many other arrangements around the building.



Blue Christmas Mediation 2024

Matthew 1:18-25

The celebrations on that first Christmas night were very different from how we celebrate Christmas today, weren't they? In the gospel tellings of that night, there are no descriptions of Christmas trees. The streets of Bethlehem were not lined with brightly colored twinkling lights. There don't appear to have been any carolers singing to Mary as she laid laboring before the birth. Bethlehem that night was quiet. Dark. And lonely.

It's interesting, then, how we got to this point—making Christmas a season of buying and bustling... a season of choirs and concerts... a season of partying and celebrating. None of these traditions were part of that first dark Christmas night.

I suspect many of these traditions emerged honestly enough as ways to mark this ever important church holy day. Who wants to spend the night in a dirty barn? Let's find some better way of marking the holiday. And it has worked... our festivities have largely allowed us to ignore the harsh reality of that first Christmas night in favor of the comfortable and the calm of our traditions.

And that's okay to an extent. But those celebrations often lead us to lose sight of the darkness of that first Christmas night. And that's why we're here tonight.

Rev. Quinn Caldwell has written about Blue Christmas Services. He talks about how services like this one are becoming more popular as they pop up around the country in response to the recognition that for some, the overly festive and jubilant celebrations of the Christmas holiday are just too much.

Caldwell writes about how he's always felt conflicted about offering a special service for—what he calls—"the odd ones out"... as if those who find solace in this sort of service need to be "quarantined from the general population." But over time, he says, he's come to understand a service like this one is really what every Advent service should be like. As Caldwell writes, "The Bible makes clear that the context for Christmas isn't rejoicing, it's desolation. It's not fullness; it's need. It's not presence; it's absence. I mean, if things weren't pretty messed up for everybody, why would God have bothered?"

And if you think about it, that fits with our mood sometimes during the holidays. Maybe we're missing someone we love... maybe we're angry about something that has happened to us in our lives... maybe we're lonely, or in pain, or worried.

These services have also—historically—been scheduled close to the date of the Winter Solstice—the day of the year with the longest night. Darkness... night... for so long, the language that we use in our everyday conversations—even here in the church—tells us that such struggles take place in the darkness of our souls. And here we are... sitting together as the darkness gathers.

What is it about darkness that we have made it out to be the opposite of light? It's one of those comparisons that we throw around: good vs. evil, the church vs. the world, spirit vs. flesh... light vs. dark. We tend to set up these comparisons as binary opposites. Things are either good or they are evil... they are either light or they are dark... and we know one is supposed to be better than the other.

But as we begin our journey together through this darkest of nights—both physically and emotionally—let us not recoil in fear of facing the darkness that surrounds us. After all, what can light mean without darkness?

We sit here in this beautiful space, and we meditate on the story of the birth of Jesus during this time of year, and we sing happy songs about peace and goodwill and joy and love. True, all of those are things that Jesus brings to us... but too often we forget to really pay attention to the details in this familiar story.

There is a lot going on in the dark in the nativity story... including things that were not joyful or peaceful. We can imagine the scene as an angel comes to a young, unmarried girl in the darkness of night to tell her that she is going to become pregnant by God's spirit. This act would likely result in her becoming a social outcast, possibly rejected by her family, and likely to lose the man to whom she is engaged.

Joseph is also visited by an angel during a dream in the darkness of sleep to explain the situation that Mary finds herself in. Joseph also agrees to the plan even though it could cost him the honor and status that he has in the community. These cannot be easy conversations or easy decisions.

It is also interesting that the birth of Jesus takes place at night—not in the light of day in the company of extended family and friends... but alone in a stable or cave, amid the stench of animals and manure.

That first Christmas was certainly a dark time in the life of the Holy Family. They had to have felt lost, abandoned, and alone. Where was the God that had ordained all of these events to take place?

John of the Cross, a 16th century monk, once wrote that “we are never more in danger of stumbling than when we think we know where we are going. When we can no longer see the path that we are on, then, and only then, are we vulnerable to divine protection.”

Like Mary and Joseph, we find ourselves at various times in our lives feeling that we are lost in the darkness that surrounds us. But John believed that those moments are when we are actually most closely connected to God. The moments when we no longer have the sense of the certainty of people and things in our lives are the moments when the only thing left to cling to is God.

The shepherds who were on the hillsides outside of Bethlehem that evening received some of the greatest news in history in the darkness of night. Not because it was a secret. Not because the message was only for a select few. But because it is sometimes in the darkest part of our night—in the darkest part of our lives—that God comes to us in the most unexpected of ways.

And so on this dark night, we come together to laugh and to cry and to sing and to pray knowing that the God we so desperately seek...the God with whom we are so angry... the God who sometimes seems so far away...we come knowing that God is most present with us when are unable to see the way before us.

As we continue to worship tonight, you will be invited to sit for a time in the quiet and darkness of this space, acknowledging your loss, your separation, your confusion, your anger. It may feel a little uncomfortable at first. It is our prayer tonight that we can begin to feel the darkness around us as the embrace of God—a God whose Spirit is hovering ever near to us, a God who is present—maybe even more powerfully in our pain, and a God who promises that it will not be dark forever.

Ann Weems captures this idea beautifully in her poem, “Toward the Light”:

Too often our answer to the darkness
is not running toward Bethlehem
but running away.
We ought to know by now that we can't see
where we're going in the dark.
Running away is rampant...
separation is stylish:
separation from mates, from friends, from self.
Run and tranquilize,
don't talk about it, avoid.
Run away and join the army
of those who have already run away.
When are we going to learn that Christmas Peace
comes only when we turn and face the darkness?
Only then will we be able to see
"the light of the world."

May God's peace be with you in this season of longest nights.
Amen.

*"Toward the Light" by Ann Weems, © 1980 The Westminster Press, ©
1985, 1987 Ann Weems*

The Harold Hill Food Bank

The Christmas Fayre held on Saturday 14th December was well supported and raised £529 for the Food Bank. A big THANK YOU for all those who helped out at this event, the Festive Fayre in November and the lawn sales throughout the year.

We raised a grand total of £3156.20 for the Harold Hill Food Bank in 2024.

As part of a nationwide network of foodbanks, supported by The Trussell Trust, working to combat poverty and hunger across the UK, the Food Bank continues to need our support so please bring your donations of non-perishable items to church and place them in the boxes in the South Porch. Our thanks go to Chris Willis for transporting these goods to Harold Hill on a regular basis.

Urgently needed food items:

- Tinned meat
- Tinned fish
- Tinned fruit
- Soup
- Pasta sauce
- Rice pudding/custard
- Long-life fruit juice
- Long-life milk
- Cereal

You can find out more about the Food Bank and the up to date items they need urgently on their website where it is also possible to make monetary donations:

<https://haroldhill.foodbank.org.uk/>



Our minister, Brian, will be spending some of his office time in our local cafes and coffee shops in the coming months. You are welcome to stop by to say 'hello,' stay for a chat, or just share some light conversation over a refreshing beverage.

All sessions will take place from 9:30 to 11 am

Upminster

4th Wednesday of the month

(*with exceptions)

Costa Coffee (across from church)

***29 January**

***Tuesday, 25 February**

26 March

***Tuesday, 20 May**

25 June

23 July

(Not meeting in April—Easter Holidays)

Sunday Services

January

5th	Communion	Rev Brian Buschkill
12th		Rev Brian Buschkill
19th		Worship Group
26th		S/C Pearson

All services start at 9:30am unless otherwise stated.

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