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From the earliest known carving of the nativity scene, there is no shortage of images of the Christ Child lying in a manger with an ox and an ass looking on. There is no reference to the presence of these animals in the Gospels. Where did the idea come from?

Isaiah 1.3 is one possible source: 'The ox knows its owner and the ass its master's crib, but Israel does not know me, my people do not understand.'

Habbakkuk wrote: 'Between two animals are you made manifest'....(Hab. 3:2).

Happy

Christmas



Dear Friends,

It is no secret that this time of year can be complicated for many of us for a variety of reasons. For some, the glow of Christmas lights seems to mock the dimness of personal struggles. The hustle of festivities can feel overwhelming, burying us under expectations we cannot meet.

While we will be celebrating the season because of the profound significance of Jesus' birth, this will be a very different Christmas for me and my family. Recovering from surgery during this season brings uncertainty, and we are leaning on God's Grace through this time. Around the world, many Christians will spend this season displaced from their homes, some in dangerous situations, and others grieving the recent loss of loved ones and more.

Yet, in all of this, we can take heart, for the first Christmas was anything but easy. It came to a family displaced, a people oppressed, and a world crying out for rescue. And God showed up—unexpected, vulnerable, and unrelenting in love.

We are a people of hope, but hope is not naïve. It does not pretend that all is well. Hope is what Joseph and Mary carried when the road was long and the future uncertain. Hope is what burned in the shepherds when the sky overflowed with angels, proclaiming that God was near. Hope is what stirred in Simeon and Anna as they watched and waited for a Saviour who would heal what was broken. And hope is what Christ offers us today: not an escape, but a presence that sustains us in all circumstances.

The story of Christmas assures us that light will not be overcome. It reminds us that God does not merely visit the earth; God dwells with us—Emmanuel.

So, let us be courageous this Christmas. Courageous in our joy, knowing it is not an escape but a declaration of trust in God's promises. Courageous in our generosity, even when resources are thin, because love shared multiplies. Courageous in our lament, because naming our grief allows light to enter the cracks. And courageous in our faith, because God's presence is real and active, even now.

With blessings of peace and courage,
Mark



From an Italian 4th century sarcophagus

From Dorothy Blatcher and Rosemary:



Christmas Market Saturday 23 November 10.30-2.00.

A BIG Thank You

I am sure that we'd all agree that putting on a Christmas Market takes a huge amount of energy, determination and especially teamwork and good will. For this year's Christmas Market all those elements were present a-plenty and came together to good effect.

The 23rd November was a foul day weather-wise, cold with more than its fair share of torrential rain. Not a day for venturing out from the warmth of hearth and home and indeed, not as many people as we would have hoped did so! Those that came appreciated the warmth of welcome and made some very complimentary comments. It was a small but important work of witness in our local community.

Thank you so much to you all – whatever part you played; whether large or small; whether

Promoting – wonderful new posters for all to see, as well as the hidden/unseen promotion that was done to 'sell' the tables, as well as via conversations, leafleting or the internet.

Preparing in so many ways – sorting, selling on e-bay, baking, organising floats, shopping and more baking.

Setting up - I don't think that we have ever had so many pairs of hands helping to set up - whether the day before or just moments before the sale - every one was used and valued.

Manning and (wo)manning the stalls – whether busy and financially successful or quite the opposite.

All provided interest, atmosphere and precious opportunities for conversations – both at the sale and at the sub-sale at Music Club in the evening.

Then there was the cooking, serving and washing up – and not to forget

The clearing up, putting away, restacking for the next time.....

And last but by no means least, meeting the challenge of totalling all the money from all the sources to reach a very satisfying figure!

If you can't recognise yourself in the list above....I do apologise. Our thanks to you too!

It would be divisive to mention anyone by name, but I make one exception for Dorothy Blatcher. who spearheaded and led the whole event with such clarity, determination, energy and good humour. Mega thanks to her and to you all.

We have a provisional result in excess of **£1000**
10% of which is tithed for the work of Young Life in our area.

It was a day of hard work, but also of camaraderie and, I hope, satisfaction. Thank you again.

Rosemary – on behalf of Dorothy, Helen and the team.



Rosemary writes:

I'm sure that you've noticed that **it's cold outside.**

There has been a recent influx of refugees into a local ex-hotel – refugees with nothing. The charity **Herts Welcomes Refugees** recently posted the following:

'Men's Women's and children's winter clothes, coats and shoes needed desperately please 🙏



The Charity is feeling overwhelmed and would greatly appreciate donations of clean, good quality items - donations in a condition that you would use yourself.

We will collect any donations at the church up to and including Sunday 15th December.

If you are unable to bring donations and would like them to be collected from your home, please let me know.

Thanking you in anticipation,

Rosemary
(07740 460118)

Would you like to donate to help children and families in Gaza and Lebanon?

We have been invited and encouraged by Synod to join the effort to raise money to support the suffering people of Gaza and Lebanon. After over a year of intense hostilities, tens of thousands of people have been killed in Gaza.

60% of those killed are women and children.

Children are struggling with displacement and are often separated from caregivers. Evacuation orders happen constantly, causing distress and further displacement. Widespread violence, hunger and disease—including **the return of polio virus**—continues to threaten the lives of children and families in Gaza. The risk of famine is growing and children need essential services.

There are no safe spaces in Gaza.

Our thoughts and prayers are with those affected by fighting, those that are mourning, those that are hurt, those that are frightened, those that are displaced, those that have become refugees, those that are cold and those that are starving.

You are invited to also support them with a money donation. These will go towards the delivery of essential supplies and services such as vaccines and life-saving food. A basket for any donations will be available in the Upper Room as you leave the church.

Donations will be totalled and sent after our service on the morning of the 15th December. They will be separate from our Christmas offerings.

Please turn to page 5 for more from Rosemary - about the choir.

Jill writes:

The next drop in art afternoon:
Tuesday 17th December
@ Broxbourne
2 pm - 3.30 pm



Worship this month



Dec 1st 10.30 am	Brox URC	1st Sunday in Advent Toy service. Jackie Hall Toys will go to 'Safer Places'
8th 10.30am 11.30 am	Brox URC Brox URC	2nd Sunday in Advent Communion John Danso Choir Practice
15th 10.30 am 6.30pm	Brox URC Brox URC	3rd Sunday in Advent Harmony at Christmas, an inclusive Family Service Dorothy and Rosemary <i>NB Instead of Café Church—please choose your favourite carol with an explanation for your choice. Give this to Dorothy or Rosemary asap.</i> <i>Refreshments</i> Carols by Candlelight with the Broxbourne Handbell Ringers and Christmas Singers Collection for the Essex and Herts Air Ambulance and SENSE.
22nd 10.30 am	Brox URC	4th Sunday in Advent Christingle Service - Rosemary Woodall, the Junior Church and the congregation.
29th	Cheshunt Free Church	Pastorate service at Cheshunt Free Church

REGULAR CHURCH ACTIVITIES FOR YOUR DIARY

COMET Please come along if you enjoy togetherness - that is meeting friends over a cuppa in the church hall and having a chat and possibly a game of Rummikub. There are occasionally special sessions such as fish and chips. It is on Mondays, 2-4pm, in the church hall.

SHORT MAT BOWLS Every Thursday evening in the church hall. Please speak to Alan Earl if you would like to join.

AFTER EIGHTS is now open to gentlemen as well as ladies. A programme of interesting talks in the church hall on the first Tuesday of each month from 2pm-4pm. If you are interested in attending a meeting please speak to Brenda McAuliffe or Marion Hall - or just go along at 2.00pm.

REGENT REGALE an informal get-together for gentlemen on the last Wednesday of the month.

PRAYER GATHERING every Wednesday at 8pm via Zoom for approximately 45 minutes. All are welcome to come and pray silently or aloud, or to be still and enjoy an oasis of peace - please contact Rosemary Woodall for further information rosemary.woodall@ntlworld.com or to be included in the circulation list.



ADVANCE NOTICES

FEBRUARY

10TH 7pm Church Meeting

MARCH

7th

World Day of Prayer

morning and evening services. Service prepared by women from the Cook Islands.

JUNE

17th 7pm Church AGM and Meeting

Rosemary writes:

Christmas Choir



Christmas Choir might be a bit of a grand title – but our **Christmas Singing Group** is **definitely taking shape**. We are going to create some harmony as part of our theme of Harmony for 2024-5 at our Carols by Candlelight service at 6.30pm on Sunday 15th December.

The nine of us (8 singers ably supported and led by Debi) plan to sing one piece as a group and to accompany the congregation – potentially singing descants – on some of the congregational carols. As I said before, not too ambitious or too serious, but definitely enjoyable!

We will have one practice for about an hour or so after the service on the morning of the 8th December and a second practice on the afternoon of the 15th - probably from about 4pm – and culminating with a cuppa before the service.

So, calling all those that love to sing!

It's not too late to join us. Please do – you'd be very welcome.

Just let me know.

Rosemary – 07740 460118



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Broxbourne Food Bank

Please remember to bring donations to the foodbank as our communion offering.

IN OUR CHURCH HALL— **DECEMBER**

3rd 2.00pm After Eights U3A Broxbourne Choir singing. Christmas Quiz and mince pies.

Amanda's Eco-Message of the Month :

December Poinsettias! If you want them to survive, the big rule is KEEP THEM WARM! Buy one grown in Britain, and not off the market, or from a display near a draughty door. If they are wilting their leaves, forget it - they are past rescue. Wrap them up for their journey home. Put them near a warm window, only if it's not cold, and move them to a warmer place over-night, any way.

Treated well, and watered and fed, they will grow again next year

Wrapping paper - please use recyclable paper, not something with foil or glitter, which can't be recycled. Instead of sellotape, suggest using Blutak, which is easier to remove than sellotape, and Kids love it. Pressing it to make it stick!

Balloons are great fun. But, when empty and floppy, they are very dangerous to children, pets and wildlife. If swallowed, they will block the airway. As the person or animal tries to breathe, the floppy rubber will expand, and cause suffocation. Suggest you chop them up after use.

Turkey can be frozen raw, and again, when cooked, but only once when cooked. So, happy baking. Put cooked turkey in foil pie dishes, or just in batches in plastic bags, and freeze for later use. (When you're not so fed up with turkey!)

Happy Christmas, Everyone. May God bless you all with a wonderful Christmas, however you spend it.



History of the United Reformed Church, Broxbourne, Part 3

In the last extract I wrote about the Rev William Ellis, a distinguished nineteenth-century Minister at the Church. His wife, Sarah, was also a distinguished person, as you can see below.

The Rev. William Ellis's second wife, Sarah Strickney (1799-1872)- inset- was a published author before she met William. She wrote several novels, including *'Self Deception'* in 1851, and a series of 'Conduct' books, of which *'The Women of England, their Social Duties and Domestic Habits'* was the first, in 1838. The books advocated moral training for young ladies, development of character, and practical preparation for running a household, emphasising a woman's place as helper and companion of men. The books were said to be popular as presents to be given by men to women!

In 1845 Sarah Ellis leased Rawdon House from John Warner and opened a school which was based on the ideas in her 'Conduct' book. 'Punch' magazine mocked her ideas in a series of articles in 1847 using the name of *'Capiscum House'* for her school. Mrs Ellis was not a radical and annoyed some of the free-thinking women of her time. She died in 1872, a few days after her husband, and is buried in the Quaker burial ground in Hoddesdon.



The school building next to the church was later used as the church hall for Sunday School and other purposes. In the twentieth century, despite the strenuous efforts of the Rev. H.S. Webb when he was the minister of the church, the trustees handed the school over to the education committee of the Hoddesdon Urban District Council. When new County Council schools were built in Burford Street, Hoddesdon, the Board of Education proposed to sell the premises. Following Mr Webb's intervention, the Trustees offered to sell the hall to the church. After lengthy negotiations with the Charity Commissioners and the Ministry of Education, the Church bought the hall with a loan from the Hertfordshire Congregational Union (Incorporated). The proceeds of the sale were invested and the original Trust came to light.

New trustees were appointed from the Church and the Society of Friends. The trustees discovered that new legislation meant that the Charity Commissioners had gained control of the Trust. Following further negotiations, the Hoddesdon Educational Charity came into being in 1979 to apply the income from the old Trust in promoting the education of people under twenty-five, whose parents lived in the Borough of Broxbourne, and who were in need of financial assistance. The Charity continued to support young people who needed help for educational reasons but, sadly, it has recently been forced to close.

After other short pastorates the Rev. S. Tamatoa Williams came to the church in 1886. He was the son of the famous John Williams who had accompanied William Ellis to Tahiti and was the first person to translate the bible into the Rarotongan language. During most of his mission John Williams was very successful and he became famous in Congregational circles. He visited the New Hebrides in 1839 where his work was unknown and In November 1839 he was killed and eaten by the inhabitants of the island of Erromango during an attempt to convert them to Christianity. In December 2009 descendants of John and Mary Williams travelled to Erromango to accept the apologies of descendants of the islanders in a ceremony of reconciliation. At the same time Dillons Bay was renamed as Williams Bay.

During the Rev. Williams' two-year ministry extensive repairs were necessary and a school room was built at the rear of the church. In 1880 the Rev. C.H. Hickling came from Hackney College and during his successful ministry the church became affiliated with the Congregational Union of England and Wales as The Hoddesdon Congregational Church. He left in 1887 and later went to Hong Kong.



Stepanka's Pastoral News Page

.....I have shared with the Elders at our last Elders Joint meeting an offer to **increase my working hours to 20 for 6 months** to allow time for Safeguarding (and also the DBS if time remains). The Elders agreed to this. I wanted to let you know that I will be working the extra hours **from January to June 2025**, so you will be hearing more from me about Safeguarding from then.

Mark and I had a good meeting before his first planned procedure to try and prepare for his absence following his eye treatments. Mark's surgeries are now scheduled for Monday 25 November and Monday 9 December. Mark will need a recovery time, although it is hard to know exactly how long. In the meantime, **please contact me or your Elders rather than Mark from 25th November until the next update**, and we will do our best to help.

You are warmly invited to **Carols from Easneye** either on site (see the attached poster) or through live stream (<https://www.youtube.com/c/allnationsuk/live>) on **Wednesday 4 December at 7:30pm**. You will be able to enjoy an international choir singing favourite carols and a Christmas Art Exhibition. You can also browse some Christmas gifts and books on offer. The event is completely free of charge. The All Nations students and staff would love to celebrate the advent season with you!

From Mark

In an interesting turn of events, the eye surgery I was scheduled to have—and that you were informed about—was postponed. This unexpected change meant I was able to lead the **Remembrance Sunday Service at URC Hertford** after all. The mayor had organised a significant programme of events in the town, and hundreds of people filled the streets, buzzing with activity as they attended early morning events and gathered at the war memorial for the commemorative service.

Due to the road closures, I initially decided to park the car and walk to church. However, when the police saw my clerical collar and I explained I was heading to URC Hertford, they kindly removed the barriers, allowing me to proceed by car without issue. Our service at church was meaningful, featuring the two-minute silence, readings, reflections, prayers, and uplifting hymns and music that added to the solemnity and significance of the day. My thanks to everyone at URC Hertford for joining together in worship to honour this important occasion.

We have submitted our grant application to the Synod Resources Committee for funding to employ a **Children's and Youth Worker**. Initially, the role will focus on supporting the Junior Church team at Broxbourne, building upon and expanding the great work they have already begun. We are hopeful that this ministry will grow to include Hertford and Cheshunt in the not-too-distant future. This is an exciting opportunity for growth,

even in areas where we currently do not have children or youth. We are optimistic about the positive impact this role will bring to the entire pastorate.

Looking ahead to Advent, I am planning to host an **Advent Bible Study with a difference**. As I will be in recovery from surgery over the coming weeks, my wife, Tessa, and I are preparing a five-week Advent course that can be shared via email and in printed form. Each week's study will include:

- An Opening Prayer,
- A Scripture Reading,
- Context and Background to the reading,
- Discussion Questions,
- A Reflection Activity, and
- A Closing Summary and Prayer.

I hope this course will offer a meaningful way for us to prepare our hearts and minds during the Advent season, even if we are unable to meet in person.

Bible Passage for Thought and Prayer

Bible Verse

"Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight." – Romans 12:16

Reflection

What does it mean to live in harmony with one another in our time? How can we embody mercy, humility, and grace in our daily lives and in our community? As you reflect on this verse, hold these questions in prayer:

Prayer

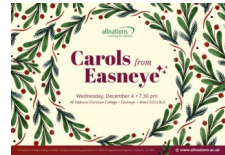
Gracious God,

As we reflect on the call to live in harmony, we ask for your guidance to create unity in our lives, our communities, and our world. Help us to see one another through eyes of humility and compassion, setting aside pride and selfishness. Teach us to act with mercy and love, seeking the good of others above our own. In our prayers and actions, may we strive to reflect your peace and grace ~ Amen.

Blessings,

Stepanka and Mark

From Stepanka.....



From the URC website: November 29th 2024

The United Reformed Church has issued a statement after today's debate in the UK Parliament about the Terminally Ill Adults Bill for England and Wales.

The United Reformed Church believes all human life is God given and precious, and each person, made in the image of God, is of inherent worth and value.

We have prayed for wisdom for our MPs as they wrestle with the complex issue of assisted dying for terminally ill adults, and are thankful where they have reached out to and listened to members of our churches for support and guidance.

Parliamentary debate

We note the debate in the UK Parliament today (November 29, 2024) on the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill, applying to England and Wales, and the vote of MPs to support further work on the Bill, which would still need Parliamentary approval before it could enter into law. The strength and depth of feeling was evident, and the discussion was gracious and sensitive.....

Great concerns were expressed around protection for vulnerable people, the possibility of coercion and shortcomings in the palliative care system.

There were objections around the limitations of the Private Members Bill process compared with Government Bills which would have received more much detailed preparation and allocated time on the Parliamentary agenda.

A response from the United Reformed Church Acknowledging a range of views on the issue within the Church and in society, the URC General Assembly in 2007 opposed any change in the law to permit voluntary euthanasia or assisted suicide, in line with the position **8**

of many Christian Churches and other faiths. The vote today in Parliament will have far-reaching impact on our society. Many will be troubled at the result of the vote, and perhaps feel that the will of lawmakers or wider society is profoundly out of step with their own personal convictions. Others will be relieved by the result, believing it will offer some hope and choice to them (or loved ones) as they approach the end of life.

The URC is unchanging in its commitment to support vulnerable people and to offer spiritual counsel and Christian love to all who seek it. Visiting – and endeavouring to meet the needs of – people who are sick is enshrined in our practice, following the example and instruction of Jesus, as well as supporting those who care for them or are bereaved.

We continue to call for the improved provision of palliative care, and note the persistent lack of universal access to good quality hospices and home-based support for people nearing the end of life.

We are concerned for medical staff, already under constant pressure in trying to deliver services to patients, who may face increased demands, and may face difficult moral choices.

Key to our response is our belief of the inherent worth and value of every human being, made in the image of God. The Bill, if enacted without sufficient safeguards, risks devaluing the lives of people who have often been marginalised by society.....

More from Dorothy and Rosemary about this month's services:

December 15th -10.30 Mark will sadly be recuperating following his hospital treatment. Please let Dorothy or Rosemary know your choice of carol for the morning service along with a reason for your choice. There will be hot drinks, cold drinks and mince pies served upstairs .

December 15th 6.30pm, again, Dorothy and Rosemary have stepped in to plan this service of carols and lessons.



NB We urgently need a few volunteers to lead, set up, manage and clear away simple refreshments after the Carols by Candlelight service please. There will be tea, coffee, small mince pies and shortbread. No cooking. Please let Dorothy and Rosemary know how you can help and what refreshments you will be able to provide. Although happy to lend a hand, due to other full commitments that day, Rosemary, Dorothy and Diane will not be available to organise the refreshments.

This year our Christmas offering will support:

SENSE - here to support people with complex disabilities to feel connected and included. Creating a world where disabled people are connected and included, no matter what.

People with complex disabilities tend to have two or more of the following:

- ✦ Deafness or hearing impairment
- ✦ Blindness or vision impairment
- ✦ Learning disability
- Autism

Herts and Essex Air Ambulance

'It costs in excess of £1,000,000 every month to remain operational, delivering a free first-class pre-hospital emergency medical service for critically ill and injured patients. Every gift given to the Air Ambulance makes a meaningful difference, helping us to bring emergency department care to the people who need them most.'

December 22nd at 10.30 am

Our Christingle Service

It will be led by Rosemary Woodall and the children of our Junior Church.

Please come and support the children as together we make our Christingles and then use them in our worship.

As the nights draw in, children across the country will be waiting.

Waiting to see their loved ones.

Waiting for the joy of opening a stocking. But many of those who are suffering with anxiety or depression are simply waiting to be heard.

They are waiting for help.

Working in areas including mental health and well-being, criminal exploitation, poverty, refugees and substance misuse, the goal of the Children's Society is that no child is left to suffer alone.

A collection will be taken in support of the Children's Society

Go to www.childrenssociety.org.uk if you would like to find out more and

PLEASE join us at 10.30am on the 22nd.

