

‘The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.’ Isaiah 9:2 NIV



“It’s Official, Christmas is Saved!” This was the headline in the Daily Express at the weekend.

Meanwhile in Northern Ireland the BBC News Website carried the following headline from Michelle O’Neill the Deputy First Minister, **“The executive will**

do all it can to "protect" as much of the Christmas period as possible.”

Politicians across the British Isles are working to find a way to ‘save Christmas’. They are all hoping that the tighter lockdown and restrictions now will help, ‘save Christmas.’

But what does saving Christmas mean and is Christmas in need of saving?

Our leaders hope that more pain now will reduce the rate of infection in the run up to the 25th December and thus allow looser restrictions over the Christmas period. They know that eight months on from the first lockdown people are weary and fed up. They know people need a break from the gloom and doom of the ongoing pandemic. People need something to look forward to, something that can be enjoyed, something that will distract them for a few days and help them forget about Covid-19 while they eat and drink and seek to be merry. Our leaders believe that people need this before we enter into a long dark January with the likelihood of further restrictions and an increased rate of infection as a result of loosening restrictions over Christmas.

Of course we all want to see as normal a Christmas as possible, we all want to be able to join together to celebrate the Christmas message, we want to be able to gather with family on Christmas Day and Boxing Day. But the idea that our government can save or protect Christmas is a misguided and arrogant one. If our leaders were really serious about protecting Christmas then they would not have shut down the churches, for they would understand that this is the primary place where the Good News at the heart of Christmas is heard.

Instead we had the situation in the United Kingdom where last Sunday morning the police arrived in force at the north London Angel Church and prevented people from entering. At the time of writing some 122 Church leaders in England are pursuing a judicial review saying that the ban on public worship is "unlawful."

The truth is our government cannot save Christmas. Nor is Christmas in need of saving. Christmas happened because we were the ones who needed saving. As the apostle Paul wrote, **"Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the very worst."** (1 Timothy 1:15) We needed to be saved from the consequences of our sin and rebellion against God. Christmas happened in order to bring light to those living in the land of deep darkness. Christmas happened in order to give us hope in the midst of despair such as

many feel at the present time. Jesus Christ came as the prophets had promised. The Word was made flesh, God dwelt with men, our salvation was accomplished at the cross and because of the resurrection we can say with absolute confidence that the light still shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

A few days of distraction towards the end of December will not give anyone real enduring hope and help in the face of the long dark January to come. But hearts and minds illuminated by the light of Christ and touched by the love of Jesus Christ will.

Christmas doesn't need to be saved but sinful people do. Those who are currently walking in darkness, need to see the great light. How we proclaim and celebrate that message as God's people will, without a doubt, be different this year. But let me assure you in RSPC that celebrate and proclaim it we must and we will.

Yours in His service,

Michael Davidson



Wishing everyone a very Blessed and Happy Christmas.



At Home for Christmas?

This Christmas In Railway Street PC

The first and most obvious thing to say is that Christmas is going to look different this year in all sorts of ways, not least in terms of how we will celebrate it in Railway Street.

We all like things to be as comfortable and familiar as possible at Christmas time, we like to be at home and we like to have our family around us. This is how I like things at Christmas but last Christmas wasn't like that for us in the Manse family because my mum was in hospital both before and during the Christmas period and so she wasn't with us on Christmas Day and instead of being able to lie back on my recliner and doze after my Christmas dinner I found myself travelling over to the Ulster Hospital to visit her.

The Covid-19 Pandemic will inevitably disrupt the way we normally do Christmas, and yet, might I be so bold as to suggest a bit of disruption to our normal Christmas patterns is maybe something useful for us to experience and to reflect on, particularly when it comes to what is really important about Christmas. As our Moderator David Bruce points out in his 'Christmas at Home?' series most of the characters in the Christmas story were not at home for that first Christmas and things were far from comfortable for them. Mary and Joseph left their home in Nazareth and travelled to Bethlehem where they struggled to find somewhere to stay. The shepherds did not have a home - they were living out in the hills outside Bethlehem keeping watch over their sheep. The wise men had travelled a very long distance from their home in Persia to Judea in search of a newborn king. And of course,

supremely Christmas reminds us that Jesus left his home in heaven in order to come to earth to live with us.

Some form of disruption is inevitable to our normal patterns of celebrating this year and we must accept that, but maybe that disruption to our normal, familiar and comfortable patterns will help us to appreciate more of what Jesus gave up in order to come and live among us.

So, let us make the most of every opportunity to celebrate the Good News of the Christmas Message and let's do all we can to communicate that message to others.

Sunday 6th December – Family Service

This is traditionally our Christmas Gift family service but it falls this year during the second week of the circuit breaker lockdown. So we cannot have a live congregation and we cannot have children and young people bringing their presents up to the Christmas tree this year. This service will be live streamed and led by Steven Woods.

Sunday 20th December – Carol Service at 7:00pm

Our service of Lessons and Carols is one of the highlights of the Railway Street church calendar however it will be very different. The restrictions on music and singing means we cannot have a choir in the building and we cannot sing our Christmas carols as we should and as we would like. There are also issues in regard to sharing microphones and the pulpit. So, we are seeking to pre-record readings and music for this service. On the night there will be a few live elements interspersed with the pre-recorded items shown on the screens. The Meeting House will be decorated with the usual subdued lighting. It will look and sound very different but hopefully will still be a meaningful celebration of the Christmas story. ***Those planning to attend in person will need to register as on a Sunday morning and please note that our maximum number is around 140. This service will also be live streamed***

Christmas Eve – Carols in the Car Park @ 5:00pm

On Christmas Eve we hope to have Carols in the Car Park - an opportunity to gather together and to be actually able to sing while maintaining social distance in our various bubbles! This will be a short service from 5:00 to around 5:30pm and we hope it will also serve as a witness to our neighbours in the local apartments. ***Pre-registration for this event will also be necessary.***

Christmas Morning Family Service @ 10:30am

We will have our Christmas morning service at 10:30am. This will as always be family orientated but we will not be able to have the same interaction as normal. Children are invited to bring Christmas presents with them but we cannot have the children up at the front. Believe me - nobody is more disappointed about that than your minister!

Numbers will again be limited to 140 and you will need to register in advance.

Sunday 27th December

Then on Sunday 27th there will be a further family service at 10:30am for which you will be asked to pre-register as normal.

Unfortunately it is the nature of the times in which we are living through that things can change very quickly. All our Christmas services are subject to change depending on wider circumstances and any further government restrictions. If this happens (and we sincerely hope it doesn't) we will communicate any changes via Facebook, email or text message. So please make sure we have your email address and mobile number and remember to follow us on Facebook.

Services for December & January

Studies in Amos – Dr Charlie Hadjiev

The Eldership – Rev Michael Davidson

6th December

10:30am - Family Service - Steven Woods
(Livestream only)

13th December

10:30am - The Role of the Elder (Acts 20:17-38) - Michael Davidson

20th December

10:30am - Amos 5: True Worship – Charlie Hadjiev
7:00pm – Carol Service: ‘Looking for A Saviour’

Christmas Eve

Carols in the Car Park - 5:00-5:30pm

25th December

10:30am – **Christmas Day Family Service** -
Michael Davidson

27th December

10:30am – Family Service -
Michael Davidson

3rd January

10:30am - Amos 7: Repentance and the Point of No Return –
Charlie Hadjiev

10th January

10:30am – The Eldership: Preparing to Choose -
Michael Davidson

17th January

10:30am - Amos 8: Idolatry and injustice – Charlie Hadjiev

24th January

10:30am - Colossians 1:1-8 – Michael Davidson

31st January

10:30am - Amos 9: Judgement and Salvation – Charlie Hadjiev
(COMMUNION)

**Do please remember if you are planning to attend to register at
attend.railwaystreet.org**

Watch online at www.railwaystreet.org

Telephone Line Service – 028 92448979



Election of New Elders - December Update

We have nearly completed our series of messages looking at the Biblical material on church eldership. If you are a voter it is essential that you engage with all these messages. If for some reason you have missed any of them you can catch up on the church website www.railwaystreet.org.

To remind you the Kirk Session is asking the congregation to elect **six** new elders.

The next stage will be to draw up the Voters' List which will be available at the beginning of January.

Those eligible to vote in an election of elders must be both communicants, and those who are recorded as having contributed to the Free Will Offering in the last year. The voters list will be updated before the end of 2020. **If you are a communicant member and for some reason you have not contributed to the Freewill Offering this year you should speak to our minister or the treasurer to rectify this as soon as possible to ensure that you are not disqualified from voting.**

You should also read the leaflet, '**Choosing New Elders**' produced by PCI. If you have received a printed copy of the bulletin you will find this leaflet inside. For those with internet access you will find this leaflet in the resources section of the Railway Street website.

<https://www.railwaystreet.org/resources>

The Laws of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland then sets out the method we will be following when we come to the election, which we hope will take place in February:

"on two successive Sundays the congregation shall be informed that an election of ruling elders is to take place and voting members invited to propose, in writing, for the consideration of the Session, any member or members qualified for the office.

The Session, having considered the proposals received and having obtained the consent of those approved, shall list the names of those to be presented to the congregation.”

(The Code of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland Paragraph 178)

The Session hopes that all voting members will consider it their prayerful duty to exercise their privilege and responsibility in voting for suitable candidates for ordination to the office of ruling elder.

The Code of the Presbyterian Church Paragraph 31 says:

“To be chosen for the office of the eldership in a congregation a person must be a voting member of that congregation and a regular attendant on its ordinances. He should be circumspect and exemplary in his conduct, both in the church and in the world, of acknowledged piety, endeavouring to maintain the worship of God in his family and held in esteem by the people.”

“Women shall be eligible for election on the same conditions as men.”

In the meantime I would continue to urge all our members to do the following:

1. Pray for God’s sovereign will to be done.
2. Note down on a private list, people you believe fulfil the Biblical qualifications and qualities of an elder

Prayer

Heavenly father, I ask for your help and guidance as I make my choice of those who are to be our Elders. May your glory and the spread of your kingdom be my first concern. May those chosen lead wisely, serve gladly, and witness always for You, by life and word. Give me grace so to work together with them that our congregation may be richly blessed and united in proclaiming Christ. For His name’s sake, Amen



At Home for Christmas?

MODERATOR'S CHRISTMAS APPEAL 2020



2020 may well be long remembered for the scenes of unimaginable suffering that swept the globe as a result of Covid-19. So far there have been around 50 million cases of this disease and well over a million people have lost their lives as a direct result of the virus. This tragedy is compounded in millions more homes and families due to the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on the economies of the

more fragile, low-income nations. Healthcare systems have fallen apart under unbearable pressure, tens of millions of daily wage earners have lost their jobs, and we have witnessed the vulnerability of 65 million refugees and internally displaced people for whom home is currently a densely populated camp or detention centre.

Covid-19 has been wreaking havoc and undoing decades of development work in so many parts of the world.

To respond to this tragedy a **Moderator's Appeal** towards the ongoing and broad-ranging Covid-19 emergency relief effort has been launched, this is in place of the usual **World Development Appeal**.

Funds donated will be distributed between PCI's relief and development partners Christian Aid and Tearfund who are already engaged in longer term sustainable development work amongst those most affected by Covid-19 and who are well-placed to direct additional efforts to combat the crisis, and to PCI's partner churches in South Sudan, Malawi, Indonesia, Nepal, Lebanon, Syria and Romania.

Further information on the types of projects that will be supported can be found on the PCI website here: [presbyterianireland.org /Resources/Congregational-Life/At-Home-for-Christmas/Moderators-Christmas-Appeal](https://www.pciireland.org/Resources/Congregational-Life/At-Home-for-Christmas/Moderators-Christmas-Appeal).

Special envelopes are being produced and may be included with the printed copies of this bulletin. They will also be available to collect when the Meeting House reopens (DV) on 13th December or you can use your own envelope. Just ensure you include your FWO number on it and mark it 'Moderator's Appeal.'

Thank you for your continued generosity.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

PRAYER FOCUS

Luke 11:1. "Lord, teach us to pray."

You will already be aware that the Moderator has asked all churches in Ireland, north and south, to set aside a weekend of prayer from 27th – 29th November. Indeed, some of you joined us on Friday 27th November for our hour of prayer via zoom.

We need to continue to pray and so we invite **YOU** to join our next Prayer Focus which will take place, via zoom, on **Monday 21st December from 8.00 – 9.00pm**. What a wonderful way to bring the year 2020 to a close in God's presence.

Likewise, we invite **YOU** to begin the New Year by joining our Prayer Focus via zoom on **Monday 18th January from 8.00-9.00pm**. What better way to begin 2021. God bless.



PW Pop-In.

Ladies, on **Thursday 17th December** between 3pm and 4pm, pop into the church car park to collect a Christmas goody bag.

Thank you to all who contributed this year to the PW Mission Fund for Home and Overseas. We will be sending a cheque for £2,300 to the PW office in Assembly Buildings. Thank you also to those ladies who have already given in their Mission Boxes for 2020/2021.

The Special Home Project for next year is Care NI (Christian Action Research and Education), ministering to those who have experienced miscarriage. The Special Overseas Project is to support the work of the Mothers' Waiting Home at Okhaldhunga Community Hospital in Nepal. Please feel free to contact any member of committee if you would like to hand in your Mission Box.

WIDER WORLD MAGAZINE

Due to the current ongoing circumstances it has not been possible to publish Wider World in recent months.

It is hoped, however, that publication will resume in 2021 and your subscription will be credited for next year.

CAR PARK RENEWAL FOR 2021

Due to the current Covid situation, you should have now received your renewal form for 2021. Details of how to pay is on the form also included is a note of the car park rules. If fees are not paid by 31st January 2021 fobs will become invalid. Church members not wishing to retain their car park fob must return it. Thank you for your co-operation.

Ian Barron Car Park Co-ordinator.

CHRISTMAS & NEW YEAR PASTORAL COVER

Please note that Rev Davidson will be off duty from Monday 28th December and will be back on duty from Monday 4th January. If you need the services of a minister during that time then please contact Roger Thompson or Jean Murray. The minister on call during this time will be Rev Dr S J Dixon.

PRESBYTERIAN HERALD

The publication of the Presbyterian Herald will resume in January 2021. It has been decided that only four seasonal issues of the magazine will be produced in 2021 instead of the usual 10. In the light of the fact that payment has already been paid for issues not received in 2020 a decision has been taken that there will be no subscription charges for 2021.

RAILWAY STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

**As stated by our Church Treasurer in
October Bulletin.**

**“OUR CHURCH IS VERY THANKFUL FOR YOUR
CONTINUED FINANCIAL RESPONSE DURING
THIS PANDEMIC of COVID 19”.**



DETAILS OF HOW YOU CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE CHURCH FUNDS

YOU CAN SET UP DIRECT DEBITS THROUGH YOUR BANK

**RAILWAY STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - DANKSE BANK
DETAILS.**

- ❖ FWO Church No 1 A/c - 95 03 61 - 91026178
- ❖ UNITED APPEAL Church No 1 A/c – 95 03 61 - 91026178
- ❖ PROPERTY/LINK Fund Church No 6 A/c – 95 03 61 - 61042858
- ❖ Envelopes can be placed on Collection plates in Vestibule each Sunday when you meet for worship.
- ❖ *Contributions can be left with or posted to:*

Church Treasurer:

Mr Stephen R. Johnston, 11 Portulla Drive, Lisburn BT28 3JS.

FWO /Gift Aid Secretary:

Miss Edith V. McConnell, 24 Warren Park, Lisburn, BT28 1LW.

*May we remind you that to be included in 2020 Annual Financial Report, **ALL CONTRIBUTIONS to all the church funds for 2020 must be forwarded to the church by:***

SUNDAY 3rd January 2021 at the latest.

Thank You
FOR
GIVING
...
GENEROUSLY

*2020 has been a year that probably none of us will ever forget.
The year Jesus was born must have been like that for Joseph.
If we had received a letter from him just after Jesus was born, I wonder
what it might have said? Perhaps something like this*

Bethlehem
31 December 0000

Dear friends in Nazareth

Happy New Year from Bethlehem!

This past year has been an amazing one for Mary and myself. It started with us getting engaged and beginning to make plans for our wedding and our life together. But then, just a few months later, Mary had an experience she will never forget. She was visited by - wait for it - someone called Gabriel who said he was a messenger from God! And the message was that she was to have His baby. God's, I mean, not Gabriel's, and certainly not mine. Well, in spite of hardly knowing what to expect, Mary humbly accepted the message from the angel and she became pregnant. It was a while before she told me and when she did I felt that people might look on her with such disgrace that I just wanted to save her embarrassment, so I offered to call off our wedding and let her go into hiding. But no, next thing was I too got a message. God Himself reassured me this was His baby and I shouldn't worry!

So began the strangest few months of our lives. Mary spent the early summer with her relative Elizabeth, who was also pregnant - even though she was actually older than you'd expect to have her first child. (By the way, she and Zach now have a gorgeous wee fellow, John.) Mary was not long back from there and we were making plans for the birth of her son soon too - we knew of course it was a boy - when more unexpected news hit us. This time it involved my family. When the King, Augustus, suddenly made the announcement that we all had to register for the Roman world census (no doubt many of you got caught up in that too), it meant a huge upheaval for us. As you probably know, both my family and Mary's originate from Bethlehem, this sleepy wee town so far away from Nazareth. So, we had no option but to come here. We knew we must but we also knew it was going to coincide with Mary's

due date! I can tell you we weren't anxious to make the three-day journey.

However, God was good and eventually we got here. But not before loads of others had done so first. The place was thronged, heaving with visitors. Try as we might, we could get nowhere to stay, not even with any of my relatives. Some of them were totally perplexed anyhow that Mary's baby wasn't mine, so they weren't likely to save a room for us. Anyhow, the only place we could get was a sort of cave-like shelter, used mostly for animals rather than people. We were so glad to get lying down, especially Mary as you can imagine, that we just accepted it gratefully and tried to settle for the night.

But the greatest shock of all was just round the corner! A few hours later, Mary gave birth! And before we knew it, our whole world had turned upside down. A huge light lit up the sky, there was beautiful singing all round, and in no time at all a few of the local shepherds appeared into our room. Their entire focus was on the baby. They seemed so interested in the fact that he had swaddling bands on and was in the manger. They were obviously thrilled to see him and they went away praising God and telling people they met that they knew who this baby was. If ever we had doubted, we knew for certain now. This was indeed the very Son of God in tiny form!

All that happened a week ago. Jesus, the baby, is now a week old and we're still here in Bethlehem. He's just perfect and he brings us such joy. What will happen next, who knows? After the year we've had, we're ready for anything. We're not sure how long we'll be here or when we'll ever be back to Nazareth. Maybe next year's letter will be from somewhere totally different! All we do know is that God has brought us this far and He who has always kept His promises is not going to leave us now.

So please remember us, as we do you. May the New Year be one of faithful following for us all, whatever lies ahead. Somehow I feel that for us, anyhow, everything from now on will centre round Jesus.

Yours lovingly, on behalf of us all,
Joseph

Whatever lies ahead for us all in 2021, may it too be centred in Jesus.

In these days when life may seem like a jigsaw puzzle to many of us, with pieces all over the place and none seeming to make much sense, this poem might help us to refocus and see where the 'big picture' really is.

It was written by a lady who suffers from cerebral palsy and has been quite severely disabled in body for most of her life. It is used with her permission.

Life's Jigsaw

Life is like a jigsaw puzzle,
With its pieces scattered round,
Sin and suffering, death and sorrow
Everywhere are found.
Man has made so many conquests,
Even landed on the moon,
Yet he can't control this planet,
Wrecked by earthquake and monsoon.

There is war and there is famine,
Pestilence of every kind,
Millions in this world are starving,
Some in body, some in mind.
Life is such a broken pitcher,
Pain, despair on every hand,
Far from what a wise Creator
In His marvellous love had planned.

But the pieces of life's jigsaw
Can be put in place again,
By the mighty hands of Jesus,
If we let Him rule and reign.
Some day soon He'll come in glory,
Then the jigsaw He'll complete.
When the world of men and nations
Shall fall humbly at His feet.

Dorothy Anderson