

## December 2022: Christmas for all

Every year I approach Christmas aware of what a special time of year it is for many, yet aware too that many others dread Christmas as one of the worst times of their year. And as I was reflecting on Christmas a few weeks ago, I came across this year's Christmas resources from the Methodist Church, called 'There is Room.'

According to the majority of Christmas adverts, Christmas is a time where happy families gather together, to give presents, play games and eat loads of luxury Christmas food. The reality of Christmas can be very, very different for many: for families grieving the empty space at the table; for parents missing meals and turning the heating off so that the children can have one or two small presents; for those for whom loneliness is intensified by the expectation that everyone will be enjoying family activities; for those for whom the extra stresses and pressures push already fragile relationships to breaking point; for those for whom the cultural expectations highlight feelings of being different, feelings of not belonging.

The Methodist Christmas resources this year remind us of who the characters at that very first Christmas really were; remind us that at that very first Christmas, God chose participants in his story who would probably all feel marginalised by our typical 'western' Christmas festivities. Mary and Joseph; inexperienced, young, poor, probably social outcasts because of Mary's pregnancy before marriage, and soon fleeing as refugees to a foreign land. The shepherds; working long, antisocial hours, far from home, in filthy, low-paid work that caused others to shun them. The wise men; foreigners who followed forbidden religious practices, who risked ridicule, persecution and rejection to follow their hopes for a better world. Even the animals who share our world with us, regularly neglected, exploited or ignored, found a place in God's story as they provided Jesus' first home on earth, a place we celebrate regularly in numerous Christmas carols.

Every year, I am astounded and delighted afresh by the real Christmas story. By the story that God chose to send his Son to humanity, to turn the values of the world upside down. To teach that God values most those whom humanity values least. That there is room for all in God's heart. That all belong. That the only wealth worth pursuing is the wealth of love and relationship, of harmony and justice. Some of my earliest steps in faith were a bemused, incredulous wondering that, 'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son' (John 3:16). This Christmas, as every year, I will find time to be alone in church, to gaze in my mind's eye into that manger so long ago, and to marvel afresh that God loves me, loves you, loves us, loves all he has made, that much. And to long to be worthy of his love. And I wish you all a joy-filled Christmas.

Yours in Christ,  
Louise Petheram  
[rev.louise.p@gmail.com](mailto:rev.louise.p@gmail.com)    01433 621918

If you would like to sign up to receive the regular newsletters from churches and Christian groups across Hope Valley, please go to  
<https://mailchi.mp/f29b1286b3df/2t1gk3uwy2>  
or email me and I can sign you up.