



# TOGETHER **100!**

For this festive, 100th issue of TOGETHER Revd Peter Hibberts has prepared the service material.

## There is room!

**Hymn:** O come, o come Immanuel (StF 180)

### Prayer

As we turn our eyes to you, in our homes, may we know and notice your presence amongst us. May your spirit gather us in separate times and spaces, into the omnipresence and eternity of your hands. My you come amongst us as you did that first Christmas. Make your dwelling in our humble homes as you did in that stable and in our hearts as you did with your first worshippers. May we bow before as did the shepherds and the kings, and may we bring to you our gifts, making room for you as we worship.

**Hymn:** Jesus calls us here to meet him (StF 28)

**Readings** Isaiah 7:10-16  
Matthew 1:18-25

**Hymn:** God of Eve and God of Mary (StF 119)

### Sermon

Have you ever felt left out? Perhaps you were the kid who didn't get invited to the birthday party! I know I was at times.

You know the message of the nativity is that God doesn't want anyone to be left out. Let me take a brief moment to tell you about a man named Jesus. The most important thing that I can tell you about Jesus is that he is God, come to live amongst us. The nativity was his birthday party and in that story there is room for everyone - there is room for you!

Just think of who was included in the first Christmas - in that nativity...can you pick out the characters?

There was room for people who are **different**...

An invitation was sent to a group of people with different coloured skin to Jesus, who came from a far off land, believed in a different God to the God of the Bible and practiced astrology - something the religion of the time prohibited. The wise men! There was room for them at the party.

There was room for those in **poverty**...

They were low paid workers, left out on a hillside. Low status members of society who were not really included in anything. When things went on they were literally left out in the cold. They were the shepherds. There was room for them at the party.

There was room for **all ages and genders**...

An invitation was sent to a very old woman and a very young woman at a time when women were wrongly marginalised. The younger was unmarried, a potential outcast, the older was barren - unable to have children, judged. The older woman was Elizabeth who gave birth to John the Baptist having walked the pregnancy journey with the young woman who we know as Mary! There was room for them at the party.

#### Circuit Strategy Team Message:

The Circuit Strategy Team has met again (12th December) to discuss taking our circuit forward. A report on our meeting is available from the Circuit Office. We next meet on the 11th January to discuss small groups across the circuit. We'd love to hear thoughts on the following questions:

*Are you part of a small fellowship, and, if so, what works?  
What missional opportunities have arisen from your small fellowship group?  
What are the barriers to people joining such a group?  
How could we encourage more leaders for small groups (pairing/training etc.)?  
What do you think the focus of small groups should be?  
What do you think helps a small group work well (size/venue/time etc)?*

*Let us know...*

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There was room for **refugees**...

An invitation was sent to a family who had to flee for their lives to a foreign country because of an evil dictator. They travelled a long way to escape oppression, probably leaving everything behind. That was, Joseph, with Mary and the newborn Jesus. There was room for them at the party.

There was room for all of **nature**...

An invitation was sent to sheep, oxen, donkeys, camels, even a star! There is room for all creation at the party.  
And there was room for **God**...

Well actually there wasn't. That's the only character there wasn't room for! (The birthday boy!) The inn was full, they were turned away. Until room was found for the party, in a place as unlikely as the guest list - in a stable. In that unlikely place there was room for that unlikely bunch.

And Jesus' desire to make room for people didn't stop at the nativity. He made room for prostitutes, tax collectors, law breakers, the immoral, the ill, the unclean, the low earners and every other ordinary person. (One time he made room for 5,000 all at once!)

There is room for you and me...have you room for Jesus?

I want you to hear the invitation to you. Whether you are able to be present at church this Christmas or not, there is room for you in God's story and God is calling you to take your place. As Isaiah 7 records, the coming of Christ is the sign that there is room for you. As Mary the mother of Jesus can testify, there is room for you whoever you are, however you are regarded or whatever the difficulties and bruises from your journey.

Folks, there is room for you. Is there room for Jesus? Will you make him welcome?

**Hymn:** Long ago prophets knew (StF 78)

### Prayer

*Journey ends! Where afar  
Bethlem shines, like a star,  
Stable door stands ajar.*

*Unborn son of Mary,  
Saviour do not tarry!  
All-powerful creator,  
sustaining spirit,  
always with us son,  
As we journey as your disciples,  
may we place our fingers  
into the stable door ajar  
and prise it open for all to see,  
all to feel, all to worship, all to receive.*

Pour our your blessings on us as we become vessels for your blessings in your world.

Be near to those who mourn...  
Sustain those who are ill or weary...  
Protect the vulnerable...  
Encourage the broken hearted...  
...bring healing and restoration

And be glorified in our lives, our church, our circuit, our country, our world.

**Amen**

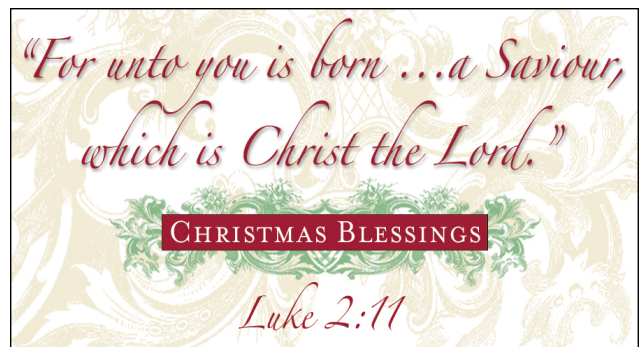
**Hymn:** Joy to the World (StF 330)

### Christmas Blessing

May the joy of the angels,  
the eagerness of the shepherds,  
the perseverance of the wise men,  
the obedience of Joseph and Mary,  
and the peace of the Christ child  
be yours this Christmas;  
and the blessing of God almighty,  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
be among you and remain with you always.

**Amen**

### Seasons Greetings...



From all of your sisters and brothers across the Newark and Southwell Methodist Circuit, may we wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!