

Sunday December 24th

Read: Romans ch15 v13

Maybe we wish our missing loved ones could be with us again this Christmas.

There are many people who wish that their loved ones could be with them this Christmas. They might be missing for a whole variety of reasons, not least that their loved one has died. Or maybe their loved one is there in body, but not in mind, or is too far away to travel, or is just otherwise committed. Maybe for some a phone call is possible, but even in that circumstance it is not the same.

One person who is never missing, and He does not abandon us, is Jesus Himself. It is a different thing, I know. But His presence can be so overwhelming that it is all consuming and overcomes the hurt of our other circumstances. May you know the closeness of God over the coming days.

Pray: Give thanks for the presence of Jesus.

Monday December 25th Maybe we wish the world was a better place.

I asked on December 4th if you had come across stories written from the view point of an angel wondering about why Jesus would leave heaven to come to earth. Below is a verse, and chorus, of a song written from just that perspective.

This Christmas day, wonder again about what it cost Jesus to leave heaven and be laid in a manger on earth.

What's in the Father's mind?

Why does he have to go?

And if I can't go with Him, there's one thing I must know.

Happy Christmas

Will they love Him? Will they love Him like I do?

Will they serve Him and take care of Him like I do?

I'm afraid to watch him go,

afraid their hearts aren't true

oh will they serve him, serve him like I do?

Leslie Phillips and Daniel Brown 1983

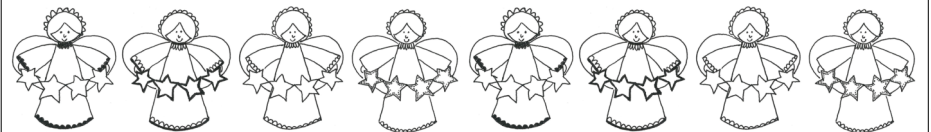
Solihull United Reformed Church



Better than
Christmas wishes

Advent Readings

2023



Linda Faber

Sunday December 3rd Maybe we wish the world was a better place.

Advent is the church season beginning four Sundays before Christmas; as Christmas is on a Monday this year, Advent is as short as it can possibly be. Advent is the period of preparing for the celebration of the birth of Christ.

Part of that preparation for you might include writing Christmas cards. Often cards include the words 'Christmas wishes' either as a part of the design or inside. I wonder what Christmas wishes you have this year. Are they along the lines we most associate with children, wishing for a particular gift to turn up under the tree, or might they be grown-up Christmas wishes for a world where there is no more war, or that no one would be lonely, or where all neighbours get along? We might *wish* for these things for our world but I think we don't really expect them to happen.

But there is another type of grown-up Christmas wish, ones where we at least *hope they* might come true. These are more personal, where we wish that things in our own lives might be different because we are struggling or our circumstances make us sorrowful .

In this booklet we are going to be looking at the Christmas story by thinking about what the people in it might have wished was different for them as events unfurled that first Christmas 2000 years ago. I then hope we realise that the way God worked not only affected the individual, but also shaped the bigger picture that an individual maybe couldn't see; God brought about what was right, and what was best, for *all people*, in the long term, whilst caring for the individual as well. God still works that way today. People who have faith in God, have the opportunity to be bold enough to leave wishes behind and move into a place of faith about events and circumstances, trusting in God.

Going Further

Read: Hebrews ch10 v35 – ch 11 v1

What might be your grown-up Christmas wishes? Can you find an encouraging Bible verse for each of them? Use the internet if you need help, if you have that available to you.

Pray: Bring each thing on your list before God in prayer .

represent praise and worship rising up to God.

Myrrh was a spice used in embalming dead bodies.

Both of these things were representative of Jesus' future life and worth. Jesus is God come to earth and as such is worthy of our worship (eg John ch1 v1, .John ch20 v28). Jesus was to die, to take the punishment that we are due, for all the ways we have broken relationship with God though our wrongdoing. These were appropriate and symbolic gifts from the Wise Men.

But I wonder if they knew. From what they believed they saw in the stars did they have any idea?

Going Further

Read: John ch20 v26-29

Is there anything which hinders your worship of Jesus and stops you from saying to Him, "My Lord and my God"?

Pray: Pray for an increased sense of the presence of God when you worship Him.

Saturday December 23rd

Maybe Mary and Joseph wished they could go home again.

After the Wise Men had visited Jesus, and His parents had taken Him to Jerusalem to be circumcised on the 8th day, according to the Jewish tradition, God warned Mary and Joseph to flee to Egypt. They were to escape the oncoming rage of Herod, and the subsequent slaughter of all baby boys under two years old because Herod feared that Jesus would take his throne.

Today there are many displaced people who have had to flee their homes to save their lives.

As Christmas approaches we like to think of it as a season of peace, and yet that is far from the experience of so many.

Going Further

Read: Matthew ch2 v16-18

Pray: In the closing days before Christmas, pray for those who wish they could return home but cannot.



message of the confidence we have in Christ Jesus, who can give us the strength to find the help we need?

Pray: Pray for all those who live in fear.

Thursday December 21st

Maybe the Wise Man who had brought gold, wished it wasn't so heavy.

In pictures of the nativity, when the Wise Men come with their gifts, the one presenting gold is always holding a box with gold jewellery, or similar, in it. We don't actually know how much gold there was or what form the gold gift was in. We assume they were generous.

They travelled a great distance to visit the new King with their gift.

The gift cost them financially, but maybe it was also a bit of a burden to transport it. They had to fit it in with all their clothing, food and water.

Sometimes the most precious gifts are the ones that we know someone has made an effort with. What memorable gifts have you been given? Why do you treasure them?

Going Further

Read: James ch1 v5-8

Gold was a suitable gift to be given to a king. It was a sign that the Wise Men recognised that a new king had been born, backed up by the fact that they first looked for Him in the palace in Jerusalem. They didn't understand yet what His Kingdom would be like.

I wonder if they realised, when He was older, that the famous adult, Jesus, was this same child.

The gift Jesus most wants today is the gift of ourselves committed to Him. How can you show your commitment to Him today?

Pray: Pray for renewal in your own commitment to Christ Jesus today.

Friday December 22nd

Maybe the Wise Men who brought the Frankincense and Myrrh wished they could have understood more about who Jesus was going to be.

Frankincense is a plant resin which is collected and burnt in worship to

Monday December 4th

Maybe the angel Gabriel wished that Jesus didn't have to leave heaven.

The Bible tells us that Jesus existed in heaven before He came to earth as a baby at Christmas (John ch1 v1 & v14). And that after He was killed on the cross He became alive again and ascended back to heaven where He is still living today (1 Thessalonians ch4 v14).

I don't know if the Angel Gabriel knew that Jesus was going to return to heaven after He lived on earth, but he knew He was going to leave to come here, because Gabriel was tasked with announcing that 'visit' to Mary, the shepherds and others.

You may have come across some of the stories that people have written where they have imagined conversations in heaven between angels. On hearing the news that Jesus is going to earth, they are shocked that Jesus would leave that perfect heaven and go to that dirty, little, ball hanging somewhere insignificant in the universe. 'Why would Jesus go there?' the stories go.

The answer is because God loves people so much that He wanted to restore the relationship between God and people which was totally broken because of all the wrong things that people do. He didn't just wish for things to be restored, better than that, He was going to make it happen, and the job was so important to Him that He was going to do it Himself. If Gabriel wished that Jesus wouldn't leave heaven then he was disappointed, because what Jesus had in mind, whilst personally costly, was much better than staying behind and doing nothing.

Going Further

Read: John ch3 v16-21

Think about what it cost Jesus to leave the perfect place of heaven to come to the spoiled earth.

Pray: For people who are missing loved ones who are absent for whatever reason.



Tuesday December 5th

Maybe Mary wished she could understand what God was up to.

Some young mums I was talking to a few years back at our weekly Toddler group, Tots and Tales, appreciated us looking at the Christmas story together from the Bible because they learnt something new. They had never realised that Mary and Joseph weren't an established couple before she became pregnant with Jesus. Being unmarried in those days meant that Mary and Joseph would never have been intimate with each other yet, and her pregnancy was, therefore, certainly a miracle.

When we read the Christmas story where Gabriel tells Mary of God's plan for a baby to be born, and that she was to be the mother, she readily said that she would go along with what God wanted in her life. We read it fairly glibly but I am certain that Mary would have had so many more questions swirling around her head than the few she asked Gabriel.

Being a believer in God does not usually take us along easy paths. Some people think that it should, but those thoughts will leave you disappointed and struggling. That is not what the Bible teaches. What it *does* teach is that if we trust in God He will be close to us and He always equips us for the road ahead, whether it be a friend at our side, or knowledge, or skills that we need. We might have to work hard, or struggle in prayer, but we can always know that we are a part of God's unfolding of His plan which is perfect, good and right. Even in difficult times we are not just being randomly tossed about in the waves, no matter how we might feel.

Going Further

Read: Luke ch1 v26-38

The angel says that Mary is highly favoured, or has found favour with God. What do you think that means? Think about Mary's life before the angel's visit and what happened afterwards.



Pray: Pray for the families in our Toddler group. May they grow in knowledge and understanding of God's love and purposes for them.

visit of the Wise Men might have been quite a while after the birth of Jesus but I think there are some good reasons to think it might have been quite soon too. We will never know.

We have already talked about the shepherds not knowing exactly where they were going in Bethlehem but the supposedly 'Wise' men had an even harder time finding the destination. They used their wisdom to assume that the new prince would be born in the Jerusalem palace, but they were entirely wrong.

The Bible tells us that holding God in proper regard with understanding that He has power over all things (we sometimes call 'fearing God') is the beginning of Wisdom. It is not possible to be truly wise without God, who knows all things.

Going Further

Read: James ch1 v5-8

Human wisdom can only take us so far. What do you need Godly wisdom for to tackle today? Ask Him for it.

Pray: Pray for God's wisdom to tackle the challenges you face today.

Wednesday December 20th

Maybe Herod wished nothing would change.

Herod, and all Jerusalem with him, were disturbed when they heard from the Magi that a new king had been born (Matthew ch 2 v3). This was because a new king, looking for a throne, meant war.

Jesus never intended to take Herod's throne, because He came to rule over a different kind of Kingdom. One which involved people's hearts, not their property and taxes. But Herod's fear wreaked disaster for every small boy child in the area because, in his fear, Herod killed them all.

Fear can make us do bad things. Is there anything that you are fearful of that is making you act poorly?

Going Further

Read: 1 John ch4 v16-18

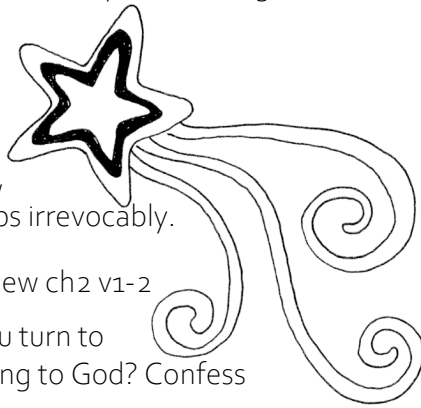
Many people live in fear within their close family relationships. Each year, through our Advent Gift service, we provide presents to mothers and children who have fled the family home to live in the Solihull Women's Refuge. People living in fear are all around us. How can we spread the

Monday December 18th

Maybe lots of people noticed the new star and wished they knew what it meant.

Stars and wishes are often linked together. People sometimes even wish upon a star, as if a star, a created thing, can do something for people. Fairies, and fairy-godmothers in panto, often have a wand with a star on it.

The wise men believed the stars could tell them something and indeed in the instance of Jesus being born, the one they saw did. But in Christianity wishing is not a faith based activity and looking to a created thing (which God can use for His purposes if He wants to) instead of looking to the Creator Himself, is something which, at best, diverts our attention away from God or, at worst, damages our spiritual journey, perhaps irrevocably.



Going Further

Read: Matthew ch2 v1-2

Is there anything in your life which you turn to for inspiration or help instead of turning to God? Confess and repent of that activity.

Pray: Ask God to show you if there is anything that you depend on instead of Him, which you have not noticed.

Tuesday December 19th

Maybe the wise men wished they knew where they were going.

After the shepherds visited the busy Bethlehem, things quietened down a bit. After the census was over people were able to go home again.

The Gospel of Luke tells us about the shepherds visit and the Gospel of Matthew tells us about the star and the Wise Men or 'Magi'. Since each of these Gospel writers were inspired to write about two different visits we don't know how they related to one another in time.

Some students of the Bible have put forward very good reasons why the

Wednesday December 6th

Maybe Mary wished she had been married before she became pregnant.

In the days of Mary and Joseph, being pregnant before marriage was a terrible thing. She would have had a hard time explaining to her family and community that she had not

been unfaithful to Joseph to whom she was engaged, and many people would have thought badly of her. She would have brought shame on her family. For a godly young woman this must have been hard to bear.



On searching the Scriptures (or maybe she knew them well enough anyway) she could see

that the promised Messiah from God was to be mothered by a virgin (Isaiah ch7 v14). I am sure no one had any idea what those old scriptures meant by that. But Mary found out. Mary continued to trust in God and God remained faithful to her and He continued to work with her even though things were difficult.

Going Further

Read: Isaiah ch9 v6-7

Mary didn't do anything wrong but found herself in the middle of a socially unacceptable situation; she was unmarried and pregnant. Think about the contrast between Mary's situation and the words of the reading from Isaiah. Do you think this passage would have helped Mary cope? Bible verses can help us to cope when emotions run high in difficult situations. How do you remind yourself to look them up or call them to mind?

Pray: For people who feel excluded from society for whatever reason.

Thursday December 7th

Maybe Elizabeth wished she was younger for having her first baby. Elizabeth was Mary's cousin. More likely a fairly close relative than a first cousin, but we don't know. We know she was an older lady and was childless despite having a loving husband and a desire to have a child. Being childless was a disaster in Bible times because older people had to rely on the next generation to support them in their old age. Additionally, maybe people thought in their ignorance, Elizabeth and Zachariah must have done something wicked and God was punishing them by stopping them from having children. (Jesus is quite clear that no one is a worse sinner than anyone else. see Luke ch13 v1-5). They were suffering social disgrace as well as their own personal heartbreak.

But then everything changes. God promises them a son and indeed Elizabeth finds herself pregnant (with a baby who we know in adult life as John the Baptist). Elizabeth and Zechariah are filled with joy. But she was a much older mother. Mothering when you are older is a different thing from when you are young. It is harder to adapt and easier to become tired. But on the positive side there is experience and an accumulation of life's wisdom, to help. Whilst extremely joyful that this had happened for her at last, I wonder if maybe she wished she had become a mother at a younger age.

There are so many things that happen to us for which we don't get the chance to choose the timing. Is there an example in your own life where you were thrown into something at an unexpected time? How did you manage?

Going Further

Read: Luke ch1 v24-25

After reading the words of Elizabeth in today's passage, see if you can find passages, maybe in the Psalms, that express some of the feelings you have had over unexpected circumstances, either joyful or really hard. See if you can find some words that express thankfulness to God for His love and closeness no matter what your circumstances.

Pray: Pray prayers inspired by the words of Scripture you found.

Sunday December 17th

Maybe the people of Bethlehem wished there weren't so many people in town.

Last year I went to London with the family and one of our children wanted to see the Elizabeth Tower. (That's the one on the Houses of Parliament, often known as Big Ben, although Big Ben is actually the bell that bongs the hour inside.) I have been to plenty of crowded places in my life but that was ridiculous, I have never been anywhere as crowded as that. I definitely wished there weren't so many people there.

I don't think it likely that Bethlehem was anything like as jammed as that, but there were more people than the accommodation could handle. That was good for the profit margin of the innkeepers but it wasn't comfortable and familiar any more to those who lived there. There are a lot of people in Solihull who don't come to church. If lots of people *did* come along it would be different and may even feel crowded in the church to those who are used to things as they are now. Things wouldn't be the same.

It may mean that we have to change the way we do things. Are you flexible enough to embrace change or do you resist what feels different, unfamiliar or may even be challenging or unpleasant to you? Growth means change. What do you find difficult about change?

Going Further

Read: Micah ch5 v2

Bethlehem was a small place but big in Israel's history. King David had come from there and now Jesus was born there too. Sometimes God does big things with the seemingly insignificant. Think about the small but significant details in your own journey into faith in Jesus Christ.

Pray: Ask God to grow the tiny seeds of faith that you may have placed in the lives of the many people you have met over the years.



again. Heaven is somewhere we can look forward to going but we are not sure of the details of the destination. But just as the shepherds trusted God to unfold the route to get to the baby, so we can be sure Jesus the Saviour will show those who trust in Him the way to heaven.

Going Further

Read: Luke ch2 v11-16

Have you invited Jesus Christ to be your Lord and Saviour, confessing your sin (wrong-doing according to God's idea and definition) and asking His forgiveness? Do you have the assurance of the Holy Spirit that heaven is your final destination? If not, don't wait a day longer. If you would like someone to talk to, or pray with about this, please ask in church.

Pray: Pray a prayer of thanks that Jesus has done everything necessary to enable us to spend eternity with God (heaven).

Saturday December 16th

Maybe the shepherds wished they could remember that special night forever.

As we watched at dead of night,
Lo, we saw a wonderous light:

Angels singing, 'Peace on earth!'

Told us of the saviour's birth.

Hail, thou ever-blessed morn!

Hail, redemption's happy dawn!

Sing through all Jerusalem,

Christ is born in Bethlehem!

Edward Caswall (1814-1878)

Going Further

Read: Luke ch2 v17- 20

If you have a hymn book look there, but you might also have access to the internet to look for song words. Sing some worship songs to God today as the angels did that first Christmas night.

Pray: Worship God, in prayer or song, for an extended period today.

Friday December 8th

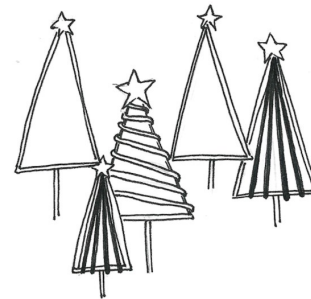
Maybe Joseph wished God had told him what was going on before he found out Mary was pregnant.

Have you ever thought in detail about the conversation between Mary and Joseph when he found out she was pregnant and he knew he wasn't the father? We know he was a good man and He was committed to Mary. I imagine he was devastated. His good character meant that he did not throw a tantrum but considered carefully what to do.

Have you ever thought about how much good character, or poor character, influences how people act? Is there one area of your character that you should concentrate on changing to make it better? That would be a great Christmas present to those we know who perhaps sometimes have to deal with the consequences of our bad character traits.

Going Further

Read: Matthew ch1 v18-21



Joseph had clearly been thinking a great deal about how he should act in the circumstances in which he found himself. He had made a decision. Then, before he could put into action his plan, God unfolded in a dream what was actually going on. Write a list of different ways that God has spoken to you over the years, or prompted you to do something. Then ask someone else if they have had different experiences—I am sure they will have.

Pray: Give thanks to God for His desire and willingness to talk to us.

Saturday December 9th

Maybe Mary and Joseph wished they could have had the baby in their own town.

I once did a long walk when I was 8 months pregnant. We were in no hurry and I was absolutely fine. It wasn't a problem.

Mary and Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem, probably mostly walking (There is no mention of a donkey in the Bible and we know they were poor people). Yes, that last extra month of pregnancy that Mary had over me on my walk should not be ignored, but she was younger than me, and more used to walking than me, with my usual mode of transport being a car. The journey to Bethlehem would have been spread over a number of days and wasn't so very far—Israel isn't that big. They were used to going to Jerusalem for the festivals, a city neighbouring Bethlehem. I am not so sure the travel itself was a huge issue for the pregnant Mary, though I am sure she could have done with out it.

What I think was likely an issue with going to Bethlehem was that she would be giving birth away from her family and amongst strangers. Feeling isolated and unsupported is a big thing in any chapter of life.

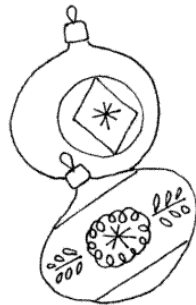
In our church we have a few different initiatives to help befriend and reach people who might be isolated or unsupported at different stages of life. Might you need to join one of them to find some friendship yourself? Or might you be someone who could volunteer to help run the groups and initiatives?

Going Further

Read: Luke ch2 v4

Make an effort to find out about one of the initiatives which we run at Solihull URC. Maybe ask one of the leaders at church tomorrow for some more detailed information or pointers to how you could support the group in prayer.

Pray: Pray for our church initiatives which help the least, the Last, the Lost and the Lonely.



Sunday December 10th

Maybe Caesar Augustus wished it didn't take so long to hold a census.

Some people enjoy looking through old census data and I am one of them. Assuming you can read the writing, which is sometimes quite

Bethlehem that King David had shepherded centuries before. He had clearly had opportunity to fend off bears and other ferocious animals—his skills and bravery when facing Goliath had all been learned as a shepherd. But he was skilled with his sling shot because he had hours and hours of not much to do but practice. Mostly, I think, shepherding wasn't all that exciting. I wonder how many shepherds wish for something more exciting to do. And then it did. One night an angel appeared in the sky. What should they make of that?

Going Further

Read: Luke ch2 v8-10

Some people like a bit of high adrenaline excitement and some people like a bit more of a quiet life. No matter what type of thing you enjoy best, most people need some sort of challenge or something to look forward to, otherwise they become bored or even depressed. What helps you find life more interesting than the same old same old? How might that kind of thing be incorporated into church life to give others like you something to look forward to? Please share your ideas with me or the other church leaders.

Pray: Pray for those who feel they have no future and nothing to look forward to.

Friday December 15th Maybe the shepherds wished they weren't so far from the town.

We don't know where the shepherds were located when the angels visited them but, whilst the Bible says they were 'nearby' I think it must have been far enough away from Bethlehem that the towns people didn't see and hear the angels singing. Then the shepherds rushed to town but didn't really know where they were going. Whose barn was the baby camping in?

Have you ever been going somewhere and you couldn't wait to arrive? Sometimes we feel like that because we have had enough of travelling but the shepherds had a different reason for hurrying; they were excited.

One destination Christians are travelling to, that the season of Advent helps us to remember, is the destination of heaven when Jesus returns

Wednesday December 13th

Maybe Mary wished she could have called her baby something other than Jesus.

Some people have an idea as a child, that if they ever have children of their own they are going to call them a particular name that they like already. I wonder how many people actually follow through with that. If Mary had a name that she had thought she wanted to use for her firstborn son, maybe the name of her father or grandfather, she didn't get to do that. The Angel Gabriel had told her to call the child Jesus. Jesus means 'The Lord Saves'. This name was suitable because Jesus was going to be the one who makes it possible for all people to be saved from the separation we suffer from God by all the wrong things we do.

Going Further

Read: Luke ch1 v29-33

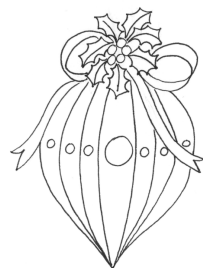
We are not just saved *from* being separated from God for all eternity but are saved *for* a life lived with Christ Jesus preparing us for our eternal future. Remember this Christmas that the season isn't just about looking back but about looking forward.

Pray: Pray that the hearts and minds of the people of Solihull will be opened to hear that Jesus is the only one who can offer them a relationship with God.

Thursday December 14th

Maybe the shepherds wished something exciting would happen.

I always think that shepherds in Bible times must have been very patient people. They stayed with their flocks moving them from place to place to find freshly grown grass and places of water. Wandering, watering and watching during the day. But at night there was greater risk of wild animals coming to attack the sheep. Some shepherds would keep watch while others slept. I wonder how often a wild animal came along that punctuated the night with a high adrenaline moment of defence of the sheep? These Christmas shepherds were on the same hills outside



fancy and flourished in its form, there is a lot of interesting information to be had about how people lived in times gone past.

We ask different questions today than in years gone by, but essentially the idea is to give those in government information about how many people they have to govern or protect.

Whatever is being asked, or for whatever reason, censuses take time to provide information. I wonder if Augustus was impatient for the results. There are no short cuts to knowing things. Even today with computers to help it takes a great deal of time and effort to take a census.

There are no short cuts to knowing things of any type. You have to find out things by a chosen means and even then it needs thinking about and applying to make it useful.

The same is true for getting information from the Bible. There are no short cuts, and effort is required. Today we don't have to travel to the library to find background material to help us in our study. We can look things up on the computer, but that doesn't take away the need to work at reading and studying the Bible in order to know and understand it well. Maybe we wish knowing the Bible didn't take so long to become familiar, but what we get out of going ahead with our quest is invaluable in helping us know our God better.

Going Further

Read: Luke ch2 v1-3

The world that Augustus decided to survey with a census was the world that Jesus was born into and grew up in. Do some research today about the world of Jesus' day.

Pray: Pray for Israel and her neighbouring countries that the God of Peace may be born in hearts today.

Monday December 11th

Maybe the inn keepers wished they had more rooms.

As a family with lots of children, and having siblings who also have large, or very large, families, having people to stay with us has always been a challenge in our house. Children sharing rooms with mattresses

covering every inch of the floor was normal for a visit by the cousins. My eldest daughter decided to record in a photo once where I had written in the family diary, "lunch for 23". Not entirely common even for us but not a massive stretch either. Not even two and a half times the normal number of people for every meal every day.

Even those used to dealing with larger numbers of people can't magic up space where they don't have it. Hospitable people never want to turn anyone away. I am sure the inn keepers in Bethlehem, whatever form those establishments might have taken in those days, wished they had more room for the people who had travelled there for the census.

We know that the need to do what he could for Mary and Joseph led to one inn keeper offering the animal shelter to be used as a bedroom. An offer gratefully accepted.

What do you think it takes to show hospitality and make people feel welcome?

Going Further

Read: Luke ch2 v4-7

Churches are supposed to be places of hospitality and welcome. How can your ideas from the question above work in our church? What can you do to make sure these types of things happen?

Pray: Pray that those who will visit our church this Christmas time and into the next year will feel welcome.

Tuesday December 12th Maybe Mary wished the stable was a bedroom.

I once went into the home of two brothers, one of whom I knew. Both brothers were bikers and were familiar with taking drugs, but one of them had recently become a Christian and was miraculously getting his life together. Whilst he may have been getting his *life* together the same couldn't be said for their home. The living room was their room for working on their bikes and the carpet had more oil on it than many a workshop floor, it was thick with motorcycle oil. I was offered a seat on the sofa, which I took, but would have rather not as that too was filthy,

and guess I perched on the edge and must have looked totally comic. The cultural contrast, and my unease, were huge. Offer me a stable and I would have taken it.

Mary was likely a poor person and her parents would have had animals at home to provide food for the family. I am sure she felt some familiarity in the environment she was in as much as is possible under the circumstances. But we would all understand if she would have wished she was in a nice inn instead.

Sometimes it can be quite a challenge to make do with what we have when we would wish for better or different. We might not want to seem ungrateful when we know there are so many others worse off than ourselves. But struggle we do sometimes.

Gratitude is an important Christian character trait. When we look at Mary's words in 'the Magnificat', the name we have given to the song she sang when the angel Gabriel first visited her, we see that she was a person who immediately gave thanks and rejoiced in God caring for her people. This usual practice of rejoicing and gratitude would have stood her in good stead when she found herself in the stable.

To what extent are you a person who gives thanks in all circumstances?

Going Further

Read: Luke ch1 v46-55

The Magnificat has a number of references to things Mary would have known God had promised in what we call The Old Testament but was her whole available Scriptures. Referencing relevant bits of Bible in our prayers helps us to feel confident that what we are praying about is stood on a firm foundation. Can you make a new commitment today to include more Bible references in your prayers? You might even need to decide to learn some new verses by heart.

Pray: Pray for Bibles to be more widely available throughout the world. Perhaps contact the Bible Society and make a donation to aid in this.

