

Wesley Memorial *magazine*

from Wesley Memorial Methodist Church, Oxford

Christmas 2025



An Angel by Olesya Vert

Acrylic ink on handmade paper

Joy to the world!

Dear Friends,

I wonder if any of you saw the 2015 Sainsbury's Christmas advert where Mog the Cat causes a Christmas catastrophe? If not, I invite you to revisit it through the medium of the internet! Mog is sleeping and has a nightmare, while managing to pull on the Christmas lights with his tail.



Mog, hanging on!

A calamitous chain of events ensues including turning the cooker on by accident – burning everything to a crisp; phoning 999 with his paws and tail; pulling the tablecloth and all its contents on to the floor and causing the Christmas tree to disintegrate! I appreciate the sentiment of this advert because it represents in part how many of us might feel at Christmas when despite weeks of preparation and the immensity of 'perfect Christmas' expectations...not just the presents... unravel on the day. The neighbours in this story pull together to make it a truly memorable community experience, which indicates the generous spirit of Christmas. Whilst this is a key factor of Christmas, it is not its true heart.

I often wonder why there is so much pressure put on making the 'perfect joyful Christmas'? Some of

our Nativity plays and carols seem to suggest the first Christmas was perfect, silent and still. The angels tell the shepherds not to fear, the 'little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes'. Why is the story depicted in such a way? Those of you who have experienced birth will know that it is not perfect, silent or still. It is messy, painful and chaotic. Do we seek after the 'perfect Christmas' because we don't want to face the reality that God became human, in the dirt, messiness, brokenness and chaos? So why do we place such pressure on ourselves? This can lead to stress and debt as we seek after that ideal. How can we as Church model a different way of being?

Christmas for many is anything but joy-filled. Life can be messy and uncertain. This is clear in our current political climate, with nations at war, a political shift towards the right wing, the scapegoating and fear-mongering. We see fragmentation, division and hurt. Yet Christ still comes. Life is messy and the world is broken and Christ still comes. For most of us, Christmas won't be perfect, especially in the way the adverts romanticise it, but Christ still comes — and he is still with us.

So often in our rush to get ready, in our shopping and planning it is easy to forget the reason for Christmas: the baby Jesus, God coming to earth as a human being. You may have seen the Nativity sketch that concludes with, "Can you just put the baby aside so we can focus on everything else?" Yet Christmas begins, continues and ends with Christ. Whether we are ready or not, God breaks into our world. This can be seen in our

communities as we care for each other, as we show love and seek to help others.

In resisting the myth of the 'perfect' Christmas, may we encounter the child born to us, the Son given, the Word who became flesh, full of grace and truth.

Blessings,

The Revd Miriam Moul



*Nativity by Sadao Watanabe,
From the Methodist Modern Art Collection © TMCP, reprinted with permission*

Editorial



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Once again, preparing a Christmas magazine in early November has its challenges. It's really too soon to think of carols and mince pies, and the Traidcraft Christmas cards bought on Sunday in coffee can be put away. Added to that, our thoughts will turn to peace but our news bulletins tell us relentlessly how far off that still remains.

Nevertheless, we are bold to proclaim *Joy to world!* – with all the resonances of the familiar carol. We hope you enjoy this collection of encouraging stories that you can also share with friends.

At Christmas we shall sing Charles Wesley's words:

Christ the everlasting Lord ...
Pleased as man with man to dwell
Jesus our Immanuel.

And that is the joyful news : as John Wesley said, "The best of all is God is with us!"

A very Happy Christmas from the team.

Light from light

Cold December. To Evensong.
The Cathedral, floodlit in the surrounding darkness.
Tall, compact beauty; a model of perfection
Towering over the world.

But man-made.

The day, and my achievements, had been small and mean.
The Gothic miracle put me in my place,
And life, it seemed, into a poor perspective.

Then, the responses set by Byrd;
A Tallis anthem: *O nata lux de lumine*.
Advent collects: "... in great humility.... to take our nature
upon him."
And in the peace the organ's *vox humana* breathed.

Out into the darkness.
Blinded by the floodlights as I left the porch
I looked back, towards the cathedral's windowed side —
Against it, a giant shadow, clerestory high,
Moved as I moved, and walked very tall.

Patrick Nobes

Salisbury Cathedral guide since 2003



The Visitation

A reflection



The visitation by Joanna Tulloch

Sometimes I struggle to relate to icons. The faces can seem flat and static with little expression. What am I to make of them? How am I to read them? But this icon is different: it simply radiates warmth and love. The close embrace of these two women as they press their cheeks against one another shows real intimacy and a deep sharing of what they are both going through.

The story is of Mary visiting her cousin, Elizabeth, when both of them are pregnant. Mary was probably only a teenager — too young to become a mother by our standards today — and, of course, she was not yet married. Elizabeth will have been much older, thinking that her chance of having a child was over, only to find that she was pregnant instead. On the face of it there is much that could divide them: they are at least a generation apart in age, one has seemingly become pregnant with ease while the other has for decades endured the shame of infertility in a society which measured a woman's worth by her ability to

have children. But here, instead, they have found what connects them: that they are both unexpected first-time mothers in unusual circumstances, unsure of what exactly lies ahead of them; both of them pregnant with a sense that there is something special about their pregnancies, and indeed their children.

Mary can sometimes come across as a lone heroine — a young woman saying yes to the angel bringing her a task from God, and later giving birth far from home, in the second-rate surroundings of a stable rather than an inn. But in between times, she spends several months with her cousin. Time during which she can receive and give courage to face what lies ahead. Time during which she can find deep empathy as she shares experiences with another unexpected first-time mother. Time during which she and Elizabeth can start to imagine new and surprising futures for themselves. Mary is not alone, but has a companion on her journey.

How can we share our journeys? To whom can we open our hearts and minds, in trust and love, to find new courage, a deeper empathy or a wider imagination?

In this icon, the two halos start to merge together into a single gold outline around the two women. The holiness perhaps arising not so much from each woman separately, but the love and interaction between them? Something of God discernible not so much in the two individuals, as in the love and closeness they share with one another? How can we form relationships and interactions that make space for the love of God to break through into our lives and the lives of others? That adds the golden glow of love to the world?

Vicky Davies, local preacher and former Oxford student, from her series "Seeing beyond".

Icons for Hope and Faith

Exhibition at Westminster Abbey, 18-20 September 2025



Christ Pantocrator



Julian of Norwich



The Holy Family

This exhibition by the British Association of Iconographers was a revelation. We visited on the 18th of September, and were amazed at the number of icons on show. We were particularly keen to see those being exhibited by Joanna Tulloch, local preacher in the Oxford Circuit, and member of Wesley Memorial. Joanna was showing three icons: *Christ Pantocrator* (Christ the Ruler of the Universe), *The Unfading Flower* (which shows the Virgin Mary holding the infant Christ on her lap, with a lily in her hand), and *Mother of God of the Sign* (an icon that shows Mary presenting the infant Christ to the viewer).

It was fascinating to see the sheer variety of ways in which the painters brought their personal style to their icons. In some ways this was surprising: there is a discipline to the painting of iconic images that encourages the painter to put aside their individuality in order that the eternal might shine through the image. Yet while there was certainly conformity to the traditional image, there was also so much variety in the way in which different artists approached their themes. This suggested something important about the way in which discipline and paying attention need not constrict the personality but can bring about a deeper form of flourishing, grounded in the eternal that transcends us all.

There was so much that was wonderful here that it is difficult to pull out favourites from an exhibition that

displayed over one hundred icons. Joanna's *Christ Pantocrator* stood out, and it was a delight that, when we visited, Joanna was there at the same time and able to talk to us about the different representations and the meaning of individual icons. Inevitably, Bev the Cat Lover liked Juliet Venter's icon of Julian of Norwich, accompanied as the mystic was by a tabby cat! Margaret was particularly taken with two images of *The Holy Family*, which portrayed Joseph as a very caring and protective husband and father, (painted by Jaime Barkley).

The beauty on display reminded us of the way in which God can be found through art, and we felt privileged to have attended such an interesting exhibition.

Bev Clack & Margaret Pargeter



Joanna at the exhibition with her three icons

3Generate 2025



This year the focus of the **3Generate** weekend was the *Journey of a Lifetime* that children and young people take as part of their faith formation. The massive halls of the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham were once more transformed into a town full of venues offering different activities. There was something for everyone! Each venue offered sessions for children and young people at different stages of their faith journey, and outside each one there were questions relating to that venue's purpose, encouraging children and young people to reflect on key questions of faith and discipleship.

Before Sunday's large collective worship, there were also smaller worship sessions in each venue, allowing children and young people to see the various forms worship can take, and how it's possible to tune into God, to each other, and the world around them in a variety of ways.

Here are some of our thoughts after the weekend:

Mel says, "I was helping in the Creation station again this year. It was very busy and involved a lot of queue management, so my favourite time in the weekend was sharing in the Saturday late night communion with a group of our children and young people. We were given bread and wine in little plastic containers. Miriam served us as we sat in circle and prayed together. It was lovely!"

Rachel enjoyed petting the animals including Winter the rabbit, Luna the chicken, Bo the Pony, Brian and Gertie the goats. "The obstacle course and eating while you were listening to songs was really fun. Betsy and I really liked the Silent Disco. I felt close to God because everyone was there. There were lots of people there. It is an amazing way to learn about God."

Lizzie really liked the Silent Disco, *Manhunt* and *Truth or Dare*, as well as watching Bladon Junior Church perform. "I made more friends who I can share the journey of God with."

Their mum, Jenny, thinks **3Generate** is an amazing way for kids and teenagers to socialise and have fun with other Church communities.

Aaron says,

"I enjoyed the creation station because it was open the whole time and it was fun doing the random creative things they offered. I also liked it because it made me think more about my beliefs. The nights were a bit annoying but I managed to get through them."

(Continued on page 9)

Caring for God's Creation

The UK's Pathway to Net Zero by 2050

Congratulations to Wesley Memorial on achieving Gold Eco Church status and for your continued commitment to tackling climate change!!

With 2025 marking the hottest summer on record (Met Office) and Storm Melissa's devastating impact on the people of Jamaica and nearby islands, we're reminded that climate change impacts are felt both locally and globally, and urgent action is vital.

We have also seen how climate change threatens the poorest communities first – destroying houses and habitats and reducing crop production and biodiversity. These communities are largely those least responsible for causing climate change. To my mind, acting on this issue is to walk in solidarity with our global neighbours. It is an act of discipleship – a visible sign of loving our neighbour and honouring God's world.

The UK was the first major economy to set legally binding targets to reach net zero by 2050 – a goal now shared by the EU and many other nations. 'Net zero' means balancing the greenhouse gases we emit with the amount removed from the atmosphere through carbon sinks in oceans, forests, wetlands and grasslands.

So, what does the pathway to net zero look like for the UK and how will this affect our daily lives?

Energy Transition: To meet 2050 goals, the burning of fossil fuels must be replaced by use of renewable energy to meet all our needs. This will mean a switch to the 'electrification' of power, transport, and heating. This shift will double the UK's electricity demand by 2050 compared to current levels. To meet this target, the government is expanding electricity networks and accelerating the rollout of solar, onshore, and offshore wind power. In 2024, 74% of the nation's power (electricity) came from clean energy sources – beyond 2030, similar progress will need to be made to electrify the heating and transport sectors.



An offshore wind farm

Heating Decarbonisation: Around 80% of UK homes currently use natural gas for heating. This will need to shift to electric heating systems powered by renewables, making heat pumps as popular as smart phones. By 2040, half of all homes are expected to have heat pumps, potentially signalling the end of the gas network as we know it.

Transport Transformation: The sale of new petrol and diesel cars will end by 2035, driving growth in electric vehicles, greener public transport, and expanded cycling routes. Hydrogen and electric aircraft remain in development for zero-emission aviation. Finding carbon-free alternatives to jet fuel is a major challenge.

Industry: Energy-intensive sectors such as cement, chemicals, and glass are the hardest to decarbonise. Hydrogen, produced using surplus renewable electricity, offers a low-carbon alternative providing heat and power to these industries. Hydrogen could flow through a repurposed gas network from the mid-2030s.

Nature and Agriculture: Farmers are adopting climate-friendly methods – restoring peatlands, planting trees, and improving soil health. The UK aims to plant 30,000 hectares of new woodland each year, increasing tree cover from 13% to 16.5% on UK land by 2050.

While we have a good understanding of what needs to happen to reach net zero, many questions remain about how best to make this transition fair for everyone. How do we balance the costs between households,

businesses, and government? How do we ensure communities dependent on traditional industries are supported and not left behind? And how to make the decisions and actions needed to achieve this transformation fully inclusive? These are not just technical questions, but moral ones, calling for compassion, cooperation, and a sense of shared responsibility.

As Christians, we are invited to see this transition as part of our discipleship. We can encourage and support fair climate action and consider how our own choices reflect the values of stewardship and justice. Those with the means might think about adopting solar panels, electric vehicles, or heat pumps, helping to pave the way for

others. And we can take meaningful steps to reduce our carbon footprint — through how we travel, shop, and use energy. In doing so, we are not only protecting the planet but bearing witness to our faith in action.

Clare Dobson



Clare is a member of the Dobson clan! She grew up in Oxford and was married at Wesley Memorial. She has worked on energy and climate-change policy, both within and outside of government, for over 20 years.

3Gen continued

Alice enjoyed the Silent Disco and breakfast! She valued the chance to make stronger connections with friends. She thinks that it's good the church supports this time to develop friendships and enable us all to spend time together.

Jasper thinks that it was the best **3Generate** ever and that was probably because it was bigger.

Tomas says,

"I thought it was very fun and a chance for us to explore our creative side. It was also a chance to do fun things together like the inflatable obstacle course of the climbing wall or the tech hub or the caving. There was also a dodge ball tournament which was very fun. I am definitely going next year and I would recommend it for others too."

Kwadwo says, "I thoroughly enjoyed the gaming room, playing *Mario Kart* against others was a blast! I found playing *Mario Kart* to be an unexpected profound experience, akin to embarking on a spiritual journey."

Nana says, "I found the Chapel to be a very relaxing place, which deepened my sense of connection with God."

They believe that **3Generate** is a significant event as it deepens people's connection with God, allowing them to feel His presence within and inspiring them to dedicate their lives to Him.

Laura says "**3Generate** is a great thing for the church to support as it gives young people a chance to have their thoughts heard, as well as have a great weekend and spend time getting to know God. This year at **3Generate** I enjoyed listening to a few talks about some people's experiences as Methodists. I also loved all the worship, especially the music."

The Oxford Circuit group had a wonderful time and we are already looking forward to **3Generate** next year! In the meantime we will carry on on our journey with God, valuing the friendships we have built and knowing we are part of something much bigger than just the Oxford Circuit.

Mel McCulloch

Mary Doreen Gilson (née Brown). 1928-2025



Our mother, Mary Doreen Gilson (née Brown), was born on 24 May 1928, in Wednesbury, West Midlands, and died peacefully on 17 August 2025. To many she was a minister's wife or a leader in women's ministry – "a wonderful, indomitable woman of God. She carried a dignity, with intent and purpose and plan, in the way she walked, spoke and acted", but to us, she was simply our Mum: steadfast, humorous, fiercely compassionate, and guided always by a quiet, unwavering faith.

She grew up in a staunch Methodist family at Springhead Church, Wednesbury, where faith meant fellowship, responsibility and care for others. Wartime evacuation took her to Hunmanby Hall Methodist School in East Yorkshire, where she learned resilience and community at a young age. From there she went to St Hilda's College, Oxford, to read Modern History – a rare path for a woman of her generation, though she spoke of it without pride, simply as "a great privilege". She joined the John Wesley Society and met our father, Nigel Gilson, who subsequently trained for the ministry at Wesley Theological College, Cambridge and was elected President of the Methodist Conference in 1986.

They married in 1951 and embarked together on a shared life of ministry – Cornwall, Newark, Nottingham, Zimbabwe, East Yorkshire, Wolverhampton, Oxford. Wherever we moved, Mum created a home: orderly, warm, full of books, laughter, and conversation. She supported our

father in every appointment and played her own vital role in ministry; they walked side by side.

Mum believed deeply in the importance of women creating spaces of fellowship, honesty and mutual support. In 1956, she published *The Jessop Family*, a Bible study book written specifically for young wives. She led women's groups in every circuit we lived in – as places where real life could be shared and burdens carried together.

Zimbabwe was an important time in our family's life. Mum joined the Ruwadzano women's movement and was profoundly moved by the joy and authenticity of the demonstrated faith. "Africa gave us joy," she later said. "People's deep faith was not a cloak or a pretence – it was real."

In the late 1970s she was appointed a Community Race Relations Officer in Dudley, where she once again gathered women together – teaching English, forming sewing circles, creating friendships across differences. Her faith was never loud, but it was active, persistent and courageous. She believed in peace and justice, not as slogans, but as daily disciplines.

Mum's work expanded within the Methodist Church as well. She served nationally on the National Ecumenical Committee, the Overseas Division Board and later chaired the Women's Network Grants Committee. She attended the 1983 World Council of Churches Assembly in Vancouver – returning home with stories of singing alongside Desmond Tutu and Coretta Scott King and worshipping with Christians from every corner of the globe.

Yet for all her public commitments, she somehow always made space for conversation, guidance, and gentle humour. She had a way of listening that made one feel both challenged and cherished. As her daughters, we never doubted her love – nor her expectations that we act with integrity, curiosity and kindness.

Mary Gilson

Her grandchildren and great-grandchildren adored her. She was dignified but never distant, principled but full of laughter. She loved hymns, family jokes, games, meals and family outings, long walks, being in the garden, a variety of good and simple food, and well-argued conversations and debates.

Looking back, we think of George Eliot's words: "The growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts... lived faithfully." That was Mum – never seeking recognition but quietly transforming lives wherever she went.

Near the end of her life, she reflected simply: "We had a very good life – never out of the sense of God in our lives." That sense of God – gentle, persistent, sustaining – shaped not only her life, but ours too.

We give thanks for her life with love, pride and deep gratitude.

Written by her daughters.

Paul interviewed Mary some years ago for our Oral History project. Extracts from the recording can be heard here:
<https://www.wesleysoxford.org.uk/people/personal-stories/mary-gilson>

Reflections from Paul Spray

We at Wesley Memorial think of her as someone who was always interested in you, would remember you, and would be on the look out for new people to welcome. The Zimbabwe Fellowship based at Wesley Mem recall that whatever activities they did – including overnight services – Mary would want to be there. In these days, we particularly thank Nigel and Mary for their initiative, with others, to establish *Asylum Welcome* in Oxford.

Back in 1983, the World Council of Churches Assembly met in Vancouver, Canada. Great names were there - Desmond Tutu, Coretta Scott King, Philip Potter. 25 came from Britain, including the Archbishops of Canterbury and York - and Mary Gilson. Characteristically, the highlight of the Assembly for Mary was about social justice. "The Pacific delegation placed a lovely garland of flowers on each desk," she remembered, "So we put them on and felt very proud. And then the leader said 'Would you just please take off your garland and give it to someone who hasn't got one.'"

Social justice in action!



Mary and friends at coffee in the John Wesley Room



Introducing Oxford Proud Voices

Oxford Proud Voices is Oxford's first (and only!) queer choir. We meet together to sing for equality, solidarity and joy and welcome people from the LGBTQIA+ community and allies to our weekly rehearsals. We are a community choir - there are no auditions and you don't need to read music to become part of OPV. Our Musical Director, Philip Read (<https://www.philipread.net>) teaches by a call and response method; we sing a cappella and our repertoire is drawn from a range of popular music.

Our membership has grown steadily from around 30 singers each week when we started in September 2024 and we now have about 60 people taking part in our regular rehearsals.

By the end of our first year, we had outgrown our first home, so we started looking for a new rehearsal venue over the summer. We're delighted that we've found our 'second home' in the Sanctuary at Wesley Memorial Church. We meet on Tuesday evenings (term time) from 6.45 until 9.15pm.

If you would like to know more, please visit our website <https://oxfordproudvoices.org>. We welcome new singers on the first Tuesday of most months: please check our website for details of our next 'new singers' evening' and we hope to welcome some of you soon!

The camel who knew



Don't miss the opportunity of grabbing a copy of *The camel who knew* for a child you know!

The camel who knew is a story book for Christmas and Epiphany and tells the story of how the Wise Ones followed the star, but needed a bit of assistance along the way from their very wise camel.

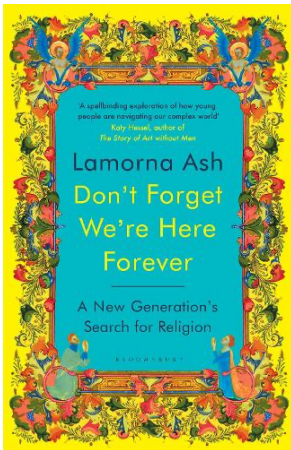
Mel has written this as part of our outreach to families; and copies will be given out to children in Rainbow House, shared with families at Rose Hill's Messy Church as well as children at Wesley Memorial and other churches around the Circuit.

The books are there to be shared and enjoyed so do take a copy and then give it away!

(See page 13 too.)

Don't Forget We're Here Forever —

A New Generation's Search for Religion



I'd never heard of Lamorna Ash before I came across a *Church Times* interview with her, about this book. She wrote the book a few years ago, in her mid-late 20s, and it's all about her research into her generation's ('Gen Z') attitude to Christianity, and her own tentative faith journey which resulted from this project.

I don't often go for non-fiction but I found this very easy to read. She creates some lovely images including of Biblical scenes, has an interesting turn of phrase, and it helps that I'm very interested in the subject matter. My assumption as a Christian is that non-Christians will be negative about my faith, and that's partly because in my generation they quite often are. It's encouraging to read that younger generations may be more positive, more open to faith, or at least start from a neutral position. The book identifies many things that younger people may be searching for which can be found in church including meaning, peace, community — summed up well in this quote from an Orthodox priest: 'Secular materialism has shown itself to be incapable of answering our deepest needs.'

Lamorna Ash didn't expect to become a Christian through writing this book. She set out to experience many different kinds of church community, various routes into faith, and interviewed several Christians, many of whom are in their 'second act' having left the church once and found a new way in to faith. She is clearly drawn to the more liberal, progressive end of the spectrum, and only partly because of her sexuality. She finds plenty of expressions of Christianity very off-putting; and as someone who loves Iona, (the island and the community) I was cheering when she had a real turning point there.

Parts of the book are a bit like a manual for those who haven't grown up with Christianity. Even though I have, I learnt plenty — about Julian of Norwich, Ignatius of Loyola, and others. The one angle in the book that didn't work for me was a thread relating to the metaphor of Jacob wrestling with the angel. But this is a tiny downside - overall I found the book hugely encouraging and interesting, and I commend it to you. Just let me know if you want to borrow my copy!

Jenny Ayres



The camel who knew kneels at the crib!



Christmas 2025 Campaign

We all know that Christmas is a time when people who never go near a church in the ordinary way might consider dropping in for a Carol service or a Midnight Mass.

Very much in the spirit of *Everyone an evangelist*, districts, circuits, local churches and fellowships of the Methodist Church are invited this Christmas to remind people of their inherent worth and beauty, not because of what they've done, or what they can give, but because of who they are.

Gifted:

- is for everyone in our churches and beyond: both believers rejoicing at God's gift of Jesus, and those who might find the season more wearying than wonderful.
- reaches out to people longing for transformation but feeling stuck. For those searching for something more, something real — but unsure where to look.

Gifted is the Methodist Church's open invitation, speaking the Good News to people that they matter. That they are Beloved. Created with infinite care. A gift to the world, just as they are.

Jodrell Bank at 80

Listen on BBC Sounds to a documentary celebrating the 80th birthday of the telescope, and the genesis of an amazing piece of music, *Pulsar*, composed for the event.

Composer Hannah Peel brings her unique creative experimental vision that draws on her background as a classical and electronic artist to the celebration of this British scientific and cultural icon. And she learns about Sir Bernard Lovell and his love of music, how as a church

A “three- step approach” will enable us Methodists to reach different people at different stages of faith, whether they are unfamiliar with Christianity, or already committed disciples of Jesus. This helps us all understand the journey we hope people will take through **Gifted** this Christmas.

The three steps

- People are a gift — made by God with love.
- Church community is a gift to others — good for inviting people in to be blessed
- Jesus is the ultimate gift to us all. .

These steps offer a discipleship process: allowing the Church to speak appropriately with someone, dependent upon where they join us in the Gifted journey. They also help us know what to invite someone to engage with next, on their faith journey.

The Connexional team (leaders of the Methodist Church) will help us with the task by launching a social media campaign aimed at people beyond the church, and by providing ideas and various resources to give us confidence and tools for the job!

At Wesley Memorial we have a good choice of regular activities to which we can invite people we know; and at this time of year there is also and always the annual Candle-lit Carol Service, Sunday 21st December at 6.00pm. All are welcome!

(Adapted from the Methodist Church website. <https://>



organist, it tied to him a belief in something beyond science. Brilliant actual conversation with Sir Bernard on the subject, at the 42nd minute!



Archive on 4

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m002lzlq>

JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR

On Wednesday, 29th October, a party from Wesley Memorial travelled to Bladon to watch the annual Junior Church production. This year, the group of more than forty children took on the ambitious challenge of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice's groundbreaking 1971 rock-opera that reimagines the final days of Jesus Christ through the eyes of Judas Iscariot. The company delivered a performance that was both deeply moving, and remarkably professional.

From the very first moments of the show, the energy, precision and emotion of the cast created an atmosphere that filled the church with excitement and reverence in equal measure. The young performers tackled the demanding score with confidence, hitting the complex harmonies and rhythms that make *Jesus Christ Superstar* such a difficult work to master. It was clear that this was no ordinary children's production!

The staging and direction were particularly impressive. Thoughtful use of lighting and highly effective set design allowed the story to shine through, whilst the choreography

was dynamic and purposeful, drawing the audience fully into the drama. Every performer, regardless of age, brought authenticity and commitment to the role. A special mention, however, must go to those playing the lead roles of Jesus, Judas and Mary Magdalene, who all displayed incredible emotional depth and vocal control; and of course Revd Paul Carter, who made a special guest appearance as a very menacing guard!

What made the evening especially inspiring was witnessing a group of children so fully inhabit a story of faith, doubt and compassion, right in the heart of their church community. It was a powerful reminder of the talent, dedication and teamwork that flourish when young people are given the opportunity to work together to tell a meaningful story.

Overall, this year's Bladon Junior Church production was yet another triumph: polished, heartfelt and profoundly engaging. The cast and creative team should be immensely proud of what they have achieved; it truly was fantastic.

Oliver Pearce



Judas struggling with his dilemma



The cast on a high



*Our party on stage!
Photo shows how the chapel is set up,
with the old gallery now the upper level
of the action!*



New Inn Hall Street, Oxford OX1 2DH

Minister: The Revd Miriam Moul

Children's, families' & outreach worker:

Mel McCulloch

Student outreach worker: Kirsty Smith

Church manager: Nikos Paplomatas

Services: Sunday worship: 10.30 am

Wednesday prayers: 12.30 pm

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and any other suitable items for publication are always
welcome. Please email them to the editorial team, stating
if you are also willing for them to appear on the church
website, www.wesleymem.org.uk Please send photos as
separate jpg or png files.

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