

CONTACT

December 2023

*Prepare ye
the Way of the
Lord ...*

**The monthly magazine of
Annan United Reformed Church**



DECEMBER 2023 WORSHIP AT ANNAN URC
MORNING SERVICES 11:00 AM

Sunday 3rd: **Communion Service** **Revd Nick Mark** **Church Meeting after**

Welcomer: Robin Richardson

Bible Reading: Helen McNairn

Intercessions: Doug Maxwell

Sunday 10th: **Morning Service** **tba**

Welcomer: Marion Kerr

Bible Reading: Nan Maxwell

Intercessions: Helen McNairn

Sunday 17th: **Morning Service** **David Townsend**

Welcomer: Anne Foster

Bible Reading: Haydn Higton

Intercessions: Nan Maxwell

Sunday 24th: **Carol Service**

Welcomer: Helen McNairn

Bible Reading: Ruth Mitchell

Intercessions: Marion Kerr

Sunday 31st: **Morning Service** **Revd Haydn Higton**

Welcomer: Marion Kerr

Bible Reading: Robin Richardson

Intercessions: Ruth Mitchell

CHURCH CONTACT INFORMATION

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*Items for January magazine should reach Ruth **by Friday 22nd December**, please*

INTERIM MODERATOR'S DECEMBER 2023 LETTER

If I were not a minister it would seem strange to be writing this letter about Advent and Christmas because the commercial world has been hyping up Christmas since the beginning of August. In my volunteer work at an Oxfam Shop in Dumfries, our manager, who happens to be the son of a Church of Scotland Minister, has had a mild rebuke from his regional office for not having all the Christmas Windows decorated and up and running by November 1st!

That leads me on to reflect on why we have in all the major Christian denominations the period known as Advent. It is about far more than giving late last-minute shoppers like me time to get elusive presents that might actually be useful to the recipients. Yes we all have the target to reach of celebrating the birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ but there is more to it than just planning a wonderful celebration and spreading goodwill to all on one significant day of the year.

First, Advent signifies starting a new year in our Study through the weeks of God's Word for us found in the Bible. Each year a key Gospel forms the background framework for us. December 3rd signifies the beginning of a study of Mark's Gospel. The First Sunday of Advent looking at Mark 13 verses 24 -37 gets us thinking about how ready we are for the coming of Jesus. That has little to do with presents and gifts and rather more about how we conduct our lives and relationships with people and the environment around us. There is climate change, war, poverty and selfishness to contend with. Advent in its first week though contains the important message of hope. God wants desperately to guide us towards the kind of world Jesus on his first visit came to show us.

The Second Sunday of Advent, 10th December, in the first 8 verses of Chapter 1 of Mark's Gospel we meet another person waiting for something to happen - namely John the Baptist who was waiting for Jesus, to see the man who was to change the World.

The Third Sunday of Advent, 17th December, looks at John 1. We see the religious leaders beginning to quake in their boots so to speak trying to comprehend who the Messiah is. They deeply question John but he diverts them to the person for whom he is a warm up act.

The Fourth Sunday of Advent introduces us in Luke 1 verses 26-38 to Mary who answers the call to become the mother of Jesus. An amazing risk-taking operation for an unmarried girl. It makes us think far more about the whole set of circumstances in which Jesus came to live among us.

Christmas Day is a true day of celebration when we realise Jesus came not for the select or any particular race of people but for all of humanity.

We round off the calendar year on New Year's Eve with Mary and Joseph taking baby Jesus to the Temple, in Luke 2 verses 22-40 to comply with Church Law and he meets two old people, Simeon and Anna, who are witnesses to who he is and how he has come to save the human race. Here for me is the evidence of the hope that our celebration of the birth of Jesus brings.

Advent, then, has a number of elements to it; waiting, preparing, celebrating, hoping and thanksgiving. It gives time to look back at the past year and to prepare to do better with God's guidance in the New Year to come.

Janet and I wish you all a very happy Christmas and thank all of you for your continuing support of Annan URC and its Elders in all that the Church tries to do to support the local community and the wider URC.

Revd Nick Mark - 16 November 2023

HOPE FOR THE WORLD

There are many helpful words in the carols we shall sing this Christmas. Peace on the earth, goodwill to all men, seems so remote in reality this year but we can still pray for such and have faith that our prayers will lead to understanding and dialogue between the warring factions. Prayer is a powerful weapon in a world blighted by weapons.

In this country views are becoming more and more extreme – the spirit of conciliation, understanding and compromise seems to be lost in the past, with crime and offences against community overlooked and unpunished. Christmas may be the time to consider what we learnt and experienced as 2023 draws to a close. It is a time to celebrate and reflect. The world has faced many challenges this year. We have had to endure rising living costs, extremes of weather, as well as war and strife in many countries.

So at this Christmas season take time to pray – for a transition in thought, word and deed among the nations to bring about lasting change for more people and give everyone hope for a better future. Use the carols of this month to cheer our moods.

Who would think that what was needed
To transform and save the earth
Might not be a plan or army
Who would think that a child should lead the way
God surprises earth with heaven coming here on Christmas Day
And continuing with the Spirit each day since!

Haydn Higton

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They will beat their swords into ploughshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks.  
Nation will not take up sword against nation,  
nor will they train for war anymore.

Isaiah 2:4

Sculpture by Yevgeny Vuchetich  
in the United Nations Garden in New York

## **THE MESSAGE OF CHRISTMAS**

Welcome Christmas once again! Come blizzard, snow or rime –  
It cannot dim the joy that fills our hearts at this glad time.  
The days are brief, the nights are long, the skies are bleak and drear –  
But a glory shines about the ending of the year.  
The glory of a wondrous thing: the Christmas mystery –  
The strange and lovely story of our Lord's nativity.  
The only hope that's left to man upon this troubled earth –  
The hope God gave at Bethlehem at the Messiah's birth ...  
Welcome sweet and holy day, the day of Christ the King  
Once again the world awaits the message that You bring.

*Church Gardener*



## **RAINBOW TRIBE**



Hello Everyone!

This year our Christmas Concert will be taking place on Wednesday 6th December at 6:30pm in the United Reformed Church.

Please come and celebrate with us.

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SOCIAL AND FUNDRAISING COMMITTEE

Friends,

We are looking forward to the New Year. We have arranged the following events:

Thursday 11th January	Soup and Sweet Lunch
Thursday 8th February	Soup and Sweet Lunch
Thursday 14 th March	Soup and Sweet Lunch
Thursday 11 th April	Soup and Sweet Lunch
Thursday 9 th May	Spring Lunch
Thursday 13 th June	Strawberry Lunch



The Social and Fundraising Committee ask for your continued support at these events.
Anyone wishing to help serve soup etc will be most welcome.

Marion Kerr

THANKS TO YOU



A very big THANK YOU to everyone who helped with this year's Shoebox Appeal for Operation Christmas Child. We have sent 30 boxes and £105 to help costs of transport. You have helped to bring joy to deprived children this Christmas.

AN AUTUMN HOLIDAY

Recently I used the October holidays as a chance to catch up with old friends. The first weekend I flew to Southampton.

It was great to be back in the New Forest for the first time since 2019 and visit some favourite places.

Lymington was an ancient sea port and is now a major yachting centre. It is also where the car ferry departs for the Isle Of Wight and the home of Olympic Gold Medal sailor Ben Ainslie.

Beaulieu is one of the New Forest's smallest villages. It is very picturesque and is home to the famous motor museum. New Forest donkeys and ponies wander freely throughout the village.

It was so good to renew friendships and spend time with three generations of one family.

Sadly, all too soon it was time to head home and unpack, but to repack the case, as we travelled to Jersey in the Channel Islands. It never ever disappoints, and the first glimpse of St Brelades Bay where we stay is always so special. It is one of the top three beaches in the United Kingdom and we had many lovely beach walks. It was fascinating to watch the surfers jump the huge waves when the tide was coming in and manage to stay on their boards.

A visit to Jersey could never be complete without a visit to Durrell Wildlife. New arrivals this year were the Aldabra tortoises; they are huge, some weighing over 200kg. Two new sloths were happy just to sleep in their baskets.

We enjoyed sampling local produce from the Central Market, which has been in the same place since 1882. There is so much to tempt you as you wander, and delicious food smells. We loved just watching the world go by on the bay.

Sadly, the week after returning home, the Island was badly affected by Storm Ciaran. The devastation some people and places have suffered is unbelievable. Hopefully, time will help heal and this amazing island will recover to the beautiful place we know and love.

Fiona Glass



PLEASE HELP

I'm sure you all remember collecting foil milk bottle tops or stamps for the Blue Peter appeal every year - back in the day when we only had three TV channels. This year our Girls' Brigade Company are collecting used or new stamps for the R.N.L.I. and we are asking you to help in this charity event by donating stamps. They can be old or new, from anywhere in the world. Please try to leave a one centimetre (that's 0.39 inches in old money) border around them. If you can give them to me on Sundays when you see me, the Company would be grateful for your support.

Kevin Higton



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The Dumfries Fairtrade Group will participate in this year's Christmas Tree Festival at St John's Church, Lovers' Walk, Dumfries. The Group invites you to see their tree which is called:

"The Banana Tree -  
Fairtrade is not just bananas".



## Christmas Tree Festival 6th to 10th December

St John's Church  
&  
Dumfries and District  
Flower Club

Lovers' Walk Dumfries

**Opening times**  
7-9 pm Wednesday 6th,  
10am-9pm Thursday, Friday and Saturday 7-9th  
and Sunday 10th 1.30-4pm

The Church will be lit only by trees and stars  
every evening between 7pm and 9pm.

**£5** Includes refreshments  
Free Admission for Children

Dumfries & Galloway Small event grant kindly received from Dumfries and Galloway Council.

## **DECEMBER 2023 AND ONWARDS - DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

|          |                                                                            |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sun 3rd  | Communion Service 11:00am with Quarterly Church Meeting after service      |
| Mon 4th  | 7th Annan Brownies & Guides 6:00pm-9:00pm (each Monday in term time)       |
| Tue 5th  | Rainbow Tribe from 5:30pm & Spectrum from 7:30pm                           |
| Wed 6th  | Rainbow Tribe Christmas Concert 6:30pm (followed by refreshments)          |
| Thu 7th  | Girls' Brigade 6:00pm (each Thursday in term time)                         |
| Sun 10th | Morning Service 11:00am                                                    |
| Thu 14th | Soup and Sweet Lunch 11:30am-1:30pm in hall                                |
| Sun 17th | Morning Service 11:00am                                                    |
| Fri 22nd | Deadline for items for January Contact Magazine                            |
| Sun 24th | Carol Service 11:00am followed by mince pies and mulled wine               |
| Mon 25th | Christmas Blessings and Joy to All, and Peace on Earth                     |
| Sun 31st | Hogmanay Morning Service 11:00am                                           |
|          |                                                                            |
| JANUARY  |                                                                            |
| Tue 9th  | School Term begins - see Jan. Contact for young people's meetings resuming |
| Thu 11th | Soup and Sweet Lunch 11:30am-1:30pm in hall                                |
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THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

Howard Thurman - a US civil rights leader and theologian - said

"When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
...To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among brothers,
To make music in the heart."

?Our challenge for 2024??