



Wesley Hall

Crookes, Sheffield



www.wesleyhall.org.uk Wesley Hall is part of Wesley Ebenezer Methodist Church (charity no. 1150284)

Sunday 1st January 2017

We hope you find a warm welcome, particularly if you are with us for the first time. All song words are projected onto the wall at the front or can be found in the books provided. Large print hymn books are available at the back of church along with separate printed sheets for songs that are not in the books.

Today's service **10:45am** **Rev. Sally Coleman (Joint Holy Communion)**
The stewards on duty are Steve and Linda Wright

<i>Sunday 8th January</i>	<i>10:30am Mr. Timon Jansen</i>	<i>6:00pm Prayer Service</i>
<i>Sunday 15th January</i>	<i>10:30am Rev. Claudia Lupi (All Age Worship)</i>	
<i>Sunday 22nd January</i>	<i>10:30am Mrs. Wendy Cartwright</i>	<i>6:00pm Stay & Pray</i>

THIS WEEK...

❖ Pat Singleton's Funeral

Pat Singleton's funeral will be held this *Thursday 5th January*. There will be a Committal Service at Grenocide Crematorium at 12:30pm followed at 1:30pm by a Service of Thanksgiving here at Wesley Hall. All are welcome.

❖ Wesley Hall Lunch Club

We are cancelling this week's Lunch Club which should have been held on *Thursday 5th January*. We are phoning round all the members to tell them but it would be good if you could pass on the message to any of our members you might meet during the week. We will be meeting as normal next *Thursday 12th January*.

COMING SOON...

❖ Songs of Praise is Coming to Sheffield

BBC Songs of Praise invite you to join them for recordings of contemporary worship hymns and songs as part of a massed choir at All Saints Ecclesall Church.

- Recording One: Saturday 21st January, 2:30pm – 5:30pm
- Recording Two: Sunday 22nd January, 2:30pm – 5:30pm

The conductor is Ken Burton and on the Saturday we are delighted to be joined by Graham Kendrick to record some of his songs, both old and new. If you would like to go along, please see Matt who will then get tickets for everyone who is interested.

❖ Congregational Meeting

There will be a congregational meeting after the service on *Sunday 5th February*. The meeting will start soon after the service has finished so please feel free to take your tea or coffee in with you. We will be sharing some of the things that have been happening recently and also looking forward to the year ahead. Everyone is welcome to this open meeting.

❖ **WEADS Panto February 2017**

WEADS will be performing the pantomime "Sleeping Beauty" at Walkley Ebenezer from *Wednesday 22nd to Saturday 25th February 2017*. Tickets are priced at £5 for adults and £3 for children for all performances. They will be available in early January from Sue Mackley on [REDACTED].

❖ **Weekend Away 2017**

We have again booked the Brincliffe Hotel in Blackpool for our Weekend Away in 2017. This will run from the evening of *Friday 5th May to Sunday 7th May 2017*, the week after the Bank Holiday. All are welcome to come along and to find out more or book a place, please see Dorothy.

AND FINALLY...

❖ **Thank You**

I would like to say a very big thank you to everybody for their thoughts, prayers and practical support during my recent illness. I have been overwhelmed with cards, texts, visits, phone calls and meals and am enormously grateful. I hope to be back in action in the New Year. Meanwhile, can I wish you all a Merry Christmas! Alison.

❖ **New Offering Envelopes**

The new offering envelopes for 2017 are now available to pick up at the back of church. If you have any questions or would like to know more about giving to Wesley Hall, please see Matt.

THE PRESIDENTIAL CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

The President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference, the Revd Dr Roger Walton and Rachel Lampard MBE, speak about the Nativity, Syria and unpromising situations in this year's Christmas Message (full text below).

The shabby collection of rooms was perched on the edge of a steep hill above Amman in Jordan. We were visiting a family of Syrian refugees who had just had a baby, and were being helped by funding provided by the Methodist charity, All We Can.

A woman, who we assumed was the grandmother, answered the door and invited us in. We sat on the floor, along with a local health worker. The father appeared with the baby, Yosra, and three other small children. It turned out that the woman was not the grandmother, but rather the mother of the family. She was just in her 30s, prematurely aged by the privations and stresses of recent years. They had left Syria four years ago, and now lived in a couple of basic rooms. The three children were similar ages to my own, but were tiny. As a refugee the father was banned from working and the family was reliant on support from a charity in order to be able to survive.

What an unpromising situation they were in. The family were underfed, with very little prospect of being able to improve their circumstances. They were desperate to go back to Syria, but recognised that this was unlikely any time soon. And their tiny baby, who slept in my arms, faced growing into adulthood in a foreign country, in poverty.

And yet. When we asked the father of the family what he wanted for the future, instead of talking about better housing, more food, or even a return to Syria, said "I want my children to be the best people that they can be". It was breath-taking. A family were facing immense poverty and dislocation, yet had the highest hopes for the character and contribution of their children.

A similarly unpromising set of circumstances surrounded another young family less than 50 miles away in Bethlehem two millennia ago. A young girl had given birth to a baby, far from her home and her family, in an outhouse, shared with animals. She had become pregnant outside marriage, and was only rescued from shame and rejection by her fiancé taking on a baby that wasn't his. Ahead lay real danger, as the ruler of the area would soon order his soldiers to slaughter all the baby boys. A dirty,

shameful, dangerous situation. An unpromising set of circumstances. And yet. This is exactly the place the Messiah, the son of God, was born into.

But should we really be surprised? This is a God who said that the kingdom of heaven belonged, not to the rich or powerful or religious, but to little children. This is a God who chose women, tax collectors, fishermen to begin a worldwide movement for the salvation of all people. Unpromising is not a word which seems to put God off; on the contrary the Bible seems to suggest that God seeks out the unpromising, the weak, the outcast in order to build his kingdom. The apostle Paul, when writing to the Corinthians, said "But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God." (1 Corinthians 27-19)

We are living in times which might be described as unpromising, or even "interesting" according to the old Chinese proverb. We face great uncertainty in our politics, our economics, our relationships with one another. Around the planet there is apparently relentless violence, and the poorest, as ever, bear the consequences of our inability to restrain our use of resources. Our own Methodist Church is seeing a continuing decline in members and a shortage of ministers for the churches we have. The future is surely unpromising.

And yet. Our faith surely prompts us not to turn away purely because any situation looks unpromising. This doesn't mean facing it with blind and passive optimism. Instead we have a hope which is grounded in the foolishness of God, which is wiser and stronger than wisdom and strength of the world. And God is at work in our world, and invites us to join in. As the theologian Ken Leech said: "hope isn't a state of mind; it's a piece of work". In the unpromising situations in our world, where is God inviting us to join in? Where is God asking us to see the treasure that is hidden within the clay jars? Where is God asking us, not to be optimistic, but rather to be hopeful?

We would like to suggest that you do three things over this "unpromising" Christmas season.

Firstly, the Methodist Church, together with the United Reformed Church, the Baptist Union and the Church of Scotland, have produced a short film, "A Very British Nativity", which suggests how Mary and Joseph might have fared arriving in the UK as asylum seekers. Why not watch it, share it and perhaps show it as part of your Christmas celebrations at church - and reflect on what this unpromising small family might mean for others, asylum seekers and refugees in particular, and how we can make their future more hopeful.

Secondly, we invite you to reflect on something that initially appeared unpromising. This might be something in your own life, the life of your church, or in the wider society or world. How was the potential or transformation within each situation revealed? What was the treasure in the clay jars?

And thirdly ask yourself: what is unpromising in your life or church or community at the moment? What might God be doing there already - or what might God do if only you would join in?

In this season we pray that you will have a happy and peace-filled Christmas, and that you will know the love of God who acts through the most unpromising things and people to bring about his kingdom of holiness and justice.

The Revd Dr Roger Walton and Rachel Lampard MBE