

Nativity

s t a r s a v i o u r b
 t w a w s t a b l e y x
 i n n k e e p e r w v y
 b e t h l e h e m h a v
 f r a n k i n c e n s e
 j k i n g l h e r o d m
 a r b l e s s i n g d a
 g s h e p h e r d s k r
 o n j o s e p h c y c y
 l f c m i r a c l e r b
 d g t m y r r h t p w q
 q h e y l j o u r n e y

star	Bethlehem	Joseph	
Saviour	frankincense	miracle	gold
stable	King Herod	myrrh	Mary
innkeeper	shepherds	journey	

A big "thank you" to all contributors this month. Please continue to furnish us with YOUR news, YOUR pictures, YOUR poem, YOUR story, any articles of interest to others. Please give to Susan Bye or Sharon Joddrell at church or post or send by email to susan@msbye.co.uk, to arrive by **15th January** for the February edition.

© Mansfield Road Baptist Church, Sherwood Rise, Nottingham NG7 6JN
 Website: www.mrbc.org.uk

MRBC

CHURCH MAGAZINE—DECEMBER 2021 / JANUARY 2022



The Young Disciples Group are learning about the Christmas Story and Kushi coloured in this Christmas Card

Mansfield Road Baptist Church

Message from our Minister

Matthew 1

¹⁸⁻¹⁹ *The birth of Jesus took place like this. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. Before they enjoyed their wedding night, Joseph discovered she was pregnant. (It was by the Holy Spirit, but he didn't know that.) Joseph, chagrined but noble, determined to take care of things quietly so Mary would not be disgraced.²⁰⁻²³ While he was trying to figure a way out, he had a dream. God's angel spoke in the dream: "Joseph, son of David, don't hesitate to get married. Mary's pregnancy is Spirit-conceived. God's Holy Spirit has made her pregnant. She will bring a son to birth, and when she does, you, Joseph, will name him Jesus—'God saves'—because he will save his people from their sins." This would bring the prophet's embryonic revelation to full term: Watch for this—a virgin will get pregnant and bear a son; They will name him Immanuel (Hebrew for "God is with us").²⁴⁻²⁵ Then Joseph woke up. He did exactly what God's angel commanded in the dream: He married Mary. But he did not consummate the marriage until she had the baby. He named the baby Jesus.*

Here we are at the start of Advent, looking forward to the promise of Christmas. For any of us going to the supermarkets currently we are getting constant reminders of the number of sleeps that we have before December the 25th. We look forward to Christmas with the expectancy and hope it brings, reminding ourselves of Jesus, Immanuel, born that first Christmas Day.

In the Gospel reading we find that Joseph was in a difficult place, trying to work out what to do. In his confusion God came alongside and the Scripture tells that an "*angel spoke*". This year the confusion and finding the way ahead is something that is there for so many of us and it comes after months of similar emotions when so much of regular life has been turned on its head. We want the promise of Christmas to break into our weariness and uncertainty.

One of the prayers I regularly read has these words: "*Beckoning God, your child in a manger invites us to lean close and bow down*" What tremendous words that are for us all both individually and together. The prophecy revealed most powerfully that first Christmas is there to become real in our midst as we live within our localities and families and together as church, Immanuel, God with us.

The preparation and eating of the feast, decorations, gift-giving, entertainments etc were all deemed essential to the celebration of the festival and were to be shared by the whole family. Prince Albert introduced to England the German tradition of a decorated fir tree, and each year a fresh fir tree was brought into the home and decorated on Christmas Eve.

Another tradition of Victorian times was the performances in every hall, church and chapel almost, of Handel's Messiah—a unique blend of Bible



passages and excellent music. This, as a vital part of Christmas for many people, was maintained up to, say, 50 years ago and I remember well my participation as a young man in at least four or five performances each year in the Albert Hall. To this day, on reading or hearing certain Bible passages I have an instant recollection of the great music to which Handel set them.

Finally, and this may or may not be familiar to readers, in Holland (and some other countries) for most children the most important day in December is the 5th, when Sinterklaas (St Nicholas) brings them their presents. There are numerous traditions around this exotic version of our Santa Claus, but it's all basically on a similar theme. Christmas itself is quite separate and is a much quieter day with church services and a family meal. Some Dutch children actually believe that Kerstman (Santa Claus) will also bring presents on Christmas Day. A bad case of wishful thinking!

Christmas Celebrations by John Sheppard

I was asked by the editor to put together a few thoughts on Christmas. I shall offer no profound theological reflections of course, there being at least two members of the MRBC community who are infinitely better qualified than I to do that. I do, however, venture to briefly set out a few observations on certain aspects of peoples' ways of celebrating Christmas.

In the early years of Christianity, Easter was the principal celebration, and it was not until the fourth century that church officials decided to institute the birth of Jesus as a holy day (or holiday). It is commonly believed that 25th December was chosen by the church in an effort to adopt and absorb certain pagan traditions of the winter season. In the Middle Ages, Christianity had, for the most part, replaced pagan beliefs and so, at Christmas, believers attended church and then celebrated in a carnival-like atmosphere with the predictable level of feasting and drinking.

During that 17th century period of strife, usually known as the English Civil War, Parliament passed an ordinance abolishing Christmas, Easter, and the other holy days that were traditionally observed. On Christmas Day 1647 riots broke out in Ipswich and Canterbury, when the authorities moved to forbid Christmas celebrations. In Canterbury, the rioters drove the mayor and many magistrates and ministers out of the city, and troops had to be brought in to restore order! In due course, the customary traditions began once more to be observed.

The Victorians transformed the idea of Christmas so that it became centred around the family, and not necessarily the Holy Family!



Having bowed down we are all to stand up and travel onwards as God's people, disciples of Jesus each and every day. As we do this what we will find is that our yearnings for expectancy and hope in the midst of our weariness will themselves take hold and the Christmas season will resource us and guide us in our discipleship ahead.

God's blessing this Christmas

Andy Wilson

CHURCH DIARY

Sunday Services continue each week at 10.30am with groups for the children & young people. A recorded version of our services will be available on the website during the Monday following.

Prayer Meeting Thursdays 2nd, 9th & 16th December from 1.00 to 1.45pm

Toddler Café Mondays 6th & 13th from 10.00 to 11.45am

Open House Thursdays 2nd, 9th & 16th from 2.00 to 4.00pm

Church Meeting Wednesday 15th December at 7.30pm

Welcome Hall Evening Wednesday 8th December from 6.30 – 8.00pm

Mid-week ministries start afresh in the New Year in the week beginning Monday 10th January.



CHRISTMAS & NEW YEAR SERVICES

Sunday 12th December @ 10.30am

Nativity Service

Sunday 19th December @ 10.30am

Communion & Carols

Saturday 25th December @ 10.30am

CHRISTMAS DAY SERVICE

Sunday 2nd January @ 10.30am

Morning Service

(please note that there will be no service on Sunday 26th December)

CORONAVIRUS We are asking people to continue to wear masks within the building, including during singing.

CHURCH OFFICE The Church Office is closed from Thursday 23rd December until Wednesday 5th January.

CHURCH CHRISTMAS CARD

From Sunday 5th December, there will be opportunity to send a Christmas card to the Church family. This will be in the Welcome Hall and we are invited to send a card and make a monetary gift. This will go towards a specific project of Baptist World Mission promoting safety and wellbeing for children in Uganda. Please speak with Joan Sheppard for more information.

PRAYER POINTS

- 1) For those people most isolated as this becomes more acute at this time of year.
- 2) For the Thursday afternoon ministry, that this will flourish.
- 3) For those working within or alongside the NHS as their high workloads continue.

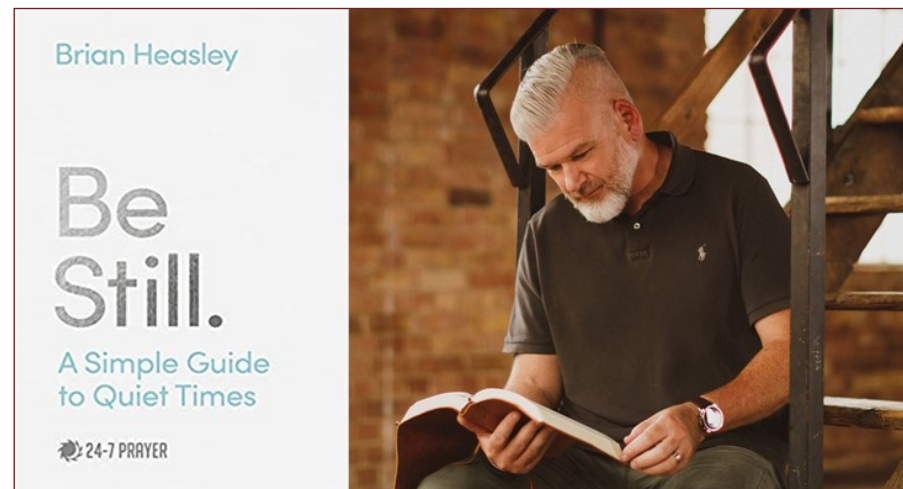
A Quiet Time—by Dave Mangan

“Taste and see that the Lord is good” Psalm 34:8

A quiet time each day provides an opportunity to slow down, read God’s word, reflect, and pray. At some points in my life however a quiet time with God has felt impossible to maintain. I was too distracted by my own thoughts, a long “to do” list or the fact that I didn’t feel that my quiet time was having any sort of impact on my life.

Brian Heasley’s new book “Be Still” is a very practical and easy-to-read guide that I wish had been available to me several years ago. It is a prayer book that is full of ideas about different ways to pray and advice about how to build a quiet time into your daily routine. Each short chapter covers one aspect of being still and focusing on God. Reading his book has provided me with new ways to deal with distractions, enabled me to read scripture more creatively, encouraged me to find different ways of using my imagination in prayer, and suggested ways to keep my life and time with God simple.

The chapter that has made an immediate impact on my quiet time was the one on journaling. I have never really kept a journal, but Brian points out that journaling bibles exist. These bibles are designed with enough space and pages thick enough to both highlight certain passages and write notes in the margins. I have purchased a journaling bible and for the first time am keeping a record of my quiet time.



About the Author

Brian Heasley is a man who has faced many struggles in his own life and his personal testimony is inspirational. Currently Brian is the International Prayer Director for 24-7 Prayer and is part of 24-7's international oversight team. He also works at Lambeth Palace as Global Ambassador for Thy Kingdom Come. Along with his wife Tracy, Brian pioneered the work of 24-7 Prayer in Ibiza, where they developed rhythms of Christian prayer and mission. His previous books include *Writing on the Wall* (Baker, 2007) and *Gatecrashing* (Muddy Pearl, 2014).

A video series based on the book can be found at www.24-7prayer.com/resource/be-still-series/