

Dear Friends

This is a time when we anticipate the light of Christ coming into our dark world once again. Advent is a time of hope when we look forward to the coming of Jesus as a baby at Christmas but also when He will come again at the end of time to make all things new.

At times the world seems to be a dreadful place. There are constant warnings about climate change and global warming and the consequences to the future if we do not change our polluting ways. We are constantly being bombarded by news of wars and atrocities from all over the world. The TV is full of pictures of earthquakes, fires, floods and famine, and the damage that they cause to the land and people. Even our financial institutions are under threat and the world economy seems to be at breaking point.

There are also times in our own lives when things look bleak and hopeless. We may be struggling to make ends meet wondering how we will pay the next bill that comes through the letter box. We may be suffering from an incurable disease or have a loved one in that situation. We may be remembering past Christmases when our families were altogether and now we are all alone.

What does the Advent hope – the Christmas hope – mean to us in the Southend and Leigh Methodist circuit at the end of 2011 and the beginning of 2012?

Jesus reminds us that wars and such things must happen these are the beginning of birth pains (Mark 13: 7-8) because God is doing something new. That new thing began when a young unmarried woman submitted her will to God and became obedient to Him (Luke 1: 26 – 38). It continued when a young man also decided to obey God and trust his betrothed (Matt 1: 18 – 25). Mary's pregnancy would have been bad news to her family and community and she would have faced stoning for adultery if Joseph had not stood by her despite her unbelievable story.

Mary was certain that her physical condition was the result of a spiritual encounter. Joseph hoped that she was telling the truth and believed the message given to him in a dream.

God still speaks to people and calls them to serve Him. God's plan for His people continues today, and we are part of it. God's plan of creating a new world involves creating new people. It involves people hearing God's message to them and responding as Mary and Joseph heard and responded. It involves being obedient to God's calling and letting go of cherished traditions and beliefs – as Mary and Joseph did. It involves self sacrifice and being born again with a new understanding of God's wishes for us.

Mary and Joseph believed the impossible. They trusted God. Their lives were not easy. They were hunted as criminals and sought asylum in Egypt, but they were blessed and a new possibility began as they nurtured Jesus. The Son of God came into the world to share in this mess with us. Through his death and resurrection the promise of eternal life becomes a reality to all who believe.

The doom and gloom of the local, national and international news, and our own personal upsets and sadness pale into insignificance when we realise that Jesus **is** alive. He **has** broken the power of death and promises new life to all who believe. That is the real hope for all of us, not just in Southend and Leigh but also in Essex, Britain and the world.

Happy Christmas



An appeal

God is calling people into His service to tell others the good news of his love. Are you being called to preach? If you think you might be, please contact me and we can explore that call together.

