



Bethel Christian Fellowship

Vital Signs

December 2017

Breaking of Bread
First Sunday of the month

BCF Leadership team:
Gordon Crick (leading)
David Cameron
Gary Fisher
Chris Taylor

Donations for Witham
Foodbank on the first Sunday
of each month please!
Food or cash accepted!

#foodbanksunday

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor,
Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with
justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.*

Isaiah 9:6-7

Bethel Christian Fellowship meets:

- * at 9.30am on the second Sunday of the month
for a café service and
- * at 10.30am on all other Sundays
at

Maltings Academy, Spinks Lane, Witham.

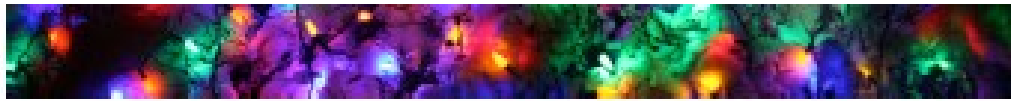
www.bethel-witham.co.uk
bethelwitham@googlemail.com

01376 520705

Facebook: @bethel-witham

Church office at The Well Coffee Shop, Guithavon St, Witham.

Christmas Lights



Colourful, glittering, welcoming Christmas lights. We get them out of the cupboard each year and plug them in, on the Christmas tree, on furniture, round doorways, even outside, on trees, bushes and to light up whole houses.

Lovely to look at - they mark the Christmas season. Many of us light candles, producing light and fire - doubling the spiritual imagery.

I simply want to celebrate Jesus this Christmas, as the light of the world. In John chapter 8 verse 12, Jesus spoke to the people saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

This is a life-changing verse if you see it for what it is – see him for who he is. It says that following Jesus is not just a once a year routine. It means following him for who he is. Being so taken with him that you join yourself to him. And notice that when you follow him, you have him – you have him as the light of life: "I am the light . . . Whoever follows me . . . will have the light . . ." You will have me, he says, as your light. If you follow me,

you have me. I am yours. I am your Shepherd and your Sacrifice and your Living Water and your Bread from Heaven and your God, and your Light.

The light of life - the light Jesus brings. The ability to see things for what they are, the light that shows up the ugliness of greed, selfishness, and anger. The same light shows direction, a way to walk and above all, peace to our souls. More than that the light of Jesus will reveal all that is beautiful. He will be the light in which you see God. He will be the light in which you see mountains and valleys and oceans and rivers and trees and animals and people. Nothing will be the same again when you have him as your light. Everything looks different in the light of Christ.

So Christmas lights, in themselves pretty and bright, but only tiny sparkling symbols of Jesus, the greater light.

Gordon



The Purpose of Christmas - What are you celebrating this Christmas?

Christmas is a party. Specifically, it's a birthday party - for Jesus - and birthdays are meant to be celebrated. It's why we say "Merry Christmas!"

Ironically, at most Christmas parties the person whose birthday we're supposed to be celebrating is completely ignored. He's never even mentioned. Although Jesus is the reason for the season, he's often overlooked or merely mentioned along with Rudolph, Frosty the Snowman, Santa Claus, the Grinch, and a long list of celebrated fictional characters.

As I was writing this little book (The Purpose of Christmas), I decided to take a survey of Christmas shoppers. I asked, "What are you celebrating this Christmas?" Most answers had nothing to do with Jesus:

"I'm celebrating that I made it through another year."

"I'm celebrating being home with my family."

"I got a Christmas bonus."

"I'm not celebrating anything. I'm just trying to survive."

Preparing for Christmas can be a lot of work, especially for mums. With the pressure of buying gifts, sending cards, decorating our homes, putting up lights, cooking, attending parties, and cleaning up afterward, we have little time to actually enjoy the meaning of Christmas.

The first purpose of Christmas is celebration! We learn this from the angel's opening statement to the

shepherds of Bethlehem. God had wonderful news for us that would cause us all to rejoice, celebrate, and throw a party: "I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." Luke 2:10.

The good news of Christmas is worth celebrating for three reasons. It is personal: "I bring YOU." It is positive: "GOOD news of great joy." And it is universal: "for ALL the people." It doesn't matter who you are, what you've done, where you've been, or where you're headed - this news is for you.

A national magazine used to carry a feature called "News You Can Use." The angel brought us news we can use. It's the best news in the world: God loves you! God is with you! God is for you! Christmas is a time to celebrate that God loves you!

The most famous statement in the Bible is Jesus' explanation of why God sent him to earth: "God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16). The entire reason for Christmas is the love of God. God loves you so much that he came to earth as a human so you could get to know him and learn to trust him and love him back.

Think about this. If God didn't want to love something, he would not have created it. Everything you see, and the trillions of things you can't see, was made by God for his enjoyment. He loves it all, even when we mess it up with our sin. He still has a purpose for it. Every star, every planet, every plant, every animal, every cell, and, most of all, every human being was created out of God's compassion.

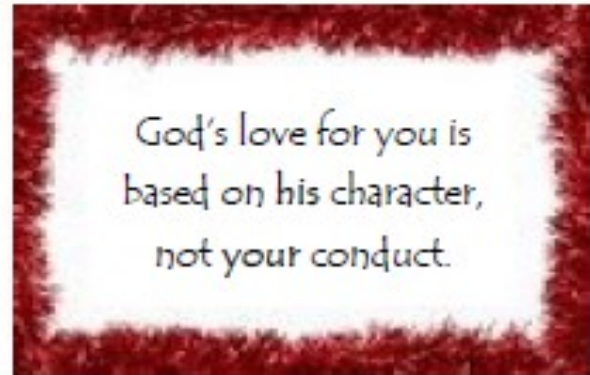


You were created as an object of God's love. He made you in order to love you! His love is the reason you're alive and breathing. Every time your heart beats and every time you take a breath, God is saying, "I love you." You would not exist if God had not wanted you. Although there are accidental parents, there are no accidental babies. The parents may not have planned them, but God did.

Because God's love for you is unconditional, he loves you on your bad days as much as on your good days. He loves you when you don't feel his love as much as when you do. He loves you regardless of your performance, your moods, your actions, or your thoughts. There is nothing you can do that will make God stop loving you. You could try, but you'd fail – because God's love for you is based on his character, not your conduct.

The baby born in Bethlehem did not stay a baby. Jesus grew to manhood, modelled for us the kind of life that pleases God, taught us the truth, paid for every sin we commit by dying on a cross, then proved that he was God and could save us by coming back to life. This is the Good News. When the Romans nailed Jesus to a cross, they stretched his arms as wide as they could. With his arms wide open, Jesus was physically demonstrating, "I love you this much! I love you so much it hurts! I'd rather die than live without you!" The next time you see a picture or statue of Jesus with outstretched arms on the cross, remember, he is saying, "I love you this much!"

This article is an excerpt from Rick Warren's *The Purpose of Christmas* © 2008 Rick Warren
This article first appeared on ChristianityToday.com on 19/12/08. Used by permission of Christianity Today, Carol Stream, IL 60188.



Might There Be More To Christmas Than Meets The Eye?

Explore this question and more in this short, first century account of the life of Jesus published by the Bible Society.

The Gospel of Luke - including the Christmas story - is a modern, easy to read translation, taking you on a journey from Jesus' birth, through to Jerusalem, where the story reaches it's conclusion.

Discover and decide ...

FREE copies available on our Sunday morning welcome desk at the Maltings, or ask Gordon or a member of the welcome team if you'd like a copy.





The Well's Christmas Bread and Butter Pudding

(Makes 6 generous portions)

37g cinnamon sugar
 300ml double cream
 6 buttered mincemeat sandwiches, crusts removed and cut into triangles
 3 large free range eggs gently beaten
 1/4 pint of whole milk
 50g caster sugar
 1 tsp good quality vanilla extract

1. Preheat oven to Gas4/ Fan160c/180c.
2. In a large 6-serving pyrex dish add the sandwich triangles in neat lines top corner pointing upwards
3. Make a custard by mixing the cream, milk, eggs, caster sugar and vanilla together.
4. Pour custard over the sandwiches.
5. Leave to absorb for 30 minutes.
6. Sprinkle over the cinnamon sugar.
7. Cook for approx. 40 minutes. It should be crisp, golden and well risen....enjoy!

No time to cook?...come and get a delicious pre-made portion served with custard, cream or ice cream for only £2.15 ... It tastes fantastic with one of our Christmas drinks!

Christmas at The Well!

We are open Monday to Saturday, 10am-2pm and would love to offer you something from our fabulous Christmas menu:

Ham, Mozzarella & Cranberry Toastie, £3.75

Mozzarella & Cranberry Toastie, £3.50

Brie, Bacon & Cranberry Toastie, £4.50

All served with Kettle crisps and a side salad.

Sausage Sandwich with fried onions & sage mayo and Kettle crisps, £3.50

Sausage Sandwich with fried onions & cranberry sauce, and Kettle crisps, £3.50

Hot Homemade Christmas Bread and Butter Pudding £2.15

Mince Pies (warm or cold) £1

Warm Chocolate Fudge Cake £2.15

Traditional Fruit Cake £2.20

All served with custard or cream

Gingerbread or Chai Latte £2.30

Gingerbread, Millionaires Shortbread or Hazelnut Hot Chocolate £2.30

We will be open right up to 2pm on Saturday 23rd December, and then we are back again after the New Year on Tuesday 2nd January 2018.

The Well would like to offer Christmas blessings to all it's customers over this wonderful time of year!

The Well's Christmas Gingerbread Latte



Tall latte glass

Hot Milk

Shot of freshly ground
coffee

(Big bags of Fairtrade Kingdom
beans can be bought from The Well at
only £12 each)

Boiling hot water

4 tsp top quality Gingerbread Syrup
Squirry Cream

Gold Hundreds and Thousands
A Borders Oat Crumble Biscuit

1. Make a gingerbread latte by mixing piping hot milk and gingerbread syrup to a large shot of freshly ground coffee.
2. Top with a generous swirl of cream.
3. Sprinkle with Christmassy gold hundreds and thousands.
4. Serve on a saucer, with a teaspoon and a Borders Oat Crumble Biscuit....enjoy!

In need of a warming drink when in town? Come and savour one of our delicious festive drinks for only £2.30.

Christmas Events

23rd December: Rejoice at Christmas and have good cheer, with free mince pies, mulled wine, nibbles and carol singing at The Well

Throughout December: Freebie vouchers for The Well were handed out at The Dickensian Fayre. Did you get a bauble? ...the vouchers are inside.....



Foodbank Sunday

Thank you everyone for your support throughout the year. We are hoping to have enough stock to supply our clients with what they need and also some Christmas extras.

We would be grateful for small items of Christmas fayre – always in sealed packets please and with a 'Best Before' date of at least 31 January 2018:

- * Christmas Cakes (small fruit cakes, chocolate rolls etc)
- * Small or medium size Christmas Puddings
- * Festive biscuit selections
- * Chocolate biscuits (eg fingers)
- * Snacks and nibbles
- * Small boxes of chocolates
- * Children's Christmas sweets
- * Mince pieces (careful of the BB date on these!)

For general stock, we always need:

- * Sponge Puddings
- * Tinned cold meat
- * Cereal bars
- * Chocolate biscuits (eg kit kat)
- * Packet soup
- * 500g bags of sugar
- * Instant mash
- * Long life fruit juice cartons

Food items can be dropped off at our church service on the first Sunday of the month, at The Well, in Tesco's near the exit, or to David Brett in the Fellowship.

Thank you.

Mince Pie Schmince Pie

As you tuck into a delicious mince pie, have you ever wondered why we eat them at Christmas at all?

Mincemeat and mince pies were actually a speciality in 16th century England. Early mince pies were made of meat, fruit and spices inspired by the Crusaders returning from the Middle East. Mince pies were meant to be formed of 13 ingredients to represent Christ and the apostles, and then formed into large oval shapes to represent the manger, thus sometimes called 'Manger Pies'.

Some theories say that Puritans condemned the pies as a Catholic custom as they were thought to be part of the tradition of presenting sweetmeats to the Roman fathers in the Vatican. The Puritans under Oliver Cromwell actually went so far as to ban the celebration of Christmas entirely!

Meat was no longer in the recipe by Victorian times, although beef suet often remains (vegetarians beware!).

Mary Appleton's Mince Pie Tart

Rub 50g butter into 125g plain flour until it looks like breadcrumbs, mix into a firm dough with a couple of tablespoons of water. Set aside to chill.

Roll out pastry and line a 9 inch pie plate, and scatter 2 crumbled trifle sponges over the base. Separately, mix a 800g jar of mincemeat with the drained contents of a 400g tin of crushed pineapple, then spoon over the pastry and sponges.

Bake for 30-40 minutes at 190c/375f/gas 5 until the filling bubbles and the pastry is golden.

Whisk 3 egg whites to stiff peaks, then whisk in 75g caster sugar, 1 tablespoon at a time. Mix another 75g of caster sugar with 25g ground almonds, then fold into the egg mixture. Spread or pipe the meringue in a circle around the edge of the mincemeat, add a decoration of cherries, and return to the oven for a further ten minutes until the meringue is golden.



After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." Matt 2:1-2

Tinsel is a type of decoration designed to mimic ice. Thin strips of sparkling material attached to thread is called 'tinsel'. Long narrow strips not attached to a thread are called 'lametta' and are meant to represent icicles. The word is from the Old French word 'estincele', which means 'sparkle'. (Concise Oxford Dictionary).

Tinsel was invented in Nuremberg, Germany around 1610 and was originally made from strands of silver. Before the 16th century, tinsel would adorn sculptures rather than Christmas trees, but was later used on trees to enhance the flickering of the candles on the tree.

It has been said that the use of tinsel at Christmas represented the starry sky over the Nativity. (Wikipedia)

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Matt 2:9-11

Amanda Fox's Honeycomb Ice-Cream

I have been doing this recipe for years! We all love it, especially at Christmas because it's not too heavy. Homemade icecream takes a while to soften so give it 1/2 an hour out of the freezer before serving. If you don't feel confident making the honeycomb just buy some.

2tbsp of golden syrup	1 pint of whipping cream	5tbsp sugar
Small tin condensed milk	1tsp bicarbonate of soda	

Honeycomb:

Grease and line a deep baking tray ready to pour the honeycomb into it, have the bicarb ready because you will need to work quickly.

In a heavy based pan heat the sugar and syrup gently for about 4-5 mins or if you have a sugar thermometer to 150c (which I don't have so normally boil mine to death!).

Once the sugar syrup is ready stir in the bicarb (this will froth up) then immediately pour into the baking tray to set.

Ice-cream:

Whip the whipping cream until thick but not stiff, fold in the condensed milk. Crush the honeycomb and fold into the cream mixture.

Transfer to a freezer-proof container. You will have to check it every hour, for about three hours to whisk it with a fork to break down the ice crystals. If you have an ice-cream machine pour the ice-cream straight in to it for about 20-30 mins, then pour it into a freezer-proof container. Allow to soften before serving!



Oh my God! - Turn the world on its head & make a curse into a blessing.

The exclamation "Oh my God!" is usually offensive, but it has its place for believers. "Oh my God!" is an exclamation that is used frequently in all kinds of situations because it has become common usage in everyday conversation.

Soon after the devastation of 11 September 2001, the Mayor of New York was asked what his initial thoughts were when he heard about the first plane hitting the North Tower. He remembered that it was "Oh my God!" When the first reports of the Japanese Tsunami were received, the reaction of the television reporter was "Oh my God!" When the television crew first saw the local fishermen on the brink of the Victoria Fall their reaction was "Oh my God!" When the pupils received news of their GCSE and A Level results the most common expression was "Oh my God!"

However, a similar expression, but with a different application, must have entered the minds of the privileged few who actually saw the baby Jesus in a manger. They must have gazed in awe as God revealed Himself in human form. Later, the first disciples were with Jesus in all kinds of circumstances through His earthly ministry. And, although the

general public may get to know someone in certain contexts, it's the family or those who are closest to that person who see the individual as he or she really is. So the disciples, who lived so close with Jesus for three years, not only shared His personal moments of joy and despair but also discovered what God is like.

Meanwhile, the apostle Paul writing to the Colossians, explains that Jesus is the image of the invisible God; and Jesus Himself declared that those who had seen Him had seen the Father. So the disciples believed that Jesus was the Son of God and, having caught a glimpse of the Father, they preached the glorious truth wherever they went.

For many, the Christmas scene in a stable is the whole story because they do not see beyond the manger. They do not perceive the image of the Father. Similarly, just as there are those who do not see the baby Jesus as the Son of God, not everyone grasped the significance of the great event when our Lord was born. Not a great number heard the angels announcing the good tidings; not many observed the star.

It was the shepherds, who witnessed the heavenly host, and the wise men with their gifts, who made their way to see the baby. They were given the precious opportunity to marvel at the image of the Father, and then in wonderment to breathe the words, "Oh my God!"

Keith Taylor

Celebrate Christmas With Bethel

Sunday 3rd December - evening

Bethel Fever Teen Christmas Party

Sunday 10th December - 9.30am

Christmas Cafe Service, Maltings Academy, Spinks Lane

Wednesday 13th December - morning

Little Friends of Bethel Toddler Christmas Party

Wednesday 13th December - 7pm

Town Carol Service around the Christmas Tree, Witham High Street

Friday 15th December - 7.30pm

The Great Bethel Christmas Quiz, Bethel Building, Church Street.
£2 per person including refreshments, teams of 4-6. (please book)

Sunday 17th December - 4pm

Family Carol Service, Maltings Academy, Spinks Lane

Tuesday 19th December - 3pm

Churches Together Carol Service, Park View Care Home, Kings Chase, Witham

Sunday 24th December - 10.30am

Short Family Service at Bethel Building, Church Street.

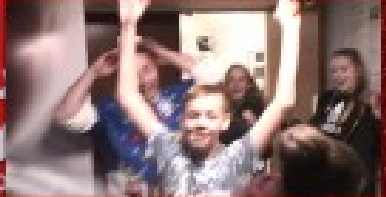
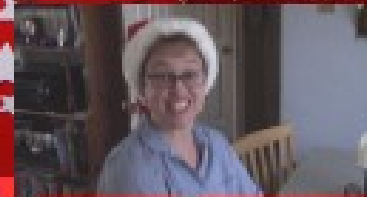
Monday 25th December - 10.30am

Short Family Celebration at Bethel Building, Church Street

Monday 31st December - 10.30am

Short Family Celebration at Bethel Building,
Church Street.

Christmas at Bethel was no fun last year - and why should this year be any different? Say "Bah, Humbug" and watch this year's and last year's Christmas videos at www.facebook.com/pg/bethel.witham/videos/



**Merry Christmas
from all at Bethel!**

© Luke Taylor 2016