

JANUARY/FEBRUARY

FROM THE C.O.'S DESK

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Happy New Year!

A fresh start, a chance for a clean slate, resolutions, commitments. or hunkering down, hiding away to retreat from the gloom of the dreariest part of the year? Maybe it's overwhelming, even frightening, all those blank pages in the diary; the unknown looms ahead. We've just finished a year, and couldn't have guessed where it would take us. God, would you give us eyes to see where you were through all the ups and downs of 2023. Lord, would you give us faith to trust you are holding us through all that is to come in 2024. We're delighted to be welcoming Darren to the team, as he covers for Amanda while she continues to recover,

A reminder from Lamentations 3:21-26...
'But there's one thing I remember, and remembering, I keep a grip on hope. God's loyal love couldn't have run out, God's merciful love couldn't have dried up. They're created new every morning. How great your faithfulness! I'm sticking with God, I say it over and over. He's all I've got left. God proves to be good to the man who passionately waits, to the woman who diligently seeks. It's a good thing to quietly hope, quietly hope for help from God.'

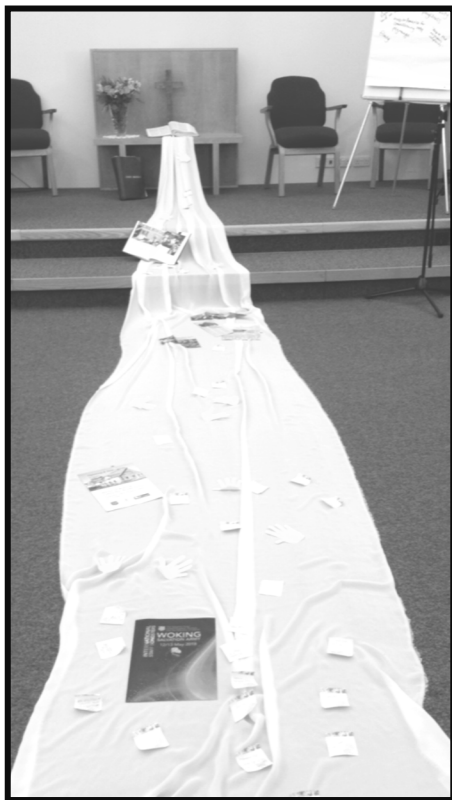
Whatever 2024 has to bring, we're looking forward to facing it together with you. Even though the Christmas lights may have been packed away for another year, the Light of the World remains with us, shining brightly, leading us forward a step at a time.



Corps Anniversary 2023

As we entered the hall for Sunday worship on the corps Anniversary, which incidentally was being celebrated on the 5 November, we found a train of white material that flowed from the cross on the Mercy Seat on the platform to the middle of the hall. We were to later use this as a time line for the history of Woking Corps. Seating was obviously different from usual with seats arranged on three sides of the time line. The band and songsters were not on duty that morning so we were able to sit with family and friends.

We sang some of the cherished old favourites that pointed us to God's faithfulness over the years and we prayed for our small group of children as they excitedly exited for Kids' Church. We'd received either cut out paper hands or postit notes as we'd arrived and we were encouraged to talk in threes as to how we had come to the corps and write that briefly on the hands or notes and then place them on the time line. Some guidance had been given as on the white material there were four date indicators, a book and some programmes with the date on them and we placed our notes where appropriate. There were a handful at the top end, not far along the timeline - they were people who'd been at the corps an exceptionally long time!!! Gill Gregory, No 1 on the Roll obviously



being one of them, There was a whole cluster and many, many more near the opposite end of the time line which was our present day attendees. The invitation was given to share memories and Pete S gave a broad over view 70 & 80 and earlier, whereas Gill Gregory concentrated on the occasion in 1999 when 21 of us travelled to Atlanta in the USA to support Bernice Knott at her Commissioning and an extra anecdote from Derrick.

We also shared in an interactive prayer time again using notes to put our hopes for the future of the corps which this time were put on the Mercy Seat.

Xander challenged us to remember the Sabbath – the command to make time to stop, particularly as we were approaching the run up to Christmas. How many of us would take up his challenge!!

Meanwhile Kids' Church had concentrated on Jesus walking on the

water with an excellent practical illustration of trust – the place was awash with water but they were having great fun and receiving sound teaching. Brilliant Naomi!!

Our morning concluded with coffee and celebratory cupcakes.

Later in the day some of our neighbours from across the way came to share in a Bonfire Night fire pit in the car park!!! You can read about this elsewhere in this issue.

Remembrance 2023

Action shot of the Band on duty at the **Remembrance Day Service** in Jubilee Square on Sunday 12 November.

Major John and Andy Stickland played the Last Post.

Meanwhile, the Sunday morning meeting was led by Captain Xander, The two minutes silence was led by Peter Glover. One Thousand Men are Walking, written by 14 year old Joshua Dyer was read by Dennis Pocock.

Following on with the theme of remembrance we considered the words of the dying thief at Christ's crucifixion 'Remember me



when you come into your Kingdom.' The use of the Taize chant 'Jesus, remember me' provided moments of quiet reflection.

Sam Beare Hospice Carol Concert

Major John Martin

'For the fourth year, a group of the band - ably supported by Fred Fuller (Staines SA) and Graham Davey (Bisley Band) - were privileged to take part in the Sam Beare Hospice Christmas Carol Concert held at Christ Church, and organised by one of the charity sponsors, Seymours Estate Agents.

The church was packed, not least because of the increase in the number of participants!

School choirs from Hoe Bridge, St. Dunstons, Barnsbury, and Horsell CofE, together with Guild School of Acting, and the Italli Conti Singing Company, ensured there lots of supportive parents! The school choirs were excellent and relished the opportunity to sing in front of a large audience. Top of the bill were performers from the West End production of 'Frozen', and the UK party band of the year, Bloomfield Avenue. The actors from 'Frozen' sang a medley from the show and wowed the crowd with their professionalism - the children particularly excited to be so close to stage artists of this quality!

Bloomfield Avenue are a 6-piece professional group who have appeared at David and Victoria Beckham's party, the World Cup Finals in 2022 and travel the country with their eclectic sounds! Their 7-song Christmas medley had the children and audience (some of them!) dancing in the aisles!

The band provided pre-meeting music and accompanied the audience in some popular carols. Our involvement this year was curtailed because of the number of guest artists, but we were happy to extend our positive relationship with Seymours and Sam Beare.'

The band enjoying a five bar rest as they join with other participants during the concert.



Fire Pit! – Bonfire Night 2023



Some of the families we have been connecting with in Lakeview were very excited about the sense of joy, community connection and spirituality they experienced sharing Christmas carols previously. As we chat with them there is a goal emerging from some of the young people to climb a mountain. We really wanted to capture some of this energy, and to build a sense of community that gathers together,

and so on Bonfire Night we gathered some people in the corps car park for a fire pit.

We learned how to light a fire, used knives to sharpen sticks to cook hotdogs and roast marshmallows over the fire, as well as boiling water on the fire to make hot chocolate. Naomi shared some bonfire crafts, including edible sparklers and scratch art, which were a hit with more than just the little ones.

There was a varied mix of people including mums and toddlers from Teddy Toddlers, grandparents and their grandchildren, people from AA and teenagers, one who said they might pop in for 5 minutes and ended up staying for hours, fully engrossed.

There was lots of fun, new friendships forming, older ones reconnected. It was beautiful to see people who use the building in different ways through the week connecting together, bringing skills, laughing over the washing up.

Capt. Vanessa



Claire & Graham

Warmest congratulations to
Claire and Graham Thompson
 On the occasion of their marriage
25 November 2023

Brunch at Bethlehem

WOW – what a morning!! I haven't felt as good since I heard Charles Aznavour in concert in Bridlington in about 1978!! So grateful that Vanessa followed her vision for 'Brunch at Bethlehem' on the first Sunday in Advent.

Excitement and anticipation had mounted since it had been announced. Free bacon baps, croissants, chokolatines, tea & coffee. Well done Neil, the bacon chef and Gwen in charge of Ts & Cs. Children were urged to follow the 'star trek' prepared by Gill with Louise as greeter on reception duty our visitors were warmly welcomed, asked if they would add their names to a registration list and then each child received a goodie bagA.

Decorate your own crown or Advent candle, make a shepherd or how about a sheep from biscuits, white marshmallows and white fondant icing?!! Make your own Nativity Scene and Jane taking photos of people who had used the costumes available to become part of the stable scene were some of the activities available.

To round off a morning where everything had centred around Christ-

mas and had been our gift to the community in which we serve, Dennis read a reading



and approximately 25 children heard Major John read an adaptation of the Christmas story which involved a lot of chocolate! Our busy band had played outside for quite a while as people arrived and then later played carols indoors as we finished by singing 'Away in a manger'.

Then it was time to tidy up and put things back to normal ready for Teddy Toddlers the next day!

Over 160 guests attended with 67 making their first visit to our church. New names were added to the Corps database, happy to receive information re future events.

Amazing!! Busy, different, exciting, maybe not for every week but how about Sunday 1st Dec 2024 – the first in Advent?!! See you there!!!

(FB)

Parcel Extravaganza

It's that time of year again. A time when people are moved to think of others less fortunate and call in at the hall with a gift for someone in need at Christmas. On a given Sunday we arrive with our gifts and as we bring them forward the pile gets bigger and wider.

For many years Gwen has attended the morning service at Knaphill Methodist Church to receive the gifts they have collected. Each year she returns to the hall with a full and heavy laden car such is the generosity of the church members. Two of the ladies from the church also helped on the Thursday. This year there was also bag after bag of goodies from St Andrew's, Goldworth Park.

Others of course give of their time and the Wednesday evening saw a small army of volunteers getting out the toys, toiletries, chocolates, biscuits, cuddly toys etc, etc for the Thursday volunteers who would actually allocate the gifts.

The system has changed over the years. Back in the day toys were wrapped – with a label 'girl aged 9' etc. from a list supplied by Social Services. Those of us of a certain era will remember the day Olive Crust, No 1 on the roll inadvertently wrapped up her cheese sandwich lunch and labelled it for a boy aged 7!! Only when she came to have her lunch did she

realise it was missing! Missing but thankfully found before it was despatched! Nowadays gifts are allocated and then left for the family to wrap – wrapping paper supplied. Families are given vouchers rather than food items.

Thursday 14 December saw the tables groaning with gifts as bags were filled and put in the appropriate areas to await collection and it was all down to brilliant team work from the volunteers who gathered to help and those who had worked together the night before. Of course at the end, the volunteers shared the customary fish & chip lunch!

Our thanks go to all those who helped us to help others. You are all STARS!!!!



Ready for the off!



BIG APOLOGIES

(Omitted in error from the Nov & Dec issue of Tidings)

Belated congratulations to

Alison & Paul

On the occasion of their

Ruby 40th Wedding Anniversary

On

Sunday 10 September 2023

Prayer Vigil – 27th November 2023

A prayer vigil for the Israeli –
Hamas war was organised by
Alison Sage.

Some met together at the hall and others joined in prayer in
their own home.



'X Marks the Spot'

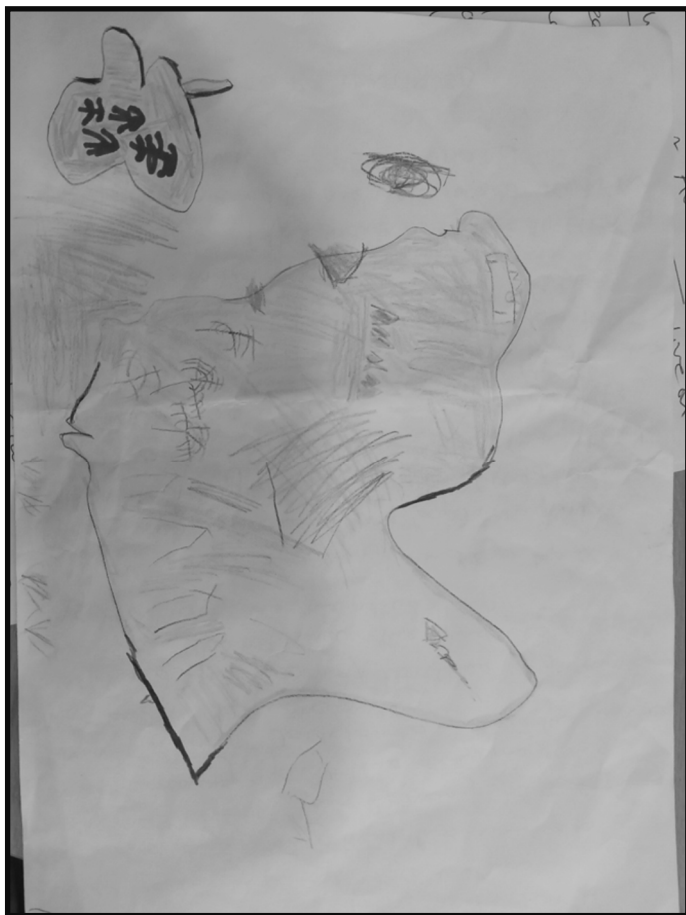
Isaac Coleman age 10

Jack was in the village. He heard that the Pirate gang were back again. He found the old Defenders Belt and swore to protect the village. He began his march to the mountains, where the pirates had their base, but they launched a surprise attack on him.

Holding cutlass and sword in

hand, they approached. Jack drew his own sword. The first pirate attacked. A quick sword fight ensued and he staggered back. The pirate slashed the blades of his cutlass at Jack, who managed to avoid it. Then there began a fight involving pistols exploding, daggers flying through the air and swords slash-

ing here, there and everywhere. Jack held them off, and on the sand that had risen up in front of him during their fight, large letters appeared, reading, 'You must find the treasures, Jack. Gather them all. Here is the map.' Jack brushed away a small mound of sand to reveal a perfect map of the island, and Pine Island next to it, with Xs along various points leading to the treasure. At the top of the



map it said, 'There is treasure on this island, and X marks the spot.'

Jack takes his map and sets off to the nearest X. After a quick march, he finds the first X. He then goes to the next and the next. Finally he finds himself near Pine Island. He had dusted off all of the Xs that he had rescued the treasure from, and now there were only two Xs left. One across the sea in Pine Island, the other in the sunken ship wreck.

Jack returned and stashed the loot in his house, collected his boat and went around the side of the island to Pine Island. When he landed, he studied where the X was, and set off. It was a quick march, and he soon found where the treasure should lie.

But when he stepped out of the forest, a huge grizzly bear swiped at him. He dodged and swiped at the bear with his sword. The bear dodged. This went on until Jack was finally fast enough to land a blow. The bear retreats and Jack retrieves the treasure. Dusting off the X, only one spot remains: the sunken ship wreck.

Jack sailed all the way around,

past the coral reef - a perfect place to hide treasure, and slowly made his way up to the ship wreck, which had been there for many years, since crashing against the rocks one dark and stormy night. Jack took a deep breath, then dived under the water. He found the treasure in a chest, attached it to a rope, then swam up to the surface, tied the rope to his boat, then pulled the treasure up to the top.

Jack opened the chest, and on top of the gold was a dry piece of paper with a message about the mysterious magic protecting the treasure. The recue of the treasure was essential for the survival of the island as a new deadly enemy rose up. They wanted to steal the treasure, and knew it was on the island, but not where to find it. The enemy pirates were determined to get the treasure and burn the island to the ground in the process.

The magic of the treasure ensured that it could only be retrieved by one who would use it for the good of the island.

TO BE CONTINUED...

Comedy Hall**D.O.H.****(Department of Humour)**

It was the day after Christmas at the church. The vicar was looking at the nativity scene outside when he noticed the baby Jesus was missing. As he was about to call the police, he spotted little Jimmy with a red wagon in which was the missing figure.

The vicar asked Jimmy why he had taken the figure from the church. Smiling, Jimmy said, "Well last week I prayed to Jesus asking him if I could have a red wagon for Christmas and promised him a ride in it if I got one."

An old country preacher in the USA wanted a sign made to tell the people passing on the freeway about the wonder of Christmas. He lived quite a way out of town and didn't have access to the convenience of phone or email. He could only send a quick message via telegraph from the local store. Since telegraphs charge by the letter, he tried to make his message succinct so that the sign builder would know exactly what he wanted without wasting extra characters. He rushed to the store and sent his message off.

At the sign making company, the poor clerk fainted as she read the message - "Unto us a child is born. 6 foot long and 3 foot wide."

The Sunday School Christmas play was going well until the vicar asked, "What guided the wise men from the east?"

On cue, the pre-schoolers, each with a letter in their hand lined up and turned the letters to face the audience.

However, the last four kids got muddled and out of sequence. The answer was displayed.....

CHRISTMAS RATS

Christmas blessings and a happy new year

Keep smiling

Major Laugh

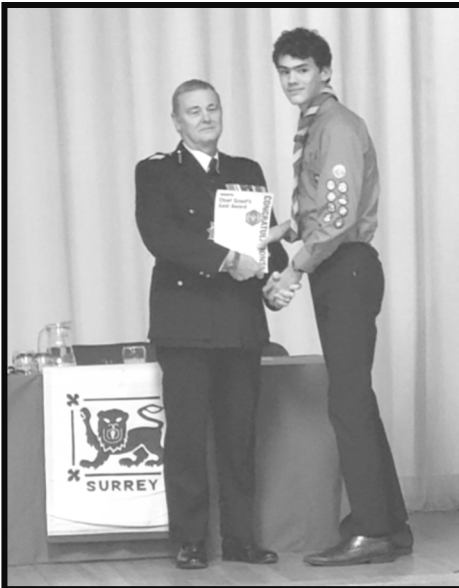
A couple of swells!!!



What do Pete & John have in common - apart from being the bandmaster of Woking Band?

Sharing a pizza lunch before going through the Safeguarding training.

Brilliant way of doing training!



Sam
receiving his
**Chief Scout -
Gold Award**

Music ministry during December

and so much more!!



Band at the Peacocks

The band as usual has had a string of engagements during December. There have been the usual visits to the Peacocks on a Saturday morning. Gone are the days of six collectors placed strategically on different floors, nowadays the kettle is the main collector! (See pic!) This year the visits to the Peacocks were supplemented by Captain Xander and friends who have sung along to guitar accompaniment after the band has finished.

The band played at the Horsell Christmas Market and along with the songsters visited Woking Homes one evening. This was a light heart-

ed evening with plenty of cracker jokes, a forgotten tunic, initially no keyboard and a slim fit shirt that wasn't meant to be seen but still with the Christmas message!!

An event that seems to have become a regular in the Christmas programme is the band playing at the Sam Beare Hospice Carol

Concert in Christ Church. (Major John has written separately about this)

The band also provided music late on two Sunday afternoons at Wisley RHS when people were gathering for GLOW, the light show. Again, how things change. Back in the day we would play on the entry area and people would gather round and sing. Pete Stickland was the Master of Ceremonies, the compere and with a good degree of affable banter would get the children to come and sing. The times they are indeed a changing!

Our final carolling event is usually immediately before Christmas when we visit the Lakeview area opposite

the hall. It is such a fun evening with both singers and band working together and an occasion when we give out mince pies and chocolates and stand around chatting rather than collect. In fact I think there is a conspicuous absence of any collecting tin! Last year we had several teenagers join us for our initial stop and how great that translated through follow up neighbourhood visits during the year to the Fire Pit experience on Bonfire Night.

However, our grateful thanks go to Jo Cox, John Martin as leaders of the songsters and band, Penny Glover for her sensitive contributions as pianist and Andrew Cox for organising the programme in December and his technical support. Thanks too to the members of both sections for their support and dedication throughout the year. Week by week we are truly blessed and not just in December alone!!!



Save the date
World Day of Prayer
Friday 1 March 2024

I BEG YOU, BEAR WITH ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE

written by the Christian women of Palestine

St Dunstan's Catholic Church

Shaftesbury Road, Woking

10.30am

Community Carols - Lakeview

It was a great evening when we made our annual carolling visit to our friends in the Lakeview area. More people came down to sing with the band this year so we were grateful to Captain Xander for the extra carol books. Others were standing out to listen and a few of us were able to go around and chat. Gwen brought out chocolates to give out – thanks to the band for sharing their

chocolates and sounding so good as always. The visit was very much appreciated by our neighbours and the added bonus was when one of the younger neighbours who went around with the band on the Thursday evening came to the Carols by Candlelight on Christmas Eve and brought three of her family/friends with her. Brilliant!!!



Our grateful thanks!!!

Our grateful thanks to those who have contributed in any way to the production of Tidings during 2023. From regular contributors to those writing reports or those providing technical support your help and commitment is so appreciated.

Freda & Pete – Team Tidings!!!

Direct Line

One morning recently I decided to go for our daily paper before I went swimming. It was 6.40am, in pitch black darkness and I was blown about by a very gusty wind. Four minutes and I arrived at the corner shop - to find the paper shelves empty!!! Nil desperandum – Sharon was at hand! I've mentioned my Sikh friend before and the chats we have. The papers had just arrived and she was very soon lifting huge weighty bundles of papers into a shopping trolley that she uses to transport them around the shop. She lifted the bundles with such ease, I wouldn't have stood a chance but she's obviously used to lifting and moving them.

As I walked home I thought of those who in our fellowship are presently shouldering great burdens with great grace. The Corps' WhatsApp chat has been working overtime of late, emails have gone out as we've become aware of the needs of others and supported each other with our love and prayers. It also brings to mind the old, old song which contains the following

Are we weak and heavy laden
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Saviour, still our refuge
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

As we review 2023 we are grateful for answered prayer – completely puzzled by those occasions when it seems our prayers haven't been heard let alone answered in the way we wanted or expected.

For 2024, we hold on in faith. For those who are or who will have heavy burdens to bear we simply say "We love you and our prayers are with you."

In 2024 let our words be few and simple, our trust great and unmeasured and our prayers many.

Blessings Freda

FLOWER LIST

January

- | | |
|----|--------------|
| 7 | Wendy Taylor |
| 14 | Jan Reed |
| 21 | Pam Elliott |
| 28 | TBA |

February

- | | |
|----|----------------------------|
| 4 | TBA |
| 11 | Louise and Peter Stickland |
| 18 | Ruth and Wendy |
| 25 | TBA |

Pop Up Nativity

In all my years I have never heard clapping and cheering before worship as I did the third Sunday in Advent. Usually the band or songsters prepare us for worship this particular morning we were treated to a jazz arrangement of 'Joy to the world' played on the piano by Penny. The place erupted as she finished and then Captain Vanessa told us we were in for a riot as this was the morning of the Pop Up Nativity!

The Advent Candles were lit by Kip – this being the week of joy – weeks one and two being hope and peace. The Pop Up Nativity saw people of all ages volunteering to be involved. Costumes were available if people wanted to dress up. We had mainly female wise men, a very tall male Gabriel with two angels in costume who were the other side of 55! Enter Naomi carrying a real live baby Jesus, her little son, baby Isaac was



albeit very stylish shepherd, so an old biddy, moved by compassion joined the lone shepherd.

The scene was complete – we were reminded of the Christmas story.

Dominic, a young boy who is being taught to play the trumpet on a Wednesday evening before songster practice by Major John played three Christmas pieces. Jingle Bells, Good King Wenceslas and Deck the halls. Following Dominic's solo the children left the hall for Kids' Church which turned out to be a Christmas party. How brilliant during Captain



just perfect and they were escorted by a very noble Joseph, As the tablesu was put together it was realised there was only one,



Vanessa's address to hear the squeals and laughter of the children at the other end of the building. The sound of children's voices so wonderful to hear- a sound of hope for the future.

We thought about surprises and our reactions to them - of how anticipation can be as joyful as the experience of an event – of how it's not just a frothy happiness but a joy

deep in our gut that we know all is in safe hands. A reminder that we anticipate the coming of Jesus - that anticipation when we wait to welcome people and where is Jesus waiting to be welcomed? As we open our presents on Christmas Day God is with us – that he might stay with us so that we see joy at work – that we in turn might bring joy to the world in all that we do!!

Lunch Club Christmas Lunch



Grateful thanks to the
Lunch Club team!

A roomful of happy
diners with
Seasonal music
provided by
Major John



Christmas Eve & Christmas Day

Christmas Eve Morning

We came to the Christmas Eve morning service adorned in our Christmas jumpers which added to the relaxed atmosphere from the knowledge that the preparations for Christmas were, for most of us, largely complete. The Songsters set the scene with 'Come let us worship the Lord' before Major John introduced the theme of 'Love', following on from Hope, Peace and Joy in the previous 3 advent meetings. After sharing selected verses from the Psalms and the Gospels, the 4th Advent candle was lit as we sang 'Here we come to Worship'. The meeting provided a number of special treats – not only the Songsters singing a new song, 'Bethlehem Child' and the band playing a piece entitled 'The Everlasting Light' set around the carol 'O Little Town of Bethlehem' but we also had a video clip of a very enthusiastic child singing 'He came from the GLORY' as part of a nativity play. This was all topped however by a dance by Shaw Coleman, one of Xander's triplet brothers who was visiting with his wife and 3 children for Christmas, accompanied by

Major John with what sounded like an Eastern European arrangement of Jingle Bells.

Introducing the message, a video was played of the opening sequences from the film, *Love Actually*, demonstrating that love is all around us. Major John reminded us that Jesus is God personified, Jesus is love in person expressing unrequited love for us, He will always love us – it is love, actually. And so, we have been brought together as a church to love each other and to extend this love to those we meet in our every day lives.

Throughout the meeting, Major John used a practical example of love as he sent Yoma on a mission to return home to pick up the music for the final band piece, which she did unquestioningly, out of love, when all along, the music was in the boot of his car just yards outside the building! Fortunately she returned in time to hear the band's rendition of Christmas Bossa Nova sending us all home with our feet tapping.

Andy Stickland

Carols by Candlelight

There was a splendid turn out for this event, the first organised by Captains Xander and Vanessa. There were new people joining us from some of the activities that take place in the hall, lunch club, Teddy toddlers, and three young girls brought by a friend who was inspired by the Community Carol singing. Rumour has it that young Isaac had a

hand in inviting a new family to join the occasion.

The evening buzzed with an air of family and community spirit drawn together to welcome the Christ Child 2023.

There were more children at this year's celebration, six provided by the Coleman family and a few more new faces. They were all welcomed to visit the

manger where the baby Jesus lay. There was a new artistic addition to the manger this year, painted by Jess who did a rather convincing scene. The fifth advent candle (the Christ Candle) was lit together with the previous four carefully by Asher Coleman.

There was an added bonus to this year's celebration. Did you know that Xander was one of triplets? We welcomed his younger brother, Shaw and his family to our gathering. In a previous life, Shaw was a professional dancer. He took a change of vocation and now heads " the Limelight Collective outreach" in Berlin. You can't let a former professional dancer get away with not performing and so we were entertained by a little bit of Tap dance to " go tell it on the mountain".

Penny played yet another beautiful piano solo to accompany the

evening's collection.

The service continued with both narrative and song appropriate for the occasion. As each section began, a small item was placed in the manger to represent the theme of the story. The Advent calendar represented the anticipation of the birth, a journey from Heaven to Earth in human form. There followed a greetings card and a toy. A candy cane was representative of a shepherd's crook, a cracker termed as the Wise Men kit and finally a small light to illuminate the darkness. The light of Christ in the darkness, no one can extinguish.

The evening ended with tea, coffee and mince pies. The conversations within the hall were that of a community coming together with joy and peace at this very special time of year. *Jenny Whitten*

Christmas Morning

Well we made it! Christmas Morning. Some had already opened their presents – some would be waiting until they got home. Some had already started on the chocolates, others had got their mince pies and cream ready for that post meeting- pre-lunch mince pie! So many Christmas traditions. Well the format of the morning was anything but traditional for the seats were set out in a circle and the order of the meeting was disclosed when the music stopped. Yes, the order of the meeting was contained within the layers of a 'pass the parcel'!

The music stopped with Dennis, who read an opening reading and prayer, next stop was the singing of the Christmas Day traditional carol, Christian awake! Salute the happy morn. What had people had in their stockings, what

presents had they received. A video of May & Josphe's journey presented by children from a child's perspective.

Then a basket of chocolates was sent round and after choosing we were urged to find those with the same colour wrapper and to pray with them. For me those were special moments when I found who I was with.

The singing of See amid the winter's snow and then the reading of John 1:1-14 – In the beginning was The Word by Major Ted led on to some final thoughts from Captain Vanessa – Even in the hardest of times remember, when the year has been hard his gift is always good for he gives himself!!!

Then it was time to dance – a simple celebration dance, not a solo performance from Shaw as we were all en-

couraged to join in, a bit if a barn dance really. Four to the left, four to the right, repeat then twelve and those who were number one moving across those who were number two - dead simple really until you increase the speed again and again and again!

Wishing each other a Happy Christmas we left for home and our mince pies and

prezzies.

What an Advent we'd shared – one we are unlikely to forget and one in which we had received so many blessings, for which we are truly grateful.

Freda



New Year's Eve Worship

The last Sunday in 2023 was also New Year's Eve. What a year it's been – the retirement of Majors David & Margaret House after many years of faithful service, a 15 week interregnum and then the arrival of our new corps officers, Captains Vanessa & Xander Coleman with Isaac, Asher and Gideon. God has been gracious. We have seen new commitments, a new soldier and adherents and many volunteers helping at week day activities. A very positive year, the corps is in good heart and we are truly blessed, however we do not rest on our laurels, but press forward to 2024 in faith and trust.

Worship was led by Majors Ted & Freda, carols were sung, possibly for the last time until December 2024. The support of the band and songsters was much appreciated as this can sometimes be a low Sunday with people away and there was the joy of hearing voluntary prayer. A Christmas video clip was used as a competition with the children being asked to count how many times the baby Jesus appeared and how many time the snowman was seen. The ap-

pearances of the snowman far exceeding that of Jesus was an opportunity to emphasise that the true meaning of Christmas was actually about Jesus – not a snowman!!! Never mind the children, it certainly brought out the competitive element in the adults!!

Our thoughts were directed to the beautiful story of the elderly Simeon and Anna who had waited a life time for the coming of the Messiah and recognised him in the Christ-child – prophecy fulfilled.

On arrival we had all been given a small bag with five small plastic counters in them. This was for an end of year prayer feature as the worship came to its conclusion. We were invited to place our prayer counters in three trays - past, present and future and to retain one to place in our purse or wallet to remind us of our prayers. After the worship the counters would not just be discarded but kept safely throughout 2024. Our worship came to an end as we sang Thy great name! Thy great name! Let my life, O Lord, each day, Glorify thy name. To which we say – AMEN!!

Freda

Forever Christmas

Christmas has passed and we must wait another twelve months, how children would like it to continue, I doubt that many adults would like it.

This is about what Christmas means, if Christmas had never happened, what effect would it have had. Christ the Lord never born, imagine how we could argue with holy accountants who would record our sins and misdemeanours. We might try and argue with God about our score of good and bad points, put extra money into the collection as a bribe, What God would expect of us is to keep every command He has given us. As we cannot keep-ten of them we have no chance, we would all be lost in hell. We would know nothing of the following: the love of God, forgiveness of sin, God's mercy, the Holy Spirit, the promise of heaven, the joy of the Lord. A whole host of things which lift us out of the miry clay and he enables us to experience the joy which passes all understanding.

We are not put on earth to simply please ourselves, our primary role is to have fellowship with God.

The amazing thing about God, He wants to have this relationship with us, because loves us without measure, much more than the dearest person we know. God is love, he created love, and through the power of the Holy Spirit He enables us to keep His commands, all He asks of us is to meet Him and accept His terms. They are not onerous, here are two of them:

Love God, love your neighbour.

God expects us to ask questions, such as "How can I love you if I don't know you?" The fact that we cannot see God means we must turn to the Bible, as it's the only book in the whole world which tells us about God. Try reading John's gospel in the New Testament. You may have your doubts but God doesn't mind, tell Him what you feel about this, and ask Him to prove Himself to you. Try reading a few minutes each day, and wait to be surprised. Using a modern Bible will help you understand the text.

None of this would be available if Christmas was a one day event, the results of Christmas go on Christ returns. Agape *Eric*

A New Year Resolution

I would commence this brand-new year with you.
But for your hand, the time and space this year
Presents could be a sullen threatening view.
It's your strong hand assures me of care.

Creative love has planned for me a way
And, born of love, this way must be the best.
I therefore gladly dedicate this day
And know that I can trust you for the rest.

I am concerned just what the year may hold
Of burden, even sorrow, strain or stress
But grace, with its resources makes me bold.
I will hold on. I know that you will bless.

The challenge of this year I gladly take
And face it well – and that for your dear sake.

Philippians 4:13
“I can do everything through him who gives me
strength.”

Harry Read