January 2023

Dear Friends,

As you read this, I hope that the time over the Christmas period has been one of peace and joy, however you have spent it. There can be much busyness over this period, as well as in the run up to Christmas, that it can be quite hard to stop and think.

One of the things about the Christmas passages that I have thought about this year, is the amount of time Mary spent stopping and reflecting on all that was happening. Her life had turned upside down (to put it mildly!) and everything had changed for her. Mary’s engagement to Joseph would have signified the start of a period of change for her but it was greatly increased by all that then happened. Yet, in it all Mary stopped. In the opening two chapters of Luke’s gospel, we see that Mary pondered the Angel Gabriel’s message to her and her response is to magnify the wonders of God as she shares the Magnificat (Luke 1:26-28 and 1:46-55). Once the shepherds had been to see Jesus, she again treasured and pondered on all the words that they had shared (Luke 2:8-20).

The period between Christmas Day and New Year’s Day can be one of pausing, although not always. Sometimes, this can even extend to a few days after 1st January as well! To pause and ponder seem like quite good things to do. Much is made of New Year’s Resolutions, but until we have paused and pondered, how do we know what resolutions to make? If such resolutions are for others, rather than yourself, pausing and pondering may take a different approach. However, it is good to stop and reflect.

During January, we will be sharing together in our Covenant Service. This is an important service in the Methodist calendar and where is where we focus and reflect on our relationship with God. The Covenant prayer is a crucial part of this service. The opening of it is ‘I am no longer my own but yours.’ These are words we pray to God recognising that our identity is in Christ, that we are led by the Holy Spirit and that we belong to God.

I hope that these are words which are freeing and full of meaning for you. We know that in whatever we face, Jesus walks alongside us. The Holy Spirit will bring us peace. Taking time to ponder on these words will, I hope, deepen their meaning for you even more.

Even in the busyness of change Mary took time to stop, reflect and ponder on the words spoken to her. As we prepare for the Covenant service, whenever in the month it takes place, I hope that we can take these words and ponder them in our hearts.

God’s peace and blessings for 2023,

Chris