



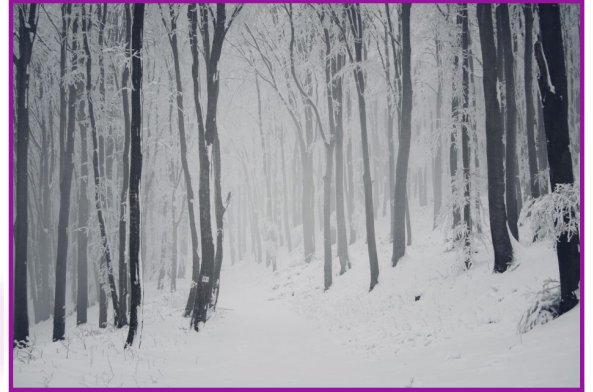
Growing Faith

20 - Winter | 19 December 2023

Being the light in the darkness

Written by Mrs Spence, Deputy Headteacher

**“In the bleak mid-winter, frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron, Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,
In the bleak mid-winter, long ago.”**



As a music loving English teacher, I've always enjoyed the words and music of the season of Advent and the twelve days of Christmas as much, if not more, than the festive treats which find their way into our homes and onto our plates. The third Sunday of Advent finds me each year enjoying my church's annual tradition of nativity by morning before early evening carols in the community garden followed by our Christingle service. Each year we brace ourselves for whatever the weather may bring as we huddle, torches in hand, carol sheets at the ready, voices set to sing out and tell the story of the baby born to save our souls. Shivering, as we often do, in the mid-winter frozen and almost lifeless garden, Rosetti's words always take on a deeper meaning. In recent years, with my own daughters first snuggled in the baby carrier against my chest, and now proudly holding the torch and singing out loud, I'm led to think of Mary, of her concerns not for the Son of God, but her concerns for her newborn baby, of the primitive surroundings which marked his first night on earth. Her fear and concern, her confusion I imagine when strangers came with gifts but also warnings. She had given birth to the light of the world, but she had to be the first spark; she had to act with faith and hope when maybe it felt there was little reason for either.

Rosetti is not the only writer we English teachers fondly quote who uses the metaphor of freezing temperatures to explore the Christmas season and the possibility of Christian compassion and benevolence. In Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, with avarice and greed holding a seemingly iron grip on Scrooge's heart, it is first said that, "The cold within him froze his old features, [...] No warmth could warm, no wintry weather chill him." As Dickens explores in the opening chapters, Scrooge is at first emotionally impenetrable; he shuns the happiness of others around him as foolishness and is unmoved by desperate poverty too. But by the end, he knows that it is so much better to, "keep Christmas in his heart, all year round." His choice to be benevolent and compassionate to his 'fellow souls' is deemed to be a blessing sent from God.

For me, the key here is that he does this 'all year round'. In the shortest and darkest days of winter that we find ourselves in now, the lights adorning houses and the twinkling of Christmas trees peeping through lounge windows are appealing to us all. With the evergreen tree reminding us of the promise of new life to come, we know this darkness will not be forever. But how do we carry this feeling beyond our own lives? When the darkness of the world does not seem to be limited to the weather of the season, we can easily feel overwhelmed and at a loss. But there is hope. Rosetti reminds us at the conclusion of her poem and carol that all we can do is bring and be our best loving selves, just as Matthew reminds us, 37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." [a] 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'" (Matthew 22: 37-39). This term, as I've had the privilege to start my time and journey at St Christopher's, I've witnessed many lights in the darkness. From charity cake sales to the befriending and guiding of new pupils in our school to the Youth Church's active compassion supporting others on the second anniversary of the church to the Christmas donations being brought in. These acts bring hope, demonstrate faith and, undoubtedly, inspire others. Let's keep our eyes, ears and hearts open to being the light in the darkness for our fellow human beings all year round.

**“What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a Shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give Him: give my heart.”**

In the bleak midwinter by Christina Rossetti

Youth Church Reflection

by Z Lawrence, Year 8

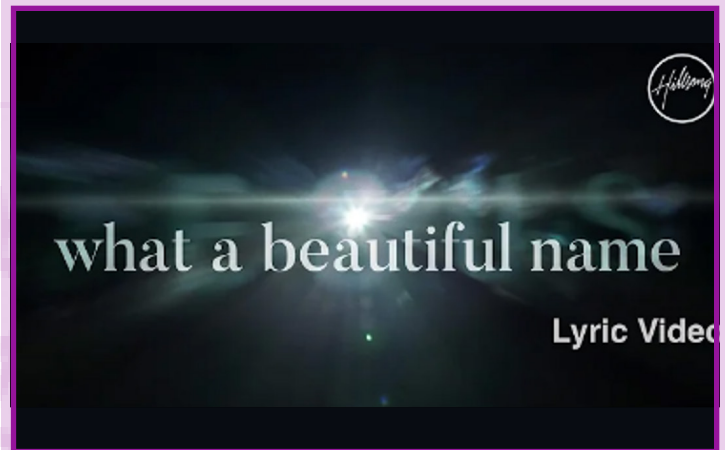
Recently, I think God has told me to make a prayer group at school. This prayer group will be held at lunchtimes where you can go to pray and spend time with God.

Because I don't think there will be many people who turn up to start off with, if you are interested, I ask that over the Christmas holidays you pray that lots of people will turn up. I also think that God has told me that when He tells you to do something you don't like the sound of, or find it makes you nervous, do it anyway so you can do it again.

It was like that when God first told me to raise my hands in prayer and I did it and now I can do it almost all the time.



A Song for Reflection



A Prayer

By E Forrest, Year 12

Heavenly Father,

Please send upon your Holy Spirit to watch over this Christmas time. so that we may celebrate a peaceful Christmas with the Infant Jesus in our hearts, may we act in a way that is faithful, gracious, loving, giving and forgiving. Help us to keep out all the dark, and welcome in the light as we prepare to celebrate the greatest gift of all your son, our lord Jesus Christ.

I make this prayer by the power of the Holy Spirit and in Jesus' holy name

Amen

Church Support

Church Services

Please visit these church websites to see when their services are taking place:

Great Harwood Christian Fellowship: [Website](#)

St John's and St Augustine's Church, Huncoat: [YouTube channel](#)

St Peter and St Paul's Church, Rishton: [Facebook Page](#)

St. John's Church, Baxenden: [Website](#)

Peel Street Baptist Church: [Website](#)

Ernest Street Baptist Church: [Website](#)

All Saints Church, Clayton-le-Moors: [Facebook Page](#)

St James' Church, Clitheroe: [Website](#)

Burnley Life Church: [Website](#)

St Mary Magdalen's Church, Accrington: [Website](#)


St Andrew's Church, Accrington: [Website](#)

St Peter's Church, Accrington: [Website](#)

Brave Church: [Website](#)

Trinity Church, Great Harwood: [Website](#)



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