

St Thomas Methodist Church, Exeter



Weekly Worship Resources **Advent - Epiphany**

30 November 2025

Advent 1: You are a Gift

Psalm 122

For the sake of my relatives and friends I will say, "Peace be within you."

For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good.

Matthew 24:36–44

Therefore you also must be ready ...

Symbol: Wrapped up present



Methodist Way of Life: Live

Background notes

Psalm 122

Psalm 122 is a pilgrim song, traditionally sung on the journey to a festival in Jerusalem. The very name 'Jerusalem' holds within it the word shalom: peace. Jerusalem is the city of peace,¹ a gift from God. A

gift that was originally for Israel, but also, as envisioned in Isaiah 2, for all people.²

In verses 6–9, the psalm becomes a prayer for the city’s wellbeing: for its security, peace and prosperity. These ancient prayers stand in sharp contrast to the historical and present-day reality of Jerusalem, a city too often marked by conflict and instability. Yet the psalm invites us to imagine and pray for an alternative story: one in which Jerusalem, and by extension all communities, become places of shalom. Places where peace is not just hoped for, but lived. Places that are a gift to all who dwell there.³

This Advent, we invite you to enact that vision by delivering cards to your neighbours. A simple gesture, but one that recognises them as a gift to your local community. In doing so, you proclaim the prophetic truth: this too can be a place of peace and wellbeing.

Matthew 24:36–44

This is a challenging passage. It gathers several sayings of Jesus, each carrying a strong sense that something significant is coming, though we don’t know when. The message is simple, but searching: be ready.

Verse 36 includes a notable textual variation: “nor the Son” appears in some manuscripts of Matthew but is missing in others, as well as in the parallel passages in Mark and Luke. This phrase was historically controversial and fuelled early denials of the equality within the Trinity of Father and Son. And yet, precisely because it would have been uncomfortable for the early church, its inclusion lends authenticity. Difficult or ‘awkward’ sayings are more likely to be genuine – less likely to be invented. Some modern scholars interpret this phrase as part of Christ’s kenosis – his willing selfemptying during the incarnation.

Verses 40–41 show pairs of people doing everyday tasks – one is taken, one left. The meaning is ambiguous. Is it better to be taken or left? When read alongside the reference to Noah, where those taken by the flood perished, we might conclude that being left behind is preferable.

Think of preparing a gift. Before you can give it, there's usually some work to do: removing packaging, peeling off the price label, maybe taking off a sale sticker. As followers of Jesus, called to be a gift to the world, Advent is a time to consider what in us needs removing. What attitudes, habits or distractions need peeling away? What doesn't belong in the gift?

Jesus says we must be ready for the coming of the Son of Man. As Advent begins, we reflect on what that means – not with fear, but with hope. We are being made ready, refined and wrapped in grace, to be given as gifts of peace to the world.

(1) Artur Weiser, *The Psalms* (1962) London: SCM, p. 750–751.

(2) Walter Brueggemann and William H Bellinger, *Psalms*, (2014) New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 528.

(3) Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms*, p. 530.

Intercessory prayer: Gifts for our neighbours

Pray for the people in your community and church, focusing on how each person is a gift to those around them. For example: “We pray for our neighbours who bring joy, support and care to our community. Help us to see and celebrate their gifts. Guide us in using our gifts to build a neighbourhood where everyone feels valued and loved.”

The good news to understand

This Advent, don't just wait – prepare. Let God peel back what's not needed. And as you're refined, reshaped and wrapped in grace – become a gift. A gift of peace to your neighbour. A gift of justice in your community. A gift of love in a world that's longing for hope. **This is the call of Advent: Be ready. Be real. Be the gift.**

7 December 2025

Advent 2: The Orange in the Stocking

Psalm 72:1–7, 18–19

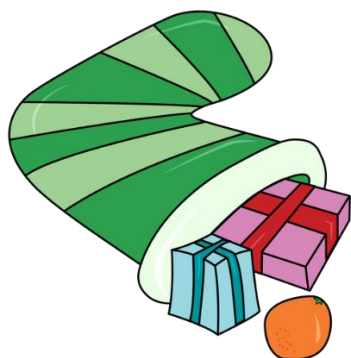
May he judge your people with righteousness and your poor with justice.

May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness.

Matthew 3:1–12

Bear fruit worthy of repentance...

Symbol: a Christmas stocking with an orange in it



Methodist way of life: Care

Background notes

Psalm 72:1–7, 18–19

Those who hold power are called to be a gift to others. In verses 1–4 of this psalm, we find a vision for leadership shaped by justice and compassion. The king is not celebrated for wealth or might, but for defending the poor, upholding justice and ending oppression.¹ True authority, the psalm suggests, is only valid when it serves the most vulnerable and seeks the wellbeing of all.²

This is a challenge to every person or institution with influence – whether in politics, faith communities, workplaces or homes. Power is not for self-preservation but for service.

It's a reminder to us, too, as the Church: we are called to be a gift to the world. Not only as individuals, but as a justice-seeking, peace-making community. And we do have power – the power to speak, to act, to stand with those who are hurting, and to work for change.

We will return to this psalm in the service for Epiphany.

Matthew 3:1–12

John the Baptist comes preaching repentance – literally calling people to change the way they think. So what needs to change?

Verse 8 gives us the heart of his message: “Bear fruit worthy of repentance.” Matthew twice later uses the metaphor of a good tree that bears good fruit. The image of fruit might remind us of Proverbs 11:30:

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and the wise capture souls.

Fruit grows out of a fundamental disposition of the heart, rather than being something that is just done.³ Our lives can become life-giving for others – a source of blessing, nourishment, and hope. We become, in ourselves, a gift to the world.

If we’re wondering what this fruit might look like, Paul’s list in Galatians 5:22–23 gives us a good clue:

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

This is the kind of fruit everyone longs to receive. Like the orange at the bottom of a traditional Christmas stocking, these are gifts that are familiar, but are nevertheless fresh and joyful. As part of this campaign we invite you to deliver cards to your neighbours, telling them what you appreciate about them. This is an opportunity to name the fruit growing in each other, to recognise each other as holy gifts.

The food imagery continues with John’s warning about winnowing. Just as an orange must be peeled before it can be enjoyed, grain must be threshed and winnowed before it becomes useful. In the ancient world, this meant beating the wheat and tossing it into the air so the wind could carry away the chaff – leaving behind only what nourishes and sustains.⁴

This Advent, we’re invited to take that image seriously. What in us needs to be cleared away? What coverings, distractions or attitudes need to be stripped back? Can we let the wind of the Spirit move freely

through us, removing all that is fruitless and leaving only what brings life?

(1) Brueggemann and Bellinger, Psalms, p. 313.

(2) *ibid*, p. 316.

(3) Eduard Schweitzer, *The Good News according to Matthew*, (1975) London: SPCK, p. 49.

(4) *ibid*. p. 52.

Prayer ideas:

Peaceful pause – close their eyes and take deep, slow breaths. As you breathe out, silently pray for God's peace to fill your heart and spread into their communities.

Joyful gratitude - name aloud one thing you're thankful for today. Pray, thanking God for the gift of joy that isn't dependent on circumstances but flows from God.

Kindness chain – silently pray for one person you know who needs kindness. Each day this week 'pass on' the prayer by naming someone else to pray for, creating a chain of kindness prayers.

The good news to understand

Let the Spirit clear away what clutters and distracts, and shape you into a holy gift – a tree of life in a world hungry for hope.

This is your calling: Bear fruit. Be bold. Be the gift.

14 December 2025

Advent 3: Give Hope

Psalm 146:5–10

The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.

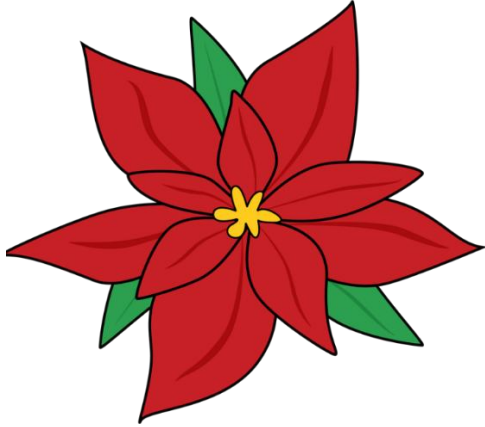
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous.

The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow...

Matthew 11:2–11

...the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with a skin disease are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.

Symbol: Poinsettia



Methodist Way of Life: Serve

Background notes

Psalm 146:5–10

This is the first of the final five psalms that serve as a conclusion to the whole book.

Today's lectionary reading gives us the second half of the psalm, which opens with the bold declaration that God is both our hope and our help.¹ It then offers reasons why God is worthy of such trust.²

In verse 6, we're reminded that God is the creator of all things – even the sea, which in Scripture often symbolises chaos and evil. Yet the world is not as God intends it to be; creation is marred by oppression, injustice and poverty (v.7).³

Having named this disorder, verses 7b–9 go on to describe God's mission to set things right: liberating the oppressed, giving sight (at least metaphorically), lifting up the downtrodden, welcoming strangers, and upholding orphans and widows. God loves the righteous (those who join in this mission) but will bring the wicked, those who perpetuate injustice, to ruin.

The psalm concludes with a celebration of God's eternal reign. The reordering of creation described here is not temporary. It is the way things will be, for evermore.⁴ Praise the Lord!

Matthew 11:2–11

In this passage, we return to John the Baptist, but much later in his story. No longer is he preaching in the wilderness; now he is imprisoned and questioning whether Jesus is truly the Messiah.⁵

Jesus responds by sending a message to reassure John: a gift of hope. He offers a collage of prophecies from Isaiah, verses that both he and John likely held dear. These were words that pointed to a new age of liberation and restoration. It's clear that both John and Jesus had a deep love for Isaiah 61: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me..."⁶ Jesus is saying that in him, these ancient promises have come to life.⁷ The long-awaited eschaton has dawned.⁸

Everything Jesus mentions in his reply reflects what he has been doing throughout his ministry, as recorded in Matthew chapters 4 to 10. This passage serves as a kind of summary of the work of God through Jesus.⁹

Notably, Jesus is selective in his use of Isaiah. He omits any verses that focus on punishment, even though such themes are present in the original prophecies. Instead, he highlights healing, restoration and good news.¹⁰

He speaks of the blind receiving sight, perhaps metaphorically as well as physically, as people begin to perceive the unseen world. The lame walk, the lepers are cleansed (a striking expansive addition, since lepers are not mentioned in these Isaiah texts), the deaf hear – again, maybe also metaphorically – as people finally begin to 'get it'. The dead are raised, and, most significantly, placed where emphasis falls, the poor receive good news.¹¹

And so too can we offer gifts of hope to those around us. As we live a Methodist Way of Life we can:

share insight and understanding (pray, learn, notice)
inspire people to get up and follow Jesus (tell)
offer a deep confidence that life is stronger than death (live)
proclaim good news to people experiencing poverty serve (challenge,
flourish, serve) – although we must also remember, as verse 6 reminds
us, that not everyone is ready to hear it – yet.

- (1) Brueggemann and Bellinger, Psalms, p. 607.
- (2) Weiser, The Psalms, p. 832.
- (3) Brueggemann and Bellinger, Psalms, p. 530.
- (4) *ibid.* p. 608.
- (5) Walter Brueggemann, Charles B. Cousar, Beverly R Gaventa, James D. Newsome, Texts for Preaching Year A, (1995) Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, pp. 25–266.
- (6) Craig A. Evans, Matthew p. 233–234
- (7) Douglas R. A. Hare, Matthew, (1993) Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, p. 121.
- (8) Schweizer, The Good News according to Matthew, p. 256.
- (9) Davies and Allison, Matthew, pp. 174–175.
- (10) Schweizer, The Good News according to Matthew, p. 256.
- (11) *ibid.* p. 256–257.

Global prayers:

Share in the prayer of the Revd Felipe Cortés, the National Ecclesiastical Secretary of the Iglesia Metodista de Chile.

Hope is seeing growth and flourishing among the droughts of our lives.
Hope is feeling that a new world is possible and that human beings can change.

Hope is trusting that justice, goodness, forgiveness, peace and reconciliation always triumphs over every sign of evil.

Hope is feeling that Christ acts among us and with us, placing that new world in our hearts. Amen.

The good news to understand

The world badly needs your gift; you can bring hope. Lift others up, and speak good news, especially to those the world overlooks. Hope is here.

21 December 2025

Advent 4: With Love from God

Psalm 80:1–7, 17–19

Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Matthew 1:18–25

...she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

Symbol: Gift tag



Methodist Way of Life: Pray

Background notes

Psalm 80:1–7, 17–19

Today's psalm is a sorrowful lament over the devastation caused by the destruction of Jerusalem. Throughout the psalm, God is addressed as Yahweh Sabaoth, the Lord of Hosts: a title that evokes divine power and military authority.

In verses 4–6, the writer holds God responsible for the suffering, describing it as the result of divine anger.

Yet verse 7 marks a turning point. The psalmist pleads, “let your face shine, that we may be saved.” Because the pain came from God, God must also desire to heal and save. This plea is repeated at the end of the psalm, forming a refrain of hope and restoration.¹

Matthew 1:18–25

Matthew's account focuses more on the conception and naming of Jesus than on the birth itself. Joseph is portrayed as an honourable man – discreet, compassionate, and faithful. His response to a bewildering situation shows a quiet courage rooted in love.²

The conception, Matthew tells us, is the work of God.³ In the Old Testament, the Spirit of God is understood as God's creative force – hovering over the waters, breathing life into dust. From this flows a deep conviction in Jewish tradition that every child is ultimately a gift from God. Perhaps that's why Matthew recounts the miraculous conception with such restraint.⁴ For him, every life is sacred. Every life is a gift from God.

Jesus was born into a loving relationship, and named with love. Two names are given: Jesus, which means "God saves" – pointing to forgiveness, healing,⁵ and God's love is not distant or abstract. It draws near.

At the very end of Matthew's Gospel, the risen Jesus says, "I am with you always, to the end of the age."⁶ The gift given then remains with us still. Jesus is the true gift to us all, divine favour manifested.⁷

(1) Brueggemann and Bellinger, Psalms, pp. 348–350.

(2) Brueggemann, Cousar, Gaventa, Newsome, Texts for Preaching Year A pp. 34–35.

(3) *ibid.* p. 35.

(4) Schweizer, The Good News according to Matthew, p. 30.

(5) Brueggemann, Cousar, Gaventa, Newsome, Texts for Preaching Year A pp. 35–36.

(6) *ibid.* p. 36.

(7) Davies and Allison, Matthew, p. 18.

Global Prayers:

In the middle of the slums of Nairobi, one Methodist Church posts a sign saying: "A place where everybody is somebody." This sums up the ministry of service and the message of God's love for all, to which Methodists throughout Africa are committed.

Lord, we give you thanks that you love every person and for all who witness to your love in every place and especially today in Africa. We give thanks for Methodist Church transforming the lives of people with disabilities in Tanzania; for the presence of the Methodist Church amongst the tribal peoples of northern Kenya, enhancing water conservation and social justice; for Church health and educational institutions throughout the continent; and for all who serve the poor and marginalised in countless ways.

May we your Church always be a gift to the world, a beacon of light, of hope and of healing and life.
Amen.

The good news to understand

The conception of Jesus is described as the work of God's Spirit, the creative force that brings life. This reminds us that every child, every life, is a sacred gift from God, made with deep love. **Your life itself is a precious gift.**

Jesus is the ultimate gift: given to us so we may know God's presence, grace and favour every day of our lives.

25 December 2025

Christmas Day: The Best Gift

Psalm 97

The Lord is king! Let the earth rejoice...

Luke 2:1-20

Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.

Symbol: Baby Jesus in a crib, with a gift ribbon and bow



Methodist Way of Life: Notice

Background notes

Psalm 97

This psalm is one of several that proclaim God as King over all creation.

It unfolds in three main sections. Verses 2—5 describe God's arrival with vivid and awe-inspiring imagery: thick clouds, fire and lightning, all signalling a dramatic and overwhelming presence. This vision contrasts with the gentler coming of Jesus, whose arrival was just as world-shaking in its significance.

Verses 6 to 9 describe how all creation responds to the presence of God the King. Heaven proclaims God's righteousness, and all people see God's glory. Even false idols are brought low. This invites us to reflect on how both creation and people responded, and still respond, to the incarnation of Christ.

In the final section, the psalm speaks of the gifts given to those who love what is good and turn from evil. God protects, rescues, and fills their lives with light and joy.¹

Luke 2:1–20

Throughout this series, we've been exploring how each of us is a gift, made with love, and how we can be that gift to those around us. With this reading, we return to the heart of the story. We hear once more of the ultimate expression of love: Jesus, the best gift.

Luke's telling is rich with detail. He lingers on the small things, like the way Mary wraps her newborn in swaddling cloths. A tender gesture, deeply ordinary, yet deeply meaningful. This was what any Ancient Near Eastern mother would do for her child.² It was an act of care and love.³

In the Old Testament, swaddling is symbolic. In Wisdom 7:4–5, it's a sign of nurture and belonging.⁴ In contrast, Ezekiel 16:4 paints a tragic picture of an unwanted child left unswaddled, a sign of neglect.⁵ Luke's image is deliberate: this child is cherished. This gift is wrapped in love.

The angel's announcement brings good news, a word the Roman Empire used for military victory or political propaganda. But here, it's reclaimed.⁶ This isn't the arrival of a conqueror. It's the birth of a child.

The good news comes today. This is a word Luke uses again and again to mark a turning point, the breaking in of God's new reality. Something has shifted. The gift has come.⁷

The shepherds rush to see it for themselves. They become the first witnesses, the first to receive and share the news. And Mary? She treasures all these words in her heart. The Greek word Luke uses is 'rich'. It means to cherish, to turn something over again and again. In Genesis 37:11, Jacob "keeps" Joseph's dream in his mind. In Daniel 4:28, a mystery is held and pondered. Mary does the same.²⁷

She receives the moment as a mystery to be held carefully, turned over slowly, and treasured deeply.⁸

This story is not just about what happened then. It's also about what is happening now. The gift has come. The good news is for today. And as people made with love, we are called to receive it, treasure it and share it.

(1) Brueggemann and Bellinger, Psalms, pp. 418–419.

- (2) Joseph A. Fitzmyer, The Gospel According to Luke (1983) New York: Doubleday, p. 408.
- (3) C. F. Evans, Saint Luke (1990) London: SCM, p. 199.
- (4) Fitzmyer, The Gospel According to Luke, p. 394.
- (5) Evans, Saint Luke p. 199.
- (6) Joel B. Green, The Gospel of Luke (1997) Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, pp. 133–134.
- (7) Fitzmyer, The Gospel According to Luke, p. 409.
- (8) *ibid.* p. 413.

Prayer ideas:

Name the gift

Take a moment today, to consider what kind of gift Jesus is to you today.

For example: “Jesus is my peace.” / “Jesus is light in the dark.” / “Jesus is God with me.”

Pray sincerely: “Thank you, God, for the gift of Jesus.”

The good news to understand

Jesus is the gift we receive at Christmas – a treasure for our hearts.

At Christmas, we celebrate the incredible gift of Jesus: God’s love wrapped in human flesh, coming into our world to bring hope, peace and new life. **This gift isn’t just for a moment or a season. It’s meant to be cherished deeply within us every day.**

When we treasure Jesus in our hearts, we discover a love that transforms us, a peace that steadies us, and a hope that carries us through life’s challenges. This gift invites us into relationship with God and calls us to share that love generously with others.

28 December 2025

Christmas 1: Handle with Care

Psalm 148

Praise the Lord from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps...

Matthew 2:13–23

‘Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him’

Symbol: Handle with care sticker/stamp



**Methodist Way of Life:
Challenge**

Background notes

Psalm 148

This is one of the final five psalms that conclude the book – a sweeping hymn of praise that calls all creation to glorify God.

Verses 1–6 focus on the heavens. The psalmist calls upon angels, the sun and moon, shining stars, and even the waters above the skies to praise the Lord. These cosmic beings and forces, created and sustained by God’s command, declare God’s glory simply by being what they are.

Verses 7–14 shift the attention to the earth. Praise now comes from sea monsters and wild weather – images that, throughout Scripture, often represent chaos or opposition to God. Yet even these untamed forces are called into the chorus of praise, revealing that nothing lies beyond God’s reach or purpose.

The psalm gathers together all parts of creation – animals, trees, rulers, young and old – and places them in harmony, united in worship. God’s name alone is exalted, and God’s people are invited to join this great, universal song.

Matthew 2:13–23

This is a harrowing passage, marked by violence and grief, and stands in stark contrast to the joyful visit of the Magi that comes just before. The beauty of epiphany light is suddenly shadowed by human cruelty and fear.¹

This text introduces a major theme in Matthew's Gospel: Jesus as the new Moses, sent to deliver God's people. Just as Moses narrowly escaped death as an infant (Exodus 2), so too does Jesus, rescued from Herod's rage by divine intervention. Both are threatened by powerful rulers, both make a dramatic escape, and both find temporary refuge in Egypt – the very place that once represented slavery.²

This theme continues in later chapters as Jesus passes through water (his baptism), enters the wilderness, and ascends a mountain to teach; all echoes of the Exodus narrative.³

If children are indeed a gift from God, they are gifts in their most fragile form. This passage reminds us not only of the vulnerability of infants, but of the fundamental truth that all human beings are fragile – if not physically, then emotionally, spiritually, or socially.

Recognising our shared vulnerability invites us to live with compassion and care for one another. We are called to handle each other gently, honouring the sacredness of every life – especially in a world where too often, power is used to harm rather than protect.

(1) Brueggemann, Cousar, Gaventa, Newsome, Texts for Preaching Year A (1995), p. 71.

(2) W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Matthew, A Shorter Commentary (2004) London: T&T Clarke, pp. 31–35.

(3) Evans, p.57.

Prayer ideas:

Silent Intercession for people who are fragile at the moment

Name different groups of people in need of special care and compassion:

children without homes / people living in fear / people carrying heavy burdens / the overlooked and unheard

After each one, pray: “God, hold them with care.”

The good news to understand

The world can be a tough and challenging place, so let's care for one another.

Life isn't always easy. People face struggles, pain and uncertainty all around us. In the midst of this, we are called to be a community that looks out for each other with kindness and compassion. Caring for one another means noticing the vulnerable, offering support, and sharing hope. It's about creating spaces where people feel safe, valued and loved – even when life feels hard. Together, we can make a difference by living gently, listening deeply, and acting with heart. In doing so, we become a source of healing and strength in a world that desperately needs it.

04 January 2026

Christmas 2: Created with Infinite Care

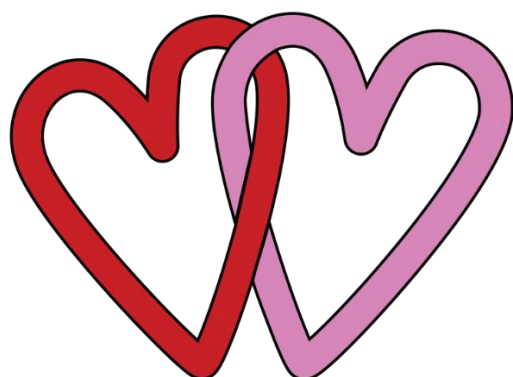
Psalm 147:12–20

He gives snow like wool; he scatters frost like ashes.

John 1:1–18

But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.

Symbol: Two overlapping hearts



Methodist Way of Life: Share

Background notes

Psalm 147

This is another of the final five psalms that conclude the book with a crescendo of praise. It's made up of three ancient hymns woven together – and the verses we read today come from the third section.

Verses 13–14 highlight God's care for a particular people, attending to their practical, everyday needs. It's earthy and grounded: God strengthens city gates, blesses children, secures borders and provides abundant wheat. This is praise rooted in the physical and communal – perhaps a natural connection to themes like the 2025 Lent campaign Soul Food, where nourishment, security, and belonging all matter deeply.

Then, in verses 15–17, the psalm zooms out to a cosmic scale. God's word races across the earth; snow and frost fall by divine command. It's a reminder that the one who provides for our daily needs is also the one who governs the vastness of creation.

We are both dust and spirit – held in the tension between the intimate and the infinite.

John 1:1–18

At the heart of John's prologue is a remarkable promise: that those who receive Christ are given the power, or more precisely the right, to become children of God (v.12). This is not a status we hold by nature, but a gift rooted in God's initiative and generosity. As Barrett notes, for John, life itself is always a gift from God.¹

John is careful with language here. He uses the Greek word tekna (children) to describe those who believe, while reserving huioi (sons) exclusively for Jesus.² We are not sons and daughters in the same way that Jesus is the Son. But we are truly, meaningfully, God's children.

And this is not a distant hope – it is a present reality. One of John's companion texts, 1 John 3:2, makes it clear: "Beloved, we are God's

children now”.³ The transformation begins the moment Christ is received.

The theme of divine abundance, so prominent throughout John’s Gospel and explored in last year’s Bible Month, is already present here. From God’s fullness, we receive grace upon grace: an overflowing generosity that not only forgives but adopts, not only welcomes but empowers.⁴

This passage invites us to receive the gift of Christ with open hearts, and to live now, today, as God’s beloved children.

(1) C K Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John* (1978) London: SPCK, p. 163.

(2) Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (1966) New York: Doubleday, p. 11.

(3) *ibid.* p. 11.

(4) David F. Ford, *The Gospel of John* (2021) Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, p. 38.

Prayer ideas:

Creation and care

Inspired by Psalm 147’s imagery, pray for the healing and protection of the earth, and for wisdom to care for the environment. Ask for God’s strength to uphold the vulnerable, just as God sustains all creation.

The good news to understand

God’s gift to you is the invitation to become a child of God.

This isn’t something we earn or achieve – it’s a generous gift, freely given. To be a child of God means you are deeply loved, accepted and valued just as you are.

This gift invites you to live with confidence and peace, knowing that no matter what happens, you are held in God’s care. It changes everything, transforming your identity and your daily life with purpose and joy.

06 January 2026

Epiphany: The Gift that Keeps on Giving

Psalm 72:1–7, 10–14

In his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more.

Matthew 2:1–12

The, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Symbol: Treasure chest



Methodist Way of Life: Open

Background notes

Psalm 72:1–7, 10–14

We first encountered the opening verses of this psalm in the second week of Advent, where the focus is on a king who rules with justice – protecting the poor, judging with righteousness and bringing peace. Today's reading picks up with verses 10–14. Here, neighbouring kings come in surrender, offering financial tribute. Attributed to Solomon, the psalm reflects a contemporary vision of Israel's dominance – an ideal where foreign powers are not only subdued but contribute their wealth to the nation. In its original context, this is a celebration of political strength.¹

There's a striking irony in using this text for Epiphany. When the Magi bring gifts to Jesus, they are not bowing to a powerful, conquering monarch but to a vulnerable child.²

Verses 12–14 return to the heart of this ideal king’s mission: compassion for the poor and vulnerable, and deep concern for justice. The king is not praised for military might or wealth, but for rescuing the needy and honouring the dignity of every person.³ Verse 14b offers a rare and powerful statement: “precious is their blood in his sight.” The true treasure in this psalm is not silver or gold, but the peace and liberation that flow from a just and compassionate reign.

Matthew 2:1–12

The visit of the Magi is one of the most evocative scenes in the nativity story, rich in symbolism and surprise.

The “wise men” or Magi were likely astrologers or scholars from Persia, in the region of modern-day Iran. To Matthew’s Jewish readers, they would have been viewed with deep suspicion: foreign, pagan and outside the covenant community. And yet, they are the ones who come seeking truth.⁴

Their journey foreshadows the final commission Jesus gives at the end of Matthew’s Gospel: to go and make disciples of all nations. The arrival of these outsiders is a glimpse of the global reach of the good news. Jesus is a gift not confined to one people or place – he is sought by those who are hungry for truth, wherever they come from.⁵ He is, quite literally, the gift that keeps on giving.

Herod stands in stark contrast to both Jesus and the Magi. Where they seek and worship, he plots and clings. Herod is paranoid and possessive, desperate to hold onto power.⁶ The Magi, meanwhile, kneel in reverence and open their treasure chests, willing to part with precious gifts in honour of one they recognise as greater. They seemed to know that earthly treasure is not to be held tightly.⁷ May we too give the gift of Jesus freely and widely.

(1) Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms*, p. 314.

(2) Brueggemann, Cousar, Gaventa, Newsome, *Texts for Preaching Year A* pp. 85–86.

(3) Weiser, The Psalms, p. 504.

(4) Evans, Matthew, p. 51.

(5) Brueggemann, Cousar, Gaventa, Newsome, Texts for Preaching Year A pp. 89–90.

(6) Evans, Matthew, pp. 53–54.

(7) Davies and Allison, Matthew, p. 27.

Global prayers:

In Europe the Church is continuing to experience the enrichment from Methodists around the world. The Methodist Church in Portugal is planting new churches as Portuguese-speaking migrants arrive with their faith looking for a home. This is the unexpected gift of wise people bringing modern day gold, frankincense and myrrh in new songs, new patterns, new words of worship.

Almighty God,

your Kingdom is one of renewal and love.

May we see the rhythm of your renewal in our churches today

Good news given and received.

We pray with all on the move, bringing gifts from lands afar to new places.

May we give our gifts with open hearts to a new place

Help us to find people of peace to build community.

We pray for all receiving wise people into congregations and homes.

May we receive the gifts and learn a fresh expression of faith.

Help us to embody your surrounding care for those newly arrived with us.

A renewed people, inspired for your mission.

Amen.

The good news to understand

You are like a treasure chest, filled with gifts waiting to be shared.

Generosity isn't just about giving things; it's about sharing your time, your encouragement, your compassion and your joy. When you freely offer these gifts, you reflect God's love and make the world a richer, brighter place.

So open your treasure chest with courage and kindness, knowing that your gifts can make a real difference in the lives of others.

The Methodist Church

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