



Update: December 2023

Dear Friends

'It's beginning to look a lot like busyness', hang on, I mean Christmas. Yes, it's that time of year for Christian communities up and down the land. It's the perennial tension and question – is this the missional opportunity of the year or would Jesus prefer us to become pilgrims along the Advent way and work out in the stillness what his incarnation will mean for us in the coming year?

I do hope you get chance to pause, not least because the Good News of Jesus is really needed and as his hands and feet, we need to share him in the best of ways.

Our December update offers support for the season practically and reflectively and with thoughts for the New Year.

One Advent prayerful reflection you may want to use and include is the [invitation to remember all those suffering in the Holy Land this advent and Christmas](#). In solidarity with churches in the Holy Land, and all who are suffering there because of the recent conflict, we invite our congregations to do something 'out of the ordinary' this advent by not lighting the second candle and pray for a lasting peace. Traditionally, the second candle on the advent wreath represents peace, and in some traditions is known as the 'Bethlehem candle'. Christian sisters and brothers in Bethlehem tell us that this advent and Christmas, the lights in Bethlehem that normally adorn the birthplace of Jesus will remain unlit in memory of those who have died in the current conflict.

This unlit candle mimics the unlit lights of Bethlehem and serves as a constant reminder that we stand in solidarity with all who are suffering there. We do this knowing the central fifth candle, will soon be lit, giving us hope that Christ's light eternally shines in the darkness.

May you know Christ's, peace, hope and presence this Advent.

Every blessing

Diane, Hilary, Jane, Mary, Mat, Mike, Paul, Sharon, Steve and Wale
Faith and Society Team



Feel free to forward this email to others in your church, or encourage them to sign up to receive our regular emails by completing the form at the bottom of every page of [our website](#).

This month's featured stories:



Exploring the Christmas story in a fun and interactive way
- Clevedon Baptist Church's 'Destination Bethlehem'



A reflection on how we pray;
on being open to God and his timing
by Simon Mattholie



Unsung Baptist heroes of Kindertransport - the 85th anniversary of the beginning of the rescue programme

News:



An invitation to remember all those suffering in the Holy Land this Advent and Christmas

In solidarity with churches in the Holy Land, and all who are suffering there because of the recent conflict, we would like to invite Baptist congregations this Advent to consider not lighting the second candle and pray for a lasting peace.

[Click here for more information.](#)



Baptist Union Presidency - 2025-26

We would like to remind you that we are inviting nominations for the person who will serve as Baptist Union President in 2025-26. The Presidency is open to anyone who is a member of one of our churches, and will be chosen because of gifts and experience which will help to communicate our Baptists Together vision and mission priorities. [Click here for details of how to make a nomination.](#)

Nominations must be received by 31 December 2023.



Joint Safeguarding Lead for Central and Eastern Baptist Associations

The Central and Eastern Baptist Association Safeguarding Lead has moved into retirement, and the associations are seeking a person with experience in safeguarding to fulfil this part-time post commencing March 2024. [Click here for more information.](#)

This month's featured resources:



December Prayer Diary

The [December Prayer Diary](#) is now available to download from our website. The particular themes this month are:

- The Ministries Team
- 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- The Northern Baptist Association
- Responding with joy and hope this Christmas
- Reflecting on 2023 and praying for the year ahead

Please print out a copy for those unable to access it.



New BSL carol service ‘a perfect opportunity for ecumenical unity’

In a new ecumenical collaboration, the Baptist Union of Great Britain will join four major UK Christian denominations to simultaneously broadcast a Christmas carol service led by Deaf Christians in British Sign Language (BSL). The Christian BSL Carol Service will be hosted on our Facebook page and YouTube channel at 09:00 on 10 December.

[Click here for details.](#)



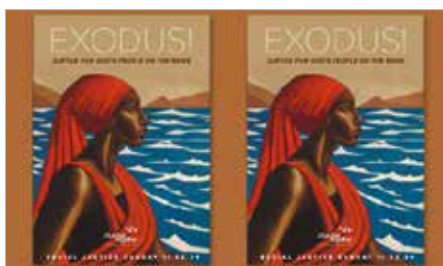
Lifewords Christmas resources

Lifewords is offering a range of resources this Christmas that welcome people into the nativity story. Lifewords Christmas resources speak of hope, welcome and life. Each booklet, video, animation and resource is designed to help people engage with the Christmas story in their context, supporting each reader, viewer or listener to experience the words of the Bible as relevant to their lives. Click here for information about the [range of resources freely available](#).



Nationwide Christmas campaign ‘Shine Your Light’ launched

‘Shine Your Light’ calls Christians to unite in towns, villages and cities this Christmas to take the message outdoors. The initiative is led by the National Day of Prayer and Worship in collaboration with many denominations and key ministries, including Baptists Together. It will run on the weekend of 16 and 17 December, with an emphasis on community events and activities, including nativities and family focused opportunities. Click here [for more information](#).



Racial Justice Sunday 2024

Racial Justice Sunday will be on 11 February 2024. The theme is ‘Exodus: God’s people on the Move’, and focuses on those who have been forced to leave homes and livelihoods for a variety of reasons, and the welcome they receive when they arrive in a new place. Click here to [download the resource booklet](#) from CTBI.



Act on Poverty - Lent course for 2024

The Act on Poverty course is a brand new resource for small groups. It is being put together by JPIT, Christian Aid, Church Action on Poverty, the Trussell Trust and others. The aim is to enable your church to gain a deeper understanding of diverse experiences of poverty and enable you to act in the run up to the General Election. The six-week course is currently in production, including questions and prompts for small group discussion plus a pack of inspiring videos and recordings featuring conversations with activists and people experiencing poverty.

[Sign up to find out when the course becomes available.](#)



Warm Welcome

Is your congregation or community space offering a warm welcome to people in your neighbourhood this winter? There is still time to register with Warm Welcome, to be added to their map to make your event easier to discover. Warm Welcome offers lots of great ideas, suggestions for potential funding and important things to know to help provide a safe and welcoming space for anyone who seeks company or warmth in the darkest months of the year.

[Click here for more information.](#)

This month's featured events:



It is Well with my Soul musical - Saturday 13 January

Premiered in June, this new evangelistic musical written by a Baptist minister tells the story behind the enduring hymn 'It is Well with My Soul'. It explores 'the enduring message of true and steadfast faith in the midst of tragedy and suffering' and invites listeners to explore the Gospel message of hope for themselves. Click here [for more details about the musical](#) and the performance in London in January.



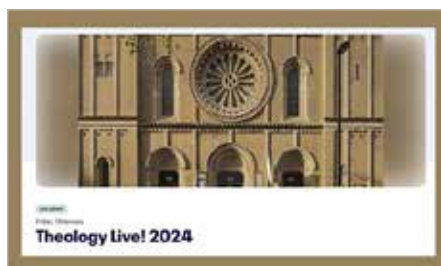
Fresh Streams National Leadership Conference - 15-17 January 2024

Each January ministers, leaders, elders, deacons, worship leaders, youth leaders – whole church leadership teams – come to The Hayes and are inspired and invigorated. You are invited to join them! Five keynote speakers will be speaking into the theme of conference - ***Together: Discipleship in a Divergent World*** - and there is a great line up of seminar speakers including Ken Benjamin, Rachel Heffer, Martin Young, Simon Harris, Simon Goddard, Kate Irvin, Sue Glover and Isabella Senior. Worship leaders are Josh and Florrie Bishop Hall. Click here [for more information and online booking](#).



Week of Prayer for Christian Unity - 18-25 January

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is a special week providing an opportunity to focus our prayers on Christian unity, as well as speak about and experience Christian unity personally, in our village, town or county and engage with what happens at a national level. This year the theme has come from an ecumenical team from Burkina Faso, facilitated by the local Chemin Neuf Community (CCN). They have reflected on the familiar story of the Good Samaritan, and all are encouraged to Go and do likewise. It is a story about crossing boundaries that calls our attention to the bonds that unite the whole human family. [Click here for more information and resources](#).



Theology Live - 19 January 2024

Theology Live has been running for six years. A day conference for Baptists to explore theology together, with specialist input and time for discussion, it's been a fantastic mix of papers by Baptists engaged in theological research and study. Theology Live in 2024 will be a little different, and will take the time to reflect on how we discern, so central to our being Baptist, and the theology that gives it meaning and weight. Read more about [plans for the event and a link to book your place](#).



Intercultural Church and City Transformation - Saturday 20 January

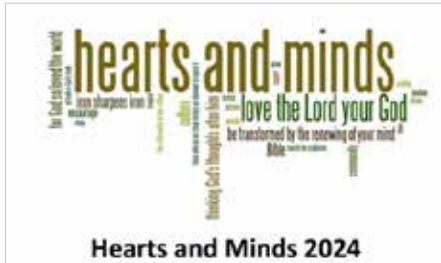
This gathering in Leeds will bring together Christians from diverse cultures and streams to foster unity and empower the Church to make a lasting impact on cities for Christ. Click here to [find out more](#) about this opportunity to be part of a movement that seeks to build bridges, break barriers, and create lasting change - and to register.



Baptist Assembly - 17-19 May 2024

Why not plan to join us at our Assembly in Telford next year, with a group from your church? To get a feel of what Assembly is like, we have a selection of videos from this year's event now available to view on our website. Please [see the Assembly website to access them](#).

More details about Assembly 2024 to follow.



Hearts and Minds Conference - Thursday 13 June 2024

This theological conference mainly for Baptist ministers will be taking place at Bristol Baptist College and will be an opportunity to present and listen to papers within a friendly, supportive environment. The Keynote speaker will be the Revd Dr Peter Morden. Hearts and Minds is an annual day conference sponsored by Bristol Baptist College, Cardiff Baptist College, and Regent's Park College. It is designed to create a hospitable space for Baptists to think and talk about theology together. To offer a paper, contact Helen Paynter paynterh@bristol-baptist.ac.uk by 1 May and to register, email reception@bristol-baptist.ac.uk by 1 June.