

One of the cheerful Advent hymns we often sing is “Hills of the north rejoice” (STF 172). It was originally written as a missionary hymn by Anglican rector Charles E. Oakley, the hopeful words being uplifting and declaring Jesus’ love as all encompassing. Nowadays some find its sentiments out of date and rather patronising, echoing as it does its 19<sup>th</sup> century context.

What interests me especially about the hymn is the first line in verse 5, “Shout, as you journey on; songs be in every mouth.” Advent is a lot about journeys. There is our own journey towards Christmas and the celebration once again of Christ’s birth, God’s reaching into the world in his son. There is also our own Christian life journey, the development of our relationship with Jesus through the living Spirit, honed and informed by the experience of passing years and the ups and downs of life.

And I reflect on the contribution of the recent pilgrimage journey to Israel to participants’ appreciation of the Gospels, as the Advent lessons mention places where we walked too. The shepherds’ fields, the town of Nazareth and the hill country between there and Bethlehem, where we visited the site of the Nativity itself. We stood on the bank of the River Jordan where Jesus was baptised by John. Such a journey brings the scripture to life and us closer to Jesus.

There are other journeys in the Advent story too. The priest Zechariah was called from his town in the hill country of Judea (Luke 1.39) to serve his duty at the temple in Jerusalem. There, alone in the inner sanctum, Zechariah received a surprise visit from the Angel Gabriel. Even more surprising was the message the angel brought, that he and his wife Elizabeth both “well on in years” (Luke 1.18) and childless, would have a son by the grace of God. Zechariah expressed some doubt at this and was struck dumb until the birth of John the Baptist. His wife did become pregnant, “for nothing is impossible with God”, as Gabriel told Mary. (Luke 1.37)

Mary also had misgivings about how she would become the bearer of the Son of God (Luke 1.34) but accepted the Lord’s favour with faith and grace. When the angel left her, Mary travelled from her home in Nazareth to visit her cousin Elizabeth and the two women rejoiced together at the blessings they had received from their Lord. The wonderful song of Mary, the Magnificat, is also retold in a popular modern Advent hymn, “Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord” (STF 186), written by Timothy Dudley-Smith, a retired Anglican Bishop.

As we journey on through Advent to Christmas and beyond, we re-live other biblical journeys. Mary and Joseph travelling to Bethlehem, the shepherds running down from the fields to the stable, the journey of the Magi from the East following the star to find the promised King and then returning home by another route; and the flight into Egypt by the Holy Family, refugees fleeing from the threat of violence, resonating with situations in the world today.

At Christmas, many families make journeys to be together on Christmas Day. Journeys this year may be made more difficult with problems on the railways, at airports and the exceptionally freezing temperatures brought all the way from the Arctic by the “Troll of

Trondheim". Mary and Joseph undertook the journey of perhaps 90 miles from their home to Bethlehem also at the coldest time of year. The journey was not without risks – Mary was heavily pregnant and there were thieves and wild beasts to contend with. Thankfully God was with them, and despite being turned away from the inn, they found shelter and Jesus was born.

May God be with you this Christmas and beyond as you continue on your journey of faith and life.

### Resources

From this week's The SiGN details of possible funding to help with your warm space.

## Resource

### Warm Space Funding & Publicity



There is a **Connexional grant available if you are opening up a warm space** (so long as you apply before 12<sup>th</sup> Jan)  
£24 per day or £12 for a half day that you are open.

[Click here to learn more about funding opportunities](#)

Have you **registered your warm space with Warm Welcome?** - This means folk will be able to find your warm space online:

[Click here to register with Warm Welcome](#)

Finally, **JPIT are encouraging folk who host warm spaces to write to their MP.** The idea is to send them a candle and invite them to join your warm space. Details and a template can be found here:

[Click here for the JPIT campaigning materials](#)

If the links above don't work please go to [Respond to the energy crisis this winter \(methodist.org.uk\)](https://www.methodist.org.uk)

**Trinity Woking's News and Views** is an uplifting and fun read and can be found at

<https://d3hgrlq6yacptf.cloudfront.net/5f193f8610e8d/content/pages/documents/issue-59-winter-202217840003452.pdf> It is also in the Church Magazines section of the Circuit website.