

Diary Dates

December

10 th Dec	Hope Church Hounslow Toddlers
15 th Dec	St James Hampton Hill 3.30pm
22 nd Dec	Ashford Common Methodist 10.30am

January

12 th Jan	St Nicholas Shepperton 3.00pm
16 th Jan	Towntree Pre-school (am)
16 th Jan	Trustees meeting
18 th Jan	Staines & Feltham Methodist Circuit Training (am)
19 th Jan	Staines Methodist 10.30am
19 th Jan	St James Hampton Hill 3.30pm
20 th Jan	Laleham Playgroup (am)
21 st Jan	Tiddlers Toddlers
22 nd Jan	Little Fishes Toddlers
23 rd Jan	Seedlings Toddlers
24 th Jan	Minnows Toddlers
26 th Jan	Ashford Common Methodist 10.30am
27 th Jan	Playbox Pre-school (am)
28 th Jan	Hope Church Hounslow Toddlers
29 th Jan	Footprints Toddlers
30 th Jan	Little Tots Toddlers
31 st Jan	Playtime Toddlers

At first glance it may appear that December is quiet. Ironically, churches often have their own well established programmes that they like to run and so neither need or want me over the festive period! It's a good time for me to prepare for the growing calls on my time in 2025 so I'm not twiddling my thumbs or sitting back and consuming trays of mince pies!

Please pray for each visit and in those apparent 'quiet moments' please pray for divine inspiration and understanding in my preparation to enable God's ministry through FACT to remain at the forefront and be relevant in an ever changing world.

Thanks.



A newsletter to keep supporters informed, inspired & involved.
Issue number 168 December 2024

Missional Emphasis?

I'm grateful for the thinking of Dr. Meic Pearse who has an interesting blog online. In a recent episode he offered some thoughts on the history of the church over the last two thousand years and the different emphasis at different times on elements of broadly agreed theology. (Yep, that's a fairly loose statement!)

He asserted that:

Eastern Orthodox Theology has emphasised the incarnation and the resurrection. This has produced a mindset open to mysticism and resistant to materialist / reductionist logic.

Western Theology (both Catholic and Protestant) has emphasised personal sin, the crucifixion and atonement. This has produced a mindset inclined to individualism and to legal abstractions. (Are you still reading this? I'm coming to the point, honest!)

Today, both of these theologies can be found globally but he suggests that where a society has a 'totally degraded culture' (that's us) in which a large minority of individuals:

1. Hate themselves (because of abuse in their past or present)
2. Feel rage against others and against society as a whole
3. Repudiate their historic heritage

It will respond best to the gospel message where there is an emphasis on **human beings in the image of God**.

Forgive me for trying to over simplify this but it no longer works when we try to 'prove' faith with beautifully constructed arguments. Being right doesn't count. Mysticism can be found virtually anywhere, in different spiritualities and ideologies. The issue for people in an egocentric world is, 'Is God like me, can God understand me, get me, engage with me and (at the heart of the questions) can I encounter God?'

This is not to abandon the other elements of theology mentioned but merely to note they are not the starting point for people's faith journeys towards and with God today.

What do you think?



Faith Awareness in Children Trust

'Artificial Intelligence must not become an intermediary between God and the individual.'

In any organisation, whether for-profit or not-for-profit, like FACT, there needs to be good governance and accountability. FACT has been blessed over the years with fantastic Trustees who have given their time and wisdom to ensure we achieve the highest levels in these areas. The nitty gritty of reviewing policies happens at every meeting and recently we looked at our 'Internet and Social Media Policy' where one of our Trustees raised the issue of AI and how we might use it.

The phenomena of AI is growing at an ever increasing rate and we all hear stories of good and bad through the media that we consume. It is affecting our lives, often without us being aware of it!

So, how is FACT monitoring it, using it where it could bring value and help, while at the same time understanding what it shouldn't be doing or inadvertently allowing it to obfuscate elements of what we do or stand for?

The headline is a sentence within a paragraph on the issue of 'Generative AI' that may be added to our policy.

It made me wonder!

What was your reaction to reading it?

Used well, AI is a fabulous tool that can unlock and speed up lots of written tasks, yet we need to remember it is only a computer programme that is dependent on the input to be able to provide the requested output. It is being developed to be more and more useful and accurate.



Of course there have been some amusing, if not slightly alarming, incidents where the AI response to a simple question generated an answer that suggested the person making the inquiry should die!

The clue is in the name, It is artificial intelligence not divine intelligence. The danger is to default to the quick and easy when, if we are to hear God's voice, there is a need and duty on our part to seek and find. That is harder, longer, demands our full attention, requires us to wrestle and wonder. Intrinsically we must function not as a machine but as a sentient being with a soul and not a CPU.

The Bible often captures this notion of God being 'Other' for example, when the prophet Isaiah says, **Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.**

Perhaps I should have dropped this article into 'Gemini' to see how it would have improved it!

FACT enabling children and households to reflect on the Christian Gospel

Toddlers and Pre-schools

I was recently asked by a supporter what the difference is between a toddler group and a pre-school group. Good question.

Pre-school groups are sometimes called playgroups and are staffed by professionals who are known as nursery workers, play assistants, or early years educators. Parents and carers pay for their children to attend sessions with a certain amount of financial support from the govt. When I visit, there are often 15 - 20 children supported by the staff as I engage in a simple presentation of a Bible based story, song and one of my friends in a bucket!

Toddler groups are generally run by volunteers and mainly based on church premises. The parents or carers (often grand-parents) stay and remain in charge and are responsible for the children in their care.

These groups can vary in size from visit to visit and may be limited by the capacity of the hall / church. I have sat in front of cohorts where the number of children is as low as 4 or as high as 70! The number of carers varies as they may be responsible for more than one child and some groups have childminders with the children in their care. I offer the same presentation as Preschools receive.

I visit each group once each half term, so six times a year. If you check out the diary on the back page you will note that as of January I will be visiting eleven settings. This number keeps on rising and is often the only contact many of these households get of anything Christian or Gospel centred.

I have completed all the recent visits in November which had a theme based around Jesus and the disciples encounter with children recorded in Matthew 19. We enjoyed an action song that noted we were all special to God and my friend 'Lady Roweena' made an appearance bedecked with her pearls and catch phrase, 'You're all gorgeous!' She has become a favourite with many a grandmother who seem to relate to her very well!



Time2Share@Home



Progress continues with the redesign of the Time2Share@Home materials. The above sketch shows the early stages of the image that will be part of the session concerning how we sometimes see ourselves and how we need to understand how God sees us. We have tried very hard not to fall into the trap of body shaming that is a very real issue in our society. So this is not about size, shape or age. Our designer has created an androgynous figure and I think the use of the paper bag head is pure genius. Perhaps I will have the completed image to show you in the next newsletter.

We have trialled some of the designs with a few select people to gather valuable thoughts and opinions. This has allowed us to tweak and rework some parts with elements that we had not seen or been aware of. Obviously once we are finished there will be many and varied opinions on the product but we will have tried our best to make it as good as we can. Keep watching this space for updates.

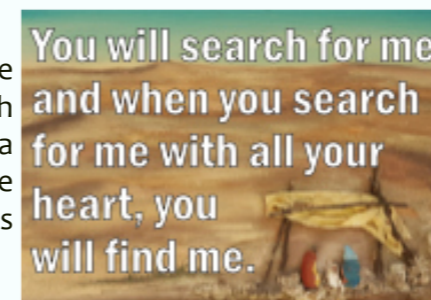
Intergenerational Worship

The October and November services continued at the same pace and excitement as September's. One of the realisations that churches are coming to is that church needs to be authentic. Being 'right' or trying to answer questions that no one is asking is proving to be of no value to the society in which we live. It is for those reasons and others that I try to engage with issues of life that many encounter today. In October I took the story of **Ruth** and rather than defaulting to the romantic elements that really don't exist, I homed in the core issues of a refugee fleeing famine in her home land and trying to work / find food in a new country where she didn't know the language or customs. She was extremely vulnerable to molestation, prostitution and violence. It is into this scenario we considered how God could be found at work. We touched on the idea of Boaz being a 'Family Redeemer' and likened it to having a 'Get out of Jail free card' from the game of Monopoly.



November's theme was, '**Thriving with God in the hard times**'. We noted that sometimes, if not often, we find life hard and ourselves in situations beyond our control - financially, physically, emotionally, our status in society and more. Places not of our choosing and with an inability to change it. We recognised that God isn't afar off but in the midst. He very rarely removes us from the situation but enables us to flourish and thrive in the midst of adversity.

We dipped into the book of Jeremiah and assembled a keyring to take away with this text.



Christmas Services

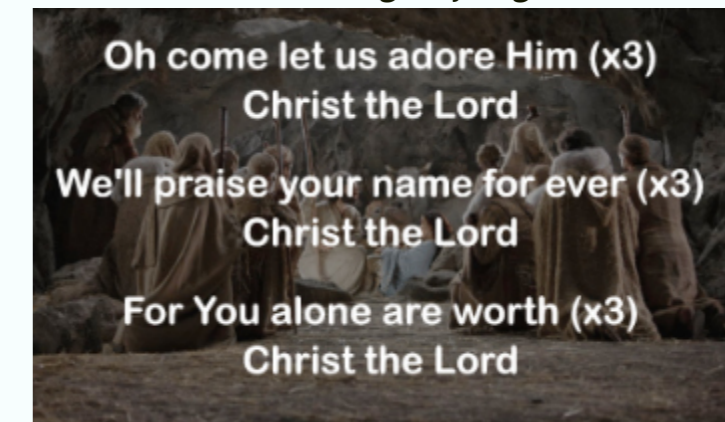
I'm excited to be doing a Christmas Intergenerational Service with 2 churches this year. It will be another chance to focus on the Nativity without the Kings / Magi.

Opportunities to make Sheep!

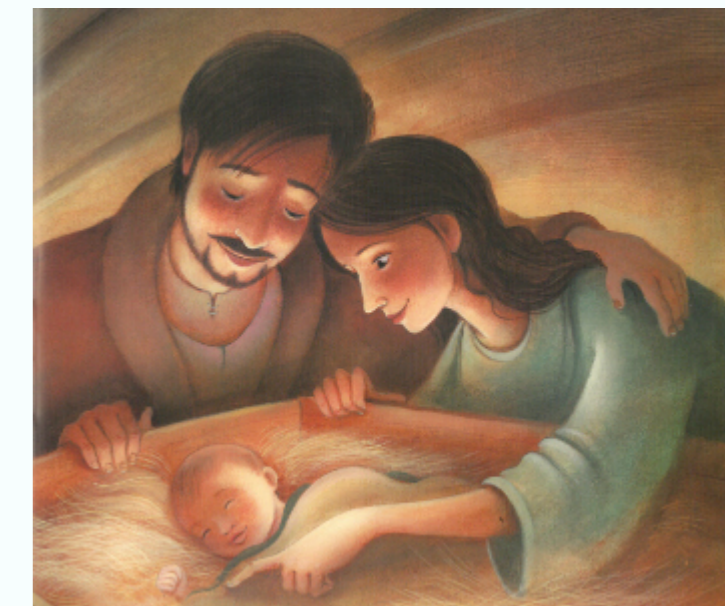


We'll place them by the manger and then pause in adoration at the birth of Jesus, God and man, Saviour of the World!

Then we'll gently sing



Come and join us at one of the local churches if you are able. It would be great to see you there.



Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation