

Hush the Noise
Join the Love Song
this Christmas



WORSHIP RESOURCE

The Methodist Church 

Hush the Noise



WORSHIP RESOURCE

It goes without saying that the Advent-Christmas season is a busy one for many ministers and preachers.



But it is also a wonderful opportunity to connect with people who don't normally attend church and who might come to a service in this Christmas season. And connecting with this story is a wonderful way to hear the good news.



This resource pack is intended to help you plan worship services to tie in with Hush the Noise, the Methodist Church's Christmas campaign for 2024. It's based around the Christmas Carol *It came upon the midnight clear* (StF 205):

Christmas is loud isn't it? So much expectation. So many voices. Telling us how to celebrate. What to wear. What to eat and drink. What to watch and what to buy.



Instead, this Christmas we're inviting everyone to hush the noise. To listen for the love song that the angels bring, this and every year. They sang it for the first time more than 2,000 years ago, on the midnight clear. They're just waiting for us to join in.

We aren't suggesting that worship services need to be less loud or joyous. It's a matter of trying to cut out the distracting noises, pressures and messages that surround us so we can all hear the voice of God in the midst of it.



You will find ideas for seven worship services, from Advent through to Epiphany. This year Advent starts on 1 December, and Christmas Day falls on a Wednesday. The ideas can be used as part of standalone services, but are even better if you use them all in order. There are also ideas for a carol service and 'blue' Christmas service, a service for people who struggle emotionally at this time, that can fit at any date.



If you wish to send out invitations for your services, postcards, along with posters for displaying outside your church, are available from

methodistpublishing.org.uk





Each service contains lots of ideas as a menu to pick from to help you craft your own service that suits your context, whether that is in a chapel, a school assembly, chaplaincy hubs, a care home, or wherever you meet with others and God. Please don't feel that you have to include everything.



Theme: a phrase from the carol.

Scripture passages: taken from the lectionary. Scripture quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition.

Songs and hymns: some extra ideas to complement the usual carols. A number of these draw from the full range of *Singing the Faith* hymn book contents, as well as from the **Resources Hub**.



Opening liturgy: to accompany the lighting of candles throughout Advent, continuing into Christmas. Each week has a symbol that can be added to the collection as a visual reminder. Thanks to the Revd Elaine Halls. The full candle liturgy is also supplied in a separate pdf, if it's helpful to print off for providing individual copies.



Background notes: short contextual information for each specific service, exploring how the theme connects to the highlighted Bible passages. As a development based on feedback from last year we've gone deeper with the exegesis in these notes, but use them as you need. Please note that these are not intended to be read out as a sermon!

Questions: these can be worked up into the main points of a sermon or used in a discussion; it's good to give people in the congregation a chance to discuss their faith. These questions will also work in a small group,

Hands-on activities: fun, intergenerational activities to help make your services pop. With some adaptation these can be used with an online group. Some activities are simpler than others to prepare during this busy time.

Prayer ideas: some use a Christmas tree as a focus.


The good news to get across: the key idea to land, particularly for newcomers. Say it several times, make it sticky!

Ways people can respond: a simple, non-threatening way for people to respond personally to the good news.

Prayer of blessing.

If you're interested in ideas to use directly with children and young people, take a look at **Advent with Children and Young People**. This flexible resource contains three short session outlines designed to be used in midweek groups during the first three weeks of Advent. Some of the activities are repeated in this worship package, to make sure everyone across churches and youth groups are using the same material.



	DATE	TITLE	OLD TESTAMENT	GOSPEL	OBJECT
ADVENT 1	01/12/24	Hush the noise	Jeremiah 33:14-16	Luke 21:25-36	
ADVENT 2	08/12/24	To prophets shown	Malachi 3:1-4	Luke 3:1-6	
ADVENT 3	15/12/24	Babel sounds	Zephaniah 3:14-20	Luke 3:7-18	
ADVENT 4	22/12/24	The love song	Micah 5:2-5a	Luke 1:39-55	
CHRISTMAS DAY	25/12/24	Hear the angels sing	Isaiah 9:2-7	Luke 2:1-20	
CHRISTMAS 1	29/12/24	Hush the hushing	1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26	Luke 2:41-52	
CHRISTMAS 2	05/01/25	Jesus, the love song	Jeremiah 31:7-14	John 1:1-18	

Advent 1

1 December
2024

HUSH THE NOISE

Bible readings

Jeremiah 33:14-16

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he **shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will live in safety.** And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

Luke 21:25-36

"There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars and **on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves.** People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

"Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place and to stand before the Son of Man."



Songs and hymns

All the room was hushed and still
(StF 266)

Come, Lord Jesus, come (StF 168)

And I will wait now (website only)

Calm me, Lord, as you calmed the
storm (StF 624)

Carol of Peace (website only)

Deep in the darkness a starlight is
gleaming (StF 625)

May the God of hope go with us
every day (StF 411)

Open, Lord, my inward ear (StF 450)

O, the love of my Lord is the essence
(StF 431)

Put peace into each other's hands
(StF 712)

Send down the fire of your justice (Call
us to be your compassion) (StF 413)

Also see: **Resource Hub Worship
Calendar** suggestions for
1 December 2024



Opening liturgy

Advent dawns with lights strung high and music everywhere,
Sights and smells abound around,
Senses assaulted and confused,
O hush the noise,

Let's hear the angels sing.

Amid the lists and cards and gifts,
Amid the pleas and "please can we",
Amid the chaos of the world,
O hush the noise,

Let's hear the angels sing.

Let's seek to see and seek to hear.
Let's seek to feel and seek to know.
Let's seek to find peace and love.
O hush the noise,

Let's hear the angels sing.

Advent 1



Background notes

Throughout Advent and Christmas 2024 the Methodist Church is calling us all to 'Hush the Noise.' This is a phrase taken from the carol *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*, which we will use each week as a basis for our worship.

Advent is the start of the Church's liturgical calendar, and the main Gospel used in the lectionary rotates to Luke. In this first Sunday in Advent we begin with a rather cryptic warning that we are going to explore through the lens of hushing the noise.

Each week we have a symbol that can be used in worship to summarise the theme. This first week's is a picture of roaring waves.

This text is a continuation of Luke's account of Jesus' speech about the end times; the advent of the Son of Man and the coming of redemption.¹ Many scholars think that it is based on Mark 13:5-37, and reuses some of the phrasing, but that Luke wove in some of his unique content.² Luke distinguishes the end times from the historical fall of Jerusalem, which Mark conflates.

...the roaring of the sea and the waves...

In the first section Luke abbreviates the quotation in Mark 13:24-25 taken from Isaiah 13:10. Luke adds a new image of the roaring seas.³ This may be an allusion to Psalm 46:3, which uses the common scriptural imagery of the sea as a metaphor for chaos.⁴

...distress among nations confused by...

The sea causes 'distress' (*sunoche*) for the nations, who are 'confused' (*aporia*) by it.⁵ 'Confusion' is perhaps too mild a translation of '*aporia*', which usually carries a sense that there is no way to go on, people being 'at their wits' end'.⁶

1 Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (1997) Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, p. 740.

2 Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, *The Gospel According to Luke* (1981) Doubleday, New York, p. 1324.

3 Fitzmeyer, p. 1349.

4 Artur Weiser, *The Psalms* (1962) SCM, London, p. 368.

5 Fitzmeyer, p. 1349.

6 Evans, p. 755.



Here we make the connection to the theme of this week: Hush the noise. Jesus encourages us to note the chaos around us and rather than being overwhelmed by it to respond to it in a way that recognises what is truly important. In that way the noise is, in effect, hushed.

Andrew Root (a theologian interested in ministry, culture and younger generations) writes that we are in a time of unprecedented contemporary cultural acceleration. We see this in rapid changes in technology, in changing social ethics, and in the general pace of life speeding up. Root claims that this causes disorientation, since we cannot realistically keep up with all the changes around us. It leads to alienation and depression;⁷ a state of *aporia*, brought on this roaring sea of contemporary change.

For Root, drawing on the work of sociologist Hartmut Rosa, the answer is to seek moments of 'resonance': times when we feel connected to our bodies, to our friends, to God.⁸ This sense is what we are expressing through the idea of 'hushing the noise' to hear the angels' sing.

...he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will live in safety.

The passage from Jeremiah promises of a new era of 'resonance', a new eternal order dependent on the grace of God. Christ will bring justice and righteousness and well-being will flow into the land.⁹

Advent 1

⁷ Andrew Root, *The Congregation in a Secular Age* (2021) Baker Academic, Michigan ch. 13.

⁸ Root, ch. 14.

⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 26-52 To Build, To Plant* (1991) Eerdmans, Grand Rapids pp. 98-99



Methodist Way of Life: Pray



Questions for discussion



- The idea of a 'stress bucket' is used to help mental health well-being. What's pouring into your bucket at the moment, and what might make the drain holes bigger?
- Where do you go to find peace and quiet?
- Christians who practise silence as a spiritual discipline talk about the 'monkey mind' – those thoughts that pop up to distract us that are hard to hush. What helps you quiet those thoughts for a few moments?

Hands-on activities

- In small groups create your own 'physical' version of the roaring sea. Each person should have a different role: to make a noise or an action. For example, using voices for the sound of the wind wailing, using arms to make the shape of the big waves, and altogether creating a crash motion. Take a few moments to practice then show the other groups what your 'picture' of the roaring sea looks and sounds like.
- Music of the roaring sea: fill a selection of different sized bottles and tubes (from drinks and crisps) with a small amount of rice and seal well. Explore making various sounds of the sea by tipping the bottle or tube, slowly and quickly. How can we make the sound quieter or noisier? Experiment creating a soundscape where the sea is calmer or the waves are roaring.



Prayer ideas

If you usually place a Christmas tree in your venue, these are suggestions to incorporate the tree into your prayer journey through the season. If you are using the suggested symbols you can add a lightbulb, sticky tape etc to your tree as well!

Before setting up your tree, prepare the pot/stand cover with prayers for a troubled world:

- **Pot:** Invite the group to cut headlines or text from newspapers (local and (inter)national) which represent their concerns for events in the world. Paste these onto your tree pot to represent the stormy waves (ie not in neat rows, but interwoven and in differing directions)
- **Pot:** Give out slips of paper in sea shades and invite people to write on places and events around the community, nation and world that they are concerned about – things that make our world distressed, our metaphorical seas stormy. Paste these slips of paper onto the pot to represent both the stormy seas and the prayers represented.
- **Pot or Stand:** Take a red ribbon long enough and wide enough to tie in a bow around the pot/stand. Invite everyone present to write the word 'justice' and their initials on the ribbon before tying it around the pot/stand. Explain when inviting participation that we are praying for both God's justice and for our own part in challenging the injustices we see in the world around us. The red ribbon represents the blood of Christ – the one who died unjustly so that we may live life in all its fullness.
- **Stand:** Repurpose a piece of fabric (such as an old sheet) of a suitable size to drape around the base of your Christmas tree. Invite all those present to write on the cloth waves of concern for people and places locally and around the world (ideally give pens in sea scape colours such as green and blue for this.)



The good news to get across

You can hush the noise and activity and reconnect with love and peace.

Ways people can respond

Take a couple of minutes now to hush the noise. Consider what you might choose not to do this Advent, to give yourself more time to pause.

Prayer of blessing

The angels are still singing.

Hush the noise, hear them sing, repeat the song.

And the blessing of God,

the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

be *yours/ours*, now and always. **Amen.**

Advent 2

8 December
2024

TO PROPHETS SHOWN

Bible readings

Malachi 3:1-4

See, **I am sending my messenger** to prepare the way before me, and the LORD whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like washers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD, as in the days of old and as in former years.

Luke 3:1-6

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, **the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness**. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,

"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord;

make his paths straight.

Every valley shall be filled,

and every mountain and hill shall be made low,

and the crooked shall be made straight,

and the rough ways made smooth,

and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.' "



Songs and hymns

Hear the call of the kingdom (StF 407)

Just as we are, your servants here (website only)

Like a candle flame (StF 176)

O God of hope, your prophets spoke (StF 708) (Tune: Repton, StF 495)

The prophets' voice comes down the years (StF 162)

When listening prophets dare to speak (StF 163)

Wild and lone the prophet's voice (StF 189)

Also see: **Resource Hub Worship Calendar** lectionary suggestions for 8 December 2024



Opening liturgy

Preparations underway, shifting focus each new day,

Amidst the darkness looking for the light,

For the truth among the mess.

O hush the noise,

Let's hear the angels sing.

Looking for the messengers who bring the light,

Isaiah – prophet and ancient poet

And John who came to point the way.

O hush the noise,

Let's hear the angels sing.

Angels, messengers of today,

Truth tellers for this present age,

Those who now show us the way.

O hush the noise,

Let's hear the angels sing.

Advent 2



Background notes

This week we focus on the prophets: messengers from both the Old and New Testaments who received a vision for a new way. The symbol for this week, a lightbulb, commonly represents a new idea. We ask how we can continue the legacy of the prophets today.

The final verse of the carol jumps back and forth in time. A vision of the new era of peace that will come that has already been revealed to the prophets of old.

...I am sending my messenger...

Malachi isn't a name as such, but literally means 'my messenger.' Writing in the second temple period after the return from the exile, this Malachi was concerned that people should live in the right way. He uses metaphors of fire and soap to convey the sense of cleansing that people will need to get back on track: fire to melt metal and remove impurities, soap to remove dirt; both restoring the item to a purer state.¹⁰

...the word of God came to John son of Zechariah...

This is the only New Testament example of the 'word of God' coming to an individual, which combined with the title 'son of xxx' (which mirrors the style of introduction of Jeremiah and Hosea¹¹) indicates a desire to portray John as a contemporary prophet in the Old Testament style.¹²

...in the wilderness.

The wilderness was a place of expectation for the coming age, referring back to the time spent wandering in the wilderness,¹³ bringing hope of a new exodus from slavery.¹⁴ It is also an apt place for a political and religious revolution, away from the sight of both the rulers and high priests mentioned earlier in the passage.¹⁵ It is a place with less noise.

10 Bruce C. Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terence E. Fretheim, David L. Petersen, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament* (1999) Abingdon, Nashville, p. 438.

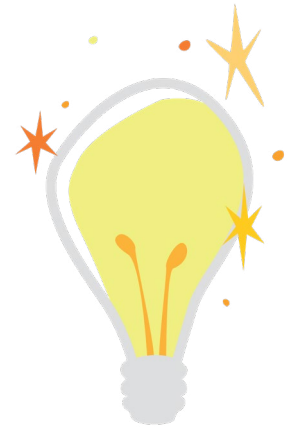
11 C. F. Evans, *Saint Luke* (1990) SCM, London, p. 234

12 Green, p. 167.

13 Evans, pp. 234-235.

14 Green, p. 170.

15 *ibid.* pp. 166-167.



Prepare the way of the Lord

In Mark 1:2-3 John the Baptist is introduced with a quotation included in Isaiah 40:3-4. In Luke's version, our Gospel passage for today, the quotation is extended to include Isaiah 40:5, which widens to the scope of salvation to 'all flesh.'¹⁶

Preparing the way involves removing barriers like mountains and valleys, and making an inhospitable landscape fertile and habitable once more.¹⁷

How might we, as modern day prophets, remove barriers for people to connect with God? A Methodist Way of Life uses the metaphorical language of 'making easy entry points' for new people to get on the train, the journey of faith. What might this look like in your community?



Advent 2

¹⁶ Fitzmeyer, p. 461.

¹⁷ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55* (2002) Doubleday, New York p. 182.



Methodist Way of Life: Open



Questions for discussion

- When have you been told something difficult about yourself by someone you trust, something that you knew was true but didn't want to admit?
- Who has been a prophet in your life, pointing the way towards Jesus?
- What's your song? What do you contribute to the songs of the prophets?

Hands-on activities

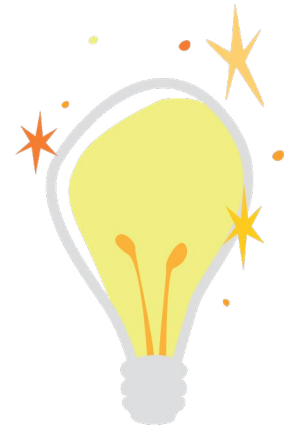
- In small groups create an alphabet code: for example a=b, b=c and so on. Write a line from the Malachi passage using this code. Swap with another group and see if you can crack each other's codes. Once all the lines have been cracked, assemble them together to read the whole verse or passage. Reflect on what made it hard to understand the message, and what helped.
- Talk about all the various ways we send messages today: using phones, images, words, emojis. Choose one of these to create a message which conveys how incredible God's love for us is. Provide art materials and images to help inspire everyone.

Prayer ideas

Before adding lights to the tree we can use them as an illustration. We have received the message of Christ's coming. As we leave we will take that good news with us and spread the light out into the communities in which we live; one message shining in lots of places like the one string of many lights. Spread the string of lights through the group (down the aisle if in a church, or around the tables in a café setting – taking care for safety, especially if there are small children moving about.) Pray that each of us will spread a little light this week, a kind word, a smile, one small act of kindness, and that this Advent our communities will know that Christmas is a time of hope, founded on the message of the one we celebrate at Christmas. As the lights are put on the tree invite everyone to pray that they will reflect the light of Christ in the world this week.

Give each person a card star and invite them to write on it a message of hope for this Advent. Invite them to hang these messages of hope on your tree (if this cannot be done safely by each person, this can be done on their behalf).

Advent 2



The good news to get across

Listen to the people to whom God has shown the way.

Ways people can respond

Take a couple of minutes now to hush the noise. Reflect on who's the truth-teller in your life, and how could you pay attention to them.

Prayer of blessing

The angels are still singing.

Prophets are still speaking.

Hush the noise, hear them sing, repeat the song.

And the blessing of God,

the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

be *yours/ours*, now and always. **Amen.**

Advent 3

15 December
2024

BABEL SOUNDS

Bible readings

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;

shout, O Israel!

Rejoice and exult with all your heart,

O daughter Jerusalem!

The LORD has taken away the judgments against you;

he has turned away your enemies.

The king of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst;

you shall fear disaster no more.

On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:

“Do not fear, O Zion;

do not let your hands grow weak.

The LORD, your God, is in your midst,

a warrior who gives victory;

he will rejoice over you with gladness;

he will renew you in his love;

he will exult over you with loud singing

as on a day of festival.”

I will remove disaster from you,

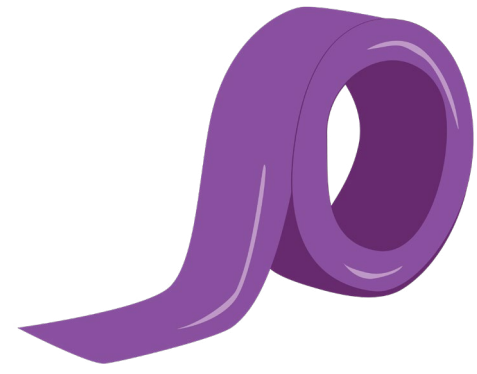
so that you will not bear reproach for it.

I will deal with all your oppressors

at that time.

And I will save the lame

and gather the outcast,



and I will change their shame into praise
and renown in all the earth.

At that time **I will bring you home,**
at the time when I gather you;
for I will make you renowned and praised
among all the peoples of the earth,
when I restore your fortunes
before your eyes, says the LORD.

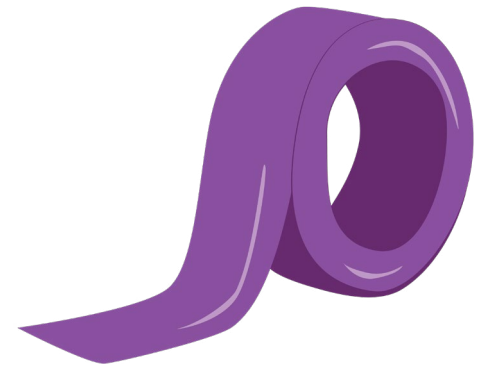
Luke 3:7-18

John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Therefore, bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire."

And the crowds asked him, "**What, then, should we do?**" In reply he said to them, "**Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none, and whoever has food must do likewise.**" Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He said to them, "**Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you.**" Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "**Do not extort money from anyone** by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."

As the people were filled with expectation and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

So with many other exhortations he proclaimed the good news to the people.



Songs and hymns

Day of judgment! Day of wonder!
(StF 732)

God, how can we forgive (StF 613)
Into the darkness of this world
(StF 173)

Let love be real, in giving and receiving
(StF 615)

Make me a channel of your peace
(StF 707)

Praise to
the God who clears the way (StF 183)

Summoned by the God who made us
(StF 689)

The kingdom of God is justice and joy
(StF 255)

Ubi caritas (StF 783)

Also see: **Resource Hub Worship
Calendar** lectionary suggestions for 15
December 2024



Opening liturgy

Presents get wrapped with tape and glue,
Tidy parcels neatly wrapped,
Names on labels with “love from”,
O hush the noise,

Let's hear the angels sing.

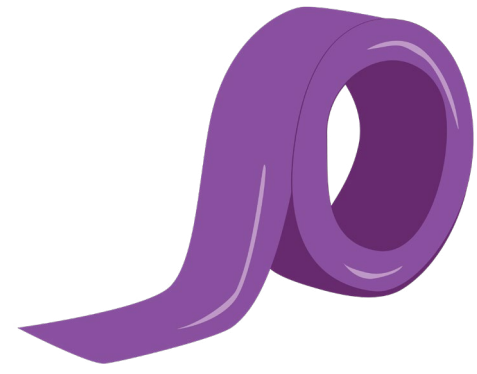
We've sorted gifts and who needs what,
What will they like, what will be good?
But are there more we need to include?
O hush the noise,

Let's hear the angels sing.

What of those alone, adrift, forgotten and neglected?
What of those whose life's been hard?
What gift of help needs wrapping too?
O hush the noise,

Let's hear the angels sing.

Advent 3



Background notes

The carol was written in America in 1849 as a response to geopolitical unrest, and as a protest about the horrors of slavery.¹⁸ It describes a “weary world” filled with “Babel sounds”, “sin and strife” and war. Sadly, 175 years later the carol is just as relevant. We long for harmony, justice and restoration.

It might be helpful to explain that ‘Babel sounds’ is a reference to Genesis 11, the ancient story of people being divided into tribes with different languages so they cannot communicate with each other

This week’s symbol is glue or sellotape. How can we mend things that are broken, be like glue in the community to reduce disconnection and disintegration?

***Sing aloud, O daughter Zion... he will exult over you with loud singing...
I will bring you home***

The prophet Zephaniah wrote in the time of King Josiah, before the exile to Babylon. The book is full of cataclysmic visions of destruction but ends with this beautiful vision of God singing over people, who have been scattered, as they are brought home.¹⁹ The people are called to join in the song.

“What, then, should we do?”

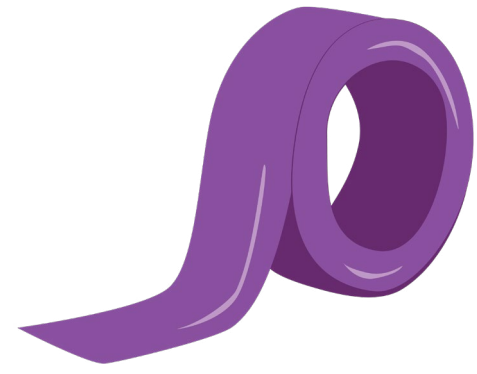
Luke uses this phrase several times, in the mouths of tax collectors, soldiers, lawyers, rulers and jailors. An encounter with the redemptive grace of God demands a response.²⁰ The carol has the same broad message: hush the noise, hear the song, and then repeat it back. The Methodist calling has a similar shape: grace impels us to live differently. A Methodist Way of Life is one way of answering the question of the crowd in this passage, with its twelve types of worship and mission.

Advent 3

18 methodist.org.uk/for-churches/resources/hymns/it-came-upon-the-midnight-clear-StF-205/

19 Birch *et al.* pp. 316-317.

20 Green, p. 177.



“Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none, and whoever has food must do likewise.”

John gives to the crowd an ethical rather than a religious answer.²¹ In MWOL language, his advice would sit in the **open, care** and **serve** actions. Greater equality is the goal.²²

“Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you... Do not extort money from anyone...”

The tax-collectors and soldiers are impelled to act more justly, with a hidden implication that corruption was the norm. They are asked to **challenge** injustice.



Methodist Way of Life: Challenge (and Open, Care, and Serve)

Questions for discussion

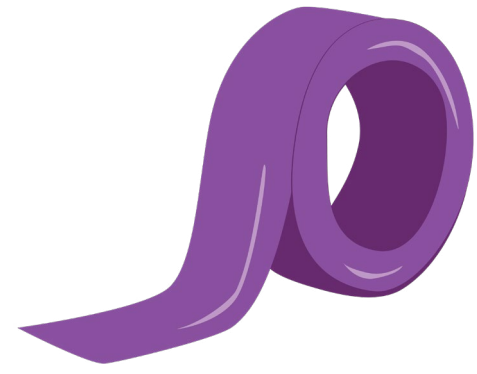
- What does it feel like to share your resources with someone?
- Are there any deep wounds in your life or your community that seem too hard to address and acknowledge? How might you do something about these?
- When have you been able to suspend judgement about a person/group/idea in order to seek a different kind of less-oppositional relationship?

Hands-on activities

- Inspired by The Repair Shop and Sewing Bee TV shows, set a challenge to repurpose broken or torn items. Invite people to share what skills and talents they have: might they be able to fix something or transform it into something new and useful? You could spend the season of Advent upcycling a few items that can either be returned to their original owner or given to a charity shop.
- Using glue and sellotape, along with other junk modelling items and art supplies, make a colourful and inviting ‘Hush the Noise’ banner for your worship space. How can it reflect who you are as a community and be welcoming for other people?

²¹ Fitzmeyer, p. 469.

²² Evans, p. 240.



- Organise a 'wrapping' exchange: invite people to bring their leftover gift bags, wrapping paper, ribbons and bows to swap with other people. This could be a chance to wrap some presents too that will be gifted to others in need in your community.

Prayer ideas

Make a large treble clef and invite the group to imagine words of praise and adoration. Hang the treble clef on the tree to represent these silent prayers of praise. Often we sing or shout words of praise. Today we hush the noise and say them in our minds. God hears our loud and our quiet prayers and delights in them.

If your group contributes to a scheme to donate presents to those in need in the community, this would be a good week to bring and place these under the tree and pray for those who will receive them.

Sing 'Be still and know that I am God' as part of the prayers this week. You could start loudly and repeat getting quieter and quieter until a period of silence. You could come out of the silence by reversing and singing from quiet to loud.

Invite the group to pause and consider one small act they might make this week to contribute to rebalancing an injustice. Invite them to make a note on their phone, write in their diary, tie a knot in their handkerchief, or write on their hand. In pairs, share what you plan to do and pray for each other.

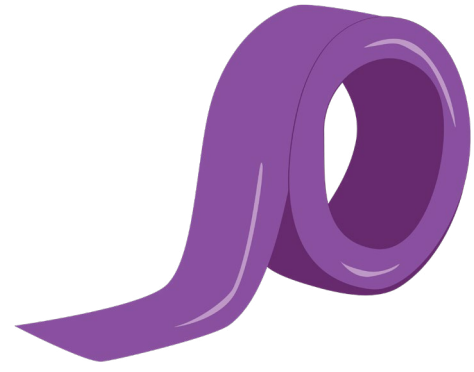
Pray for all people who will be lonely this Christmas. Make or write cards and send or take these to Methodist Homes for giving to older people who may not receive any Christmas greetings this year.

The good news to get across

We need to work to end division, selfish ambition, disconnection and fragmentation.

Ways people can respond

Take a couple of minutes now to hush the noise. Consider how God is calling you to share what you have with others, and where you might bring connection and harmony.



Prayer of blessing

The angels are still singing.
Prophets are still speaking.
Hush the noise, hear them sing,
repeat the song, bring harmony.
And the blessing of God,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be *yours/ours*, now and always. **Amen.**

Advent 4

22 December
2024

THE LOVE SONG

Bible readings

Micah 5:2-5a

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
who are one of the little clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to rule in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
from ancient days.

Therefore he shall give them up until the time
when she who is in labour has brought forth;
then the rest of his kindred shall return
to the people of Israel.

And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD,
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.

And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great
to the ends of the earth,
and **he shall be the one of peace.**

If the Assyrians come into our land
and tread upon our soil,
we will raise against them seven shepherds
and eight rulers.

Luke 1:39-55

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And



Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

for he has looked with favour on the lowly state of his servant.

Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,

for the Mighty One has done great things for me,

and holy is his name;

indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him

from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones

and lifted up the lowly;

he has filled the hungry with good things

and sent the rich away empty.

He has come to the aid of his child Israel,

in remembrance of his mercy,

according to the promise he made to our ancestors,

to Abraham and to his descendants forever."



Songs and hymns

Heaven shall not wait (StF 701)

I will speak out for those who have no voices (StF 702)

Jesus Christ is waiting (StF 251)

Longing for light, we wait in darkness (StF 706)

Love inspired the anger (StF 253)

My soul rejoices in God my Saviour (StF 60)

Show me how to stand for justice (StF 713)

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord! (StF 186)

We do not look for angel choirs (website only)

Also see: **Resource Hub Worship Calendar** lectionary suggestions for 22 December 2024



Opening liturgy

Preparations almost complete, the time is nearly here.

Promises and praises echo all around,

Silencing the noises of injustice.

O hush the noise,

Let's hear the angels sing.

The promise of God for the servant lowly,

God who comes to the help of all,

Whose ancient promise still stands today.

O hush the noise,

Let's hear the angels sing.

And we watch and we seek,

And we learn, we pray and we praise,

And we wait and we wait.

O hush the noise,

Let's hear the angels sing.

Advent 4



Background notes

On the final Sunday of Advent we focus on Mary and her song, the Magnificat. The theme of the President and Vice-President of Conference this year is **Praise and Protest**, both of which aspects are clear in Mary's song.

The symbol this week is a protest banner, to represent the imperative to challenge injustice that is present in the song.

...he shall be the one of peace.

Micah wrote in the style of Hosea and Amos, echoing their passionate calls for justice. This passage has traditionally been used in Advent as it refers to a child coming from Bethlehem, who will bring peace to the ends of the earth.²³

And Mary said...

Mary's song, the Magnificat, is one of four similar songs in Luke: the Benedictus (Luke 1:67-69), the Nunc Dimittis (Luke 2:28-32) and the Angel's song (Luke 2.13-14),²⁴ which we will be the focus on Christmas Day. It draws on Hannah's song, from 1 Samuel 2, which we will mention next Sunday.

The song has a similar structure to many of the Psalms, with a word of praise followed by reasons for the praise.²⁵

"My soul magnifies the Lord..."

The song begins with praise and giving thanks for God's greatness and majesty. This is reminiscent of Psalm 69:31.²⁶

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones

and lifted up the lowly;

he has filled the hungry with good things

and sent the rich away empty.

23 Craig A. Evans, *Matthew* (2012) Cambridge, New York, pp. 54-55.

24 Fitzmeyer, p. 358.

25 Green, p. 99.

26 Fitzmeyer, p. 366.



These verses are structured in a parallel chiasm, where the first ideas are later mirrored in reverse order: the bad things that are coming to the rich and powerful are given to the lowly and poor, who feature in the most prominent place in the centre of this arrangement.²⁷

It might sound like a call to a revolution, but in the song the agency and initiative primarily lies with God. However, we may partner with God.²⁸



Methodist Way of Life: Worship (and Challenge)

• Questions for discussion

- What old or modern songs in your Spotify queue or music collection might be versions of Mary's song?
- Mary's love song isn't cutesy – it's fierce and radical, and is about change and transformation. How does your experience of love (divine love or otherwise) change things for you or the world?
- Singing is a verbal/aural experience, but it also can be written words or signed. How can we 'sing' with all our bodies?

Hands-on activities

- Make 'praise and protest' banners: using large pieces of cardboard attached to bamboo canes, write, draw, paint or illustrate each side to make a statement about praise and protest. For example, for praise: 'Praise God for all the amazing creatures in the ocean'. On the other side, for protest: 'Keep plastic out of the oceans'. Talk about how we could be an agent of change and make a difference to whichever issue is the focus of your protest.
- Working in pairs, create actions that reflect praise and protest. One person demonstrates praise using physical movement and gestures whilst the other conveys an act of protest. After a few practices, each pair can share with the rest of the group their actions. Can we guess which is praise or protest? What do these actions say about how we view or think about praise and protest? For example, our protest actions may appear violent or angry.

²⁷ Green, p. 99.

²⁸ *ibid.* p. 99



Prayer ideas

Hang small pieces of non-recyclable material on the tree in protest against damage to the environment. Encourage writing of letters to the local council to request more recycling. Pray that those letters will lead to action.

Make small paper doves and hang them on the tree – as they are made, invite the group to consider where in the world most needs the coming of the One of peace this Christmas – this may be individuals known to us as well as nations at war.

Use a globe or map of the world and highlight places where there is conflict. Use blue tack to attach ribbons or banners to the globe or place electric tea lights or stones onto the map. If people are seated around tables, consider giving each table a country to think about. Share some facts or invite the people at the table to share what they know. Invite them to pray for that nation and particularly for peace.

The good news to get across

In her song of praise Mary thanks God for the child Jesus, who will announce God's kingdom which "brings down the powerful from their thrones and lifts up the lowly." To engage in God's mission and be part of that transformation, we believe the Methodist Church is called to become an increasingly evangelistic, inclusive and justice-seeking Church.

Ways people can respond

Take a couple of minutes now to hush the noise. Consider the ways in which you are powerful and need to step back. In what ways are you 'lowly', where God is inviting you to step into your power?

Prayer of blessing

The angels are still singing.

Prophets are still speaking.

Hush the noise, hear them sing, repeat the song, seek justice.

And the blessing of God,

the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

be *yours/ours*, now and always. **Amen.**

Christmas Day

25 December 2024

HEAR THE ANGELS SING

Bible readings

Isaiah 9:2-7

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.

You have multiplied exultation;
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.

For the yoke of their burden
and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.

For all the boots of the tramping warriors
and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders,
and he is named

Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.



Great will be his authority,

and there shall be endless peace

for the throne of David and his kingdom.

He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness

from this time onward and forevermore.

The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Luke 2:1-20

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place in the guest room.

Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

**"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!"**

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, **they made known what had been told them** about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them, and Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told them.

Christmas Day



Songs and hymns

Born in the night, Mary's child (StF 193)

Child of joy and peace (StF 194)

Christmas Blessing (May you have the joy of the angels) (website only)

Glory be to God on high (StF 199)

Heaven's come so close tonight (website only)

I had a dream that I was standing on a hillside (StF 203)

It was on a starry night when the hills were bright (StF 206)

Love came down at Christmas (StF 210)

Sent by the Lord am I (StF 239)

Also see: **Resource Hub Worship Calendar** lectionary suggestions for 25 December 2024



Opening liturgy

Light in our darkness, joy in our sorrow,
Our saviour is born, the Prince of Peace,
The King of all, Emmanuel, God with us.

Let's share the song,

With angels let us sing.

Glory to God, revealed among us,
Given for us, offered for us,
Living within, one with us.

Let's share the song,

With angels let us sing

The day is here, the time is now.
Promised long ago and promised still.
Within the laughter and the chat,
Let's share the song,

With angels let us sing.

Christmas Day



Background notes

On this special day it is time to hear the midnight song of the angels referred to in the carol. The symbol today is, naturally, an angel.

...and there shall be endless peace.

This passage from Isaiah is full of light, joy and gladness. The child will bring peace and justice; salvation is described in a communal, not individualistic frame.²⁹

*“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!”*

The song of the angels is a mini-canticle, with two parallel chiasmic lines.³⁰ As in the Isaiah passage above, the whole saving event of Christ coming is summed up as peace. This is not merely an absence of war, but a state of abundance and well-being that comes from God.³¹ Or, as our carol puts it, ‘Peace on the earth, good will to men... [sic.]’

Who is included in this outpouring of peace? What might seem like an exclusive limit in the words of the angels (‘among those whom he favours’) is really a universal blessing for the whole earth and all who inhabit it: God favours it all.³²

...they made known what had been told them...

The shepherds ‘repeat the song’ that they have heard from the angels to Mary and Joseph. There was new information here; Mary and Joseph already knew that the child would be the Messiah (Luke 1:32-35) and Lord (Luke 1:43) but from the shepherds they learn that the child will also be a saviour.

29 David Stacey, *Isaiah 1-39* (1993) Epworth, London, p. 73.

30 Evans, p. 206.

31 Fitzmeyer, pp. 224 – 225.

32 Green, p. 137.



Methodist Way of Life: Tell

Questions for discussion

- Can you describe a time when you have felt a deep sense of peace?
- What would be different in a world full of peace?
- How do you feel about passing on the good news?

Hands-on activities

- Make paper plate angels and create a choir of angels like those that appeared to the shepherds. A simple craft and template with instructions is available here: [Paper Plate Angel Lacing Craft](#)
- Write the names of Jesus (mentioned in the Isaiah passage) on a long roll of paper in large letters. Invite everyone to decorate a letter or word using art supplies provided. Try to include lots of shiny, bright and colourful items such as glitter gel pens, stickers, ribbon, metallic pens, threads and yarns. Display the finished names in all their majestic glory for all to see!

Prayer ideas

- Place an angel on the top of the tree to remind those present that angels are messengers of God. Today we hear the message of the birth of Christ. We respond by saying thank you to God. Use the BSL or Makaton sign for 'thank you'.
- Add an infinity symbol to the tree. Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:20 talks about God doing immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine. What is the most extraordinary thing you can imagine God doing? How does this compare to God coming as a baby in an animal shed? What would you like to ask God for today? What will you do in partnership with the Spirit?

The good news to get across

Christmas is loud, isn't it? So much expectation. So many voices. Telling us how to celebrate, what to wear, what to eat and drink, what to watch and what to buy.

Instead, this Christmas we're inviting everyone to hush the noise. To listen for the love song that the angels bring this and every year. They sang it for the first time more than 2,000 years ago, on the midnight clear. They're just waiting for us to join in.

Christmas Day



Ways people can respond

Take a couple of minutes now to hush the noise. Consider how you might help others hear the angel's love song in your community. How might you amplify the song?

Prayer of blessing

The angels are still singing.

Hush the noise, hear them sing, repeat the song.

And the blessing of God,

the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

be *yours/ours*, now and always. **Amen.**

Christmas 1

29 December 2024

HUSH THE HUSHING

Bible readings

1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26

Samuel was ministering before the LORD, a boy wearing a linen ephod. His mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife and say, "May the LORD repay you with children by this woman for the loan that she made to the LORD," and then they would return to their home.

Luke 2:41-52

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents were unaware of this. Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days **they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.** And all who heard him **were amazed at his understanding and his answers.** When his parents saw him they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously looking for you." He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that **I must be in my Father's house?**" But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was obedient to them, and his mother treasured all these things in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years and in divine and human favour.



Songs and hymns

As dawn awakes another day (StF 659)

Called by Christ to be disciples
(StF 660)

Come, all who look to Christ today
(StF 678)

Have you heard God's voice; has your
heart been stirred? (StF 662)

Lord give me eyes that I may see
(website only)

Lord, you call us to your service
(StF 664)

Says Jesus, 'Come and gather round.'
(StF 510)

Summoned by the God who made us
(StF 689)

**The prophet speaks from days
gone by** (website only)

Also see: **Resource Hub Worship
Calendar** lectionary suggestions for
29 December 2024



Opening liturgy

Old and young, rich and poor, hale and frail,

Near and far, remembered and forgotten,

Neighbours, family, friends and strangers,

Let's share the song,

With angels let us sing.

Let's listen to each other's singing of that song,

The old familiar words that take us back,

The 'new take' that gives fresh light,

Let's share the song,

With angels let us sing.

Together, you and me and they and them,

And he and she, from here and there,

And everywhere and always,

Let's share the song,

With angels let us sing.

Christmas 1



Background notes

Our Bible passages this week both feature children in a place of worship. There is a risk that the title of this campaign, Hush the Noise, might inadvertently encourage a belief that children in church should be seen and not heard. This is the last thing that we want to do. Children come to worship as they are, as part of the diverse family of God. All are welcome. This service, instead, calls us to 'hush the hushing.' The noise that we should hush in order to better hear the song of the angels is not the literal noise that beloved children of God make, which can be a source of learning for us if we just pay attention.

Samuel was ministering before the Lord, a boy...

The passage from 1 Samuel follows the song of his mother, Hannah, which provided the basis for Mary's song that we used in worship last Sunday. But this passage jumps forward in time to when her long awaited son, Samuel, was a boy. Samuel was ministering in the place of worship in Shiloh alongside the priest Eli. This young child was the harbinger of God's new future.³³

Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival.

Jesus' family regularly travelled to Jerusalem for the Passover festival; this implies a regular practice of family worship as Jesus grew up.³⁴ The custom was that children aged 13 and over were expected to go too, so Jesus either went a year early or was preparing for the Bar Mitzvah.³⁵

...they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

The word translated here as 'asking them questions' (*eperōtōnta*) usually implies a vigorous debate or dispute, rather than a gentle inquiry. The boy Jesus was right in the thick of it.

...were amazed at his understanding and his answers...

33 Birch *et al.* pp. 224-225.

34 Green, p. 155.

35 Fitzmeyer, pp. 440-441.



Obviously Jesus was a special case, but this principle still applies to us today: older people can and should appreciate the insights that young people have, and vice versa. As John Hull says:



Congregations where children are found a distraction should stop thinking about their ministry to children and start to think about the ministry of children to them. Learning breakthroughs occur when barriers suggested by the experience of distraction are broken through.³⁶

Methodist Way of Life: Learn

Questions for discussion

- Can you describe what it feels like to be hushed?
- Lots of different people groups experience being hushed: people of colour, people experiencing poverty, LGBTQ+ folks, women, children, refugees, etc. How do we hush the hushing of these people and amplify their voices?
- Do you have a secret dream of mission or evangelism, or a God-given gift you feel you've never had the opportunity to use or develop?

Hands-on activities

- Play a version of charades where everyone is given the title of a Christmas carol. Ask them to use actions and movements (but not to verbally communicate) to describe it with others trying to guess. Reflect afterwards how easy or difficult it was to communicate without words or spoken language. Did people enjoy or dislike being silenced? How did that impact on each of us?
- Using a variety of people outlines, invite everyone to decorate a figure to create a collage of those present from your faith community. Encourage people to work in pairs to make each other's figures, perhaps pair a younger with an older person to produce theirs together. Speech bubbles could be added with a phrase that describes a characteristic or skill, such as "I love dancing!" Celebrate the wealth of difference that makes up the congregation.

³⁶ John M. Hull, *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning?* (1985) SCM, London, p. 19.



Prayer ideas

- You could add a child's toy trumpet to the tree, if available.
- Encourage each child present to draw a picture of themselves on small cards and add these to the tree (you can be more environmentally friendly by drawing on the back of used greeting/Christmas card images - the back of the pictures is then also pretty.).
- Use cut out shapes of children and encourage adults to write the names of countries around the world, thinking particularly of places where children are in danger and their voices are not heard.
- If you have someone in the congregation who speaks a different language, invite them to pray in that language.
- Play a video of the Lord's Prayer in another language. We are 'hushed' because we cannot join in, but blessed by the rhythm and tone of the voice.

The good news to get across

You're never too young or old to find your place in God's kingdom.

Ways people can respond

Take a couple of minutes now to hush the noise. What's your unique gift that only you can be or do?

Prayer of blessing

The angels are still singing.

Hush the noise, hear them sing, repeat the song, welcome everyone.

And the blessing of God,

the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

be *yours/ours*, now and always. **Amen.**

Christmas 2

5 January 2024

JESUS, THE LOVE SONG

Bible readings

Jeremiah 31:7-14

For thus says the LORD:

Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,
and raise shouts for the chief of the nations;
proclaim, give praise, and say,
“Save, O LORD, your people,
the remnant of Israel.”

See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north
and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,
among them the blind and the lame,
those with child and those in labour together;
a great company, they shall return here.

With weeping they shall come,
and with consolations I will lead them back;
I will let them walk by brooks of water,
in a straight path where they shall not stumble,
for I have become a father to Israel,
and Ephraim is my firstborn.

Hear the word of the LORD, O nations,
and declare it in the coastlands far away;
say, “He who scattered Israel will gather him
and will keep him as a shepherd does a flock.”

For the LORD has ransomed Jacob



and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.

They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion,
and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD,
over the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and over the young of the flock and the herd;
their life shall become like a watered garden,
and they shall never languish again.

**Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance,
and the young men and the old shall be merry.**

I will turn their mourning into joy;
I will comfort them and give them gladness for sorrow.
I will give the priests their fill of fatness,
and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty,
says the LORD.

John 1:1-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. John testified to him



and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'" From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son, himself God, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Songs and hymns

All my days I will sing this song of gladness (StF 343)

And still he calls us (website only)

Jesus comes with all his grace (StF 326)

Jesu, the joy of loving hearts (StF 365)

Lord, you have my heart (StF 559)

My eyes be open to your presence (StF 560)

Only by grace can we enter (StF 565)

The world God imagines (website only)

There's a light upon the mountains (StF 188)

Also see: **Resource Hub Worship Calendar** lectionary suggestions for 5 January 2025



Opening liturgy

The year is new, the day is new,

The light is newly shining,

The song is newly sung.

Let's share the song,

With angels let us sing.

We cannot touch with harps of gold,

But touch and speak and pray we can,

With smiles and words and deeds.

Let's share the song,

With angels let us sing.

Christmas 2



So hush the turmoil with words of hope,
And hush the pain with needed care,
And hush two thousand years of wrong,
Let's share the song,
With angels let us sing.
Let's share the song,
With angels let us sing.

Background notes

In this final service in the season of Christmas, we wrap up the Hush the Noise series with two beautiful passages that give us a broad perspective on God's saving work, and an invitation to join in. We see Jesus as the cosmic, eternal Word – maybe we can think of Jesus as the song that the angels have been singing, that we can sing too.

In Jewish tradition a song is a valid metaphor for God. The phrase 'The Lord is my strength and my song' (*Ozi v'Zimrat Yah*)³⁷ is the only one that features in all three sections of the Hebrew Bible – Torah (Exodus 15.2), Psalms (Psalm 118.14) and Prophets (Isaiah 12.2.) The word *zimrat* derived from *zamar* (instrumental music) has proved hard to translate to English,³⁸ the NRSV chooses 'defence', and gives the alternative 'song' in a footnote.

The God-as-song metaphor is explored in Rob Bell's *Nooma* film 'Rhythm':

When I think of God I hear a song, a song that moves me. It has a melody and it has a groove. It has a certain rhythm. And people have heard this song for thousands and thousands of years. Across continents and cultures and time periods people have heard the song, and they've found it captivating, and they've wanted to hear more. There have always been people who say there is no song and who deny the music, but the song keeps playing. And so Jesus came to show us how to live in tune with the song.³⁹

37 rabbishefagold.com/ozivzimrat-yah/

38 Brevard Childs, *Exodus* (1974) SCM, London, p. 242.

39 Rob Bell, *NOOMA: Rhythm* – 011, youtu.be/1FNHoYl8a78?si=TvKml8vgDAf-obx1



*Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance,
and the young men and the old shall be merry.*

In this vision of the future, all kinds of people will be caught up in a dance, moving with all their being in response to the song they hear. Mourning will turn into dancing. God has the power to transform all things, and has promised to do it.⁴⁰

In the beginning was the Word...

There are clear parallels with Genesis 1, both the use of the word 'beginning' and the motifs of light and dark.⁴¹ Preachers might wish to make reference to last year's Bible Month, which explored the book of Genesis.

The term 'Word' (logos) is used frequently in the Old Testament, both for the creative work of God speaking (singing?) new things into being, and for communication through the prophets. The word always conveys action.⁴²



Methodist Way of Life: Live

Questions for discussion

- Which secular love songs help you understand Jesus' love? Which show the difference between human love, and God's unconditional love for us?
- How does the idea of Jesus as a song make you feel?
- How has the divine love song transformed you as you've joined in with it?

Hands-on activities

- Make simple spin drums to use as part of sung worship, these can be made from cardboard tubes or cheese triangle boxes! Paper plates or bowls could also be used. Instructions and supplies needed for making these can be found here: **DIY Spin Drum for Kids Birthday Parties** Decorate the drums with sticker musical notes or draw them with a black pen.

40 Walter Brueggemann, *Jeremiah 26-52, To Build, To Plant* (1991) Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, pp. 61-63.

41 Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (1966) Doubleday. New York, p. 4.

42 C.K. Barratt, *The Gospel According to St. John* (1978) SPCK, London, p. 153.



- Print out copies of the A4 'Hush the Noise' handout. Enjoy colouring in the pictures and words whilst reflecting on this past season of Advent and Christmas. Consider the following questions: What is one new thing that has struck me about the birth of Jesus? Has there been one thing I sense God has been saying to me? What one thing would I like to take into this new year? Feel free to jot down responses on the sheet.

Prayer ideas

Add a musical note to the tree. What is the action you will take so that the message is not just for Christmas but is for life?

The good news to get across

- The eternal love song took on human form in Jesus.

Ways people can respond

Take a couple of minutes now to hush the noise. How could you pay more attention to the song of love that's always being sung, and join in with it?

Prayer of blessing

The angels are still singing, and the Word has become flesh.

Hush the noise, hear them sing, repeat the song.

And the blessing of God,

the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

be *yours/ours*, now and always. **Amen.**

Blue Christmas

Bible reading

Luke 2.8-14

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

*'Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!'*

Songs and hymns

O Lord, hear my prayer (Taizé)

O Come, O Come Immanuel (StF 180)

It Came Upon the Midnight Clear (StF 205)

Opening liturgy

Loving God,

Whose song of love is being sung always,

Offering unconditional love and grace to all you have made.

Thank you for your love.

Living Lord Jesus,

Who came to share our humanity, our fragility, and our pain.

Thank you that you do not leave us alone.

Holy Spirit,
Who came upon the Virgin Mary,
Bringing the eternal Son into the world through a human body.
Thank you for bringing God's love to us.

Eternal God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
An everlasting communion of love,
Whose song of love the angels sing,
We confess that so often our ears are closed to you.
There is so much that drowns out your song of love.
We hurt ourselves and others, and others hurt us.
And sometimes we are simply sick and sad
And our pain makes it hard to pay attention.

Please forgive us for the things we can control
And help us with the things we can't.
Break through the Babel sounds of our world
And help us hear the song of the angels
And send back their song to you.

We pray in the name of Jesus,
Whose birth we are here to remember.

Amen.

Background notes

Christmas can be a very difficult time, both for unaffiliated people and for Christians, for all kinds of reasons. It is a time that can magnify emotions: happy people feel happier and sad people feel sadder. Some will be spending their first Christmas without someone they love. Others may have had an empty place at the table for many years, and yet it still hurts, particularly at Christmas. People without children, whether by choice or circumstance, may wonder if there is a place for them in a festival with such a strong emphasis

on young families. Children and adults with a history of trauma may carry memories of stressful and frightening Christmases when tensions ran high. People experiencing poverty may find themselves in the painful position of being excluded from the rampant consumerism – or forced to go into debt in order to participate. People struggling with chronic pain, illness or disability may find it hard to summon up the jollity that seems to be demanded of them.

A 'Blue Christmas' service provides a space for painful emotions to be held and acknowledged rather than dismissed or hidden amidst all the jollity. It offers a quiet and reflective space in which people can feel what they feel.

A Blue Christmas service needs to offer good news of hope for the future without minimising the pain that is felt now. It is likely to demand less of participants: music may be performed rather than people being expected to sing along. Careful thought needs to be given in terms of pastoral care. Prayer and/or listening could be offered at the end of the service for people who want this, and signposting to other services, such as counselling, may be helpful.

Questions for discussion

- How do you feel about Christmas music in shops – love it or loathe it?
- What makes Christmas hard for some people?
- What's the difference between cheerfulness and joy?

Hands-on activities

- Give out simple Christmas themed colouring sheets, glue sticks and craft materials in shades of blue (tissue paper, sugar paper, yarn, scraps of fabric etc). Have people make a blue collage to reflect the sadness some people feel at Christmas.
- Offer an opportunity to light a candle to remember someone who has died.
- Paint a Christmas tree ornament blue and take it home to hang on your tree.

Prayer ideas

Loving God,
We pray for those of us who are grieving,
Who have an empty seat at our table.
Please bring comfort to all who mourn,
And fill us with your love.

God who heals,
We pray for those of us who are ill and in pain.
Please bring us relief and comfort us when it hurts,
Remind us that you never leave us alone.

God of justice,
We pray for those of us for whom life is struggle.
Remembering that you have brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
May this be true for us today.

God of hope,
We pray for those of us who are feeling hopeless.
Thank you for the angels' song of love and joy and peace.
We look forward to the promised time
When all the world will repeat the song
which now the angels sing.

We pray in the name of Jesus,
Whose coming we remember at Christmas
And whose second coming we await.

Amen.

The good news to get across

There is much 'noise' at Christmas. Quite literally: you cannot buy anything in many shops without a background of Christmas music. There are lots of tasks and events that demand much of us: gift-giving, food shopping, family gatherings, perhaps work Christmas parties. And we are expected to do all this with a smile on our face, though this may not chime with how we feel inside. In the words of *It came upon the midnight clear*, we may be solemn and still; weary; sad and lowly.

The angels came to the shepherds to sing a new song of love and joy and peace. And this was not a one-off event: the angels are always singing God's love song to creation. Though there is much that can drown out that beautiful song – things we may not be able to fix or take away – nevertheless we can take moments when we deliberately try to pause, tune out the noise, and listen for the song that declares the unconditional love of God for all of us, no strings attached. A song of hope that declares, things are really hard *now*, but they won't be *always*.

Ways people can respond

Finish by leaving a space with quiet music playing, allowing people to stay and listen and think or pray for as long as they wish.

Carol Service

Bible reading

Carol services appeal to a broad range of people, including many unaffiliated people, and for some folks it will be the only church service they attend all year. For this reason, it makes sense to include all the key passages that tell the Christmas story as part of your service. For example:

Isaiah 9:2-7

Luke 1:26-38

Luke 2:1-7

Luke 2:8-20*

Matthew 2:1-12

John 1:1-14

**We recommend that any spoken message in the service focuses on this passage – the shepherds and the angels – in order to draw out the theme of the Methodist Church’s Christmas campaign, ‘Hush the Noise’.*

Songs and hymns

Choose carols that are well known, using tunes and words that are likely to be familiar to unaffiliated people. Traditional is good, as this may connect with people’s memories of childhood Christmases, and unaffiliated people can get just as grumpy as church folks about messing with tradition! For example:

Hark! The Herald-Angels Sing (StF 202)

O Come all ye Faithful (StF 212)

Silent Night (StF 217)

O Little Town of Bethlehem (StF 213)

Once in Royal David’s City (StF 214)

In the Bleak Midwinter (StF 204)

If in doubt, ask unaffiliated friends and family which carols they know.



Background notes

You can refer to the Christmas Day service notes for exegetical material on Luke 2.8-20. When preparing to preach at your carol service, hold in mind unaffiliated people with a loose grasp of the Christian story as your key audience. This may be the only time in the year that some of your visitors hear a sermon or equivalent spoken message, so keep it short and simple, and focus on good news. You might want to show the Hush the Noise film.

Questions for discussion

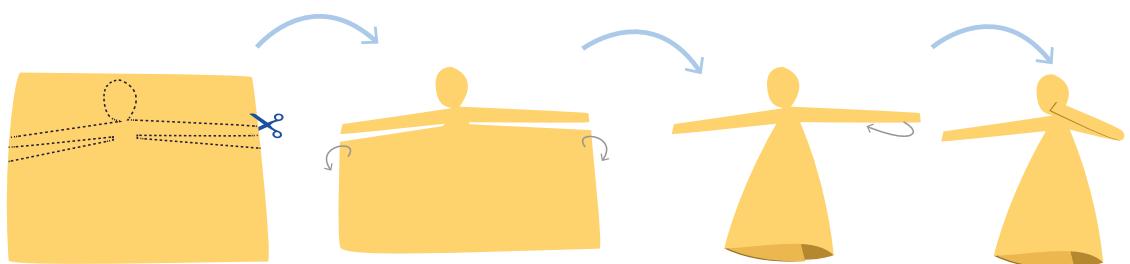
- When have you had an experience of hearing the angels' song – in other words, a moment when God has seemed very real to you?
- What kinds of things drown out the angel song for you?
- What helps you 'hush the noise'?

Prayer ideas

- Write or draw on a piece of paper the things that help you 'hush the noise'. Then turn the paper into a cone shape and glue or sellotape it to make a simple ear trumpet



- Make a paper angel saying "shh" to hang on your tree





The good news to get across

The angels are always singing a song of praise to God and love for the world God made. Often in daily life we don't hear it because the 'noise' of life drowns it out, but occasionally we experience moments when the song breaks in. The shepherds heard the song of the angels while they were working, doing an ordinary job in a dark field.

When have you heard the song of the angels? And how might you best tune in so that you can hear it more clearly?

Ways people can respond

Take a couple of minutes now to hush the noise.

Think about how you might tune in to the song of the angels and live a life of love and peace.

Prayer of blessing

The angels are still singing.

Hush the noise, hear them sing, repeat the song.

And the blessing of God,

the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,

be *yours/ours*, now and always. **Amen.**

The **Methodist** Church

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