Advent and Christmas Resource 2026

These FEAST sessions are an invitation for the Northampton Methodist District to gather around the Christmas message:

New Places for New People

Facilitator's & Resource Guide

This is offered alongside the Connexional Advent and Christmas resource available at https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/christmasresources/.

Dear Friends

This Advent and Christmas, **FEAST** (Friends Exploring And Sharing Together) invites you as individuals, congregations, and circuits to join with others across the Connexion as part of the Methodist *'Don't Be Afraid'* campaign and to consider hosting a FEAST in your community.

Whether small and simple, or big and boisterous, these gatherings are part of our wider calling to New Places for New People, offering spaces to listen deeply, share generously and celebrate God's presence among us.

For those who enjoyed the Gifted Tables last year, this resource offers a familiar rhythm with fresh themes. For those beginning now, there is room for you too to FEAST.

Rooted in Heritage, beginning with listening

Drawing on our Methodist heritage of going to where the people are, and affirming the District's Mission Development Plan of Growing Disciples, Developing Leaders and Transforming Communities, these spaces invite us to listen to God, to one another, and to the communities we serve in affirming that:

1. **God is already present** – *in the people and places we are invited to encounter.*
2. **Everyone brings something to the FEAST** – *stories, questions, wisdom and gifts to receive with care.*
3. **Jesus comes close** – *God with us, offering reassurance amid uncertainty and hope for what might become possible.*

In the Advent and Christmas story, Zechariah, Mary, Joseph and the shepherds each encounter something unexpected and hear the words *"Do not be afraid."* Reassurance comes alongside uncertainty, inviting them towards hope, trust and action.

Rather than following the stories chronologically, we will pause with each voice in turn, considering **Hope, Love, Joy and Peace** and how their experiences might connect with our own lives and communities. An optional gathering during Epiphany turns to **Light** and the ways that God leaves traces to guide us.

Other Voices Around our Tables

Alongside Scripture, poetry and familiar songs of the season, we will also bring our own voices: our memories, questions, hopes and experiences. Whether people come once or every week, we hope that there is always something new to notice.

Some voices may reassure us; others may challenge us or widen our understanding. Through conversation, creativity, song and silence, we will make room for one another and listen for God among us, and through these encounters we will prayerfully ask:

- Where is **God** already at work around us?
- Who are the **people** longing for connection, hope and belonging?
- What **place** might grow as faith, stories, and relationships are nurtured?

Don't be Afraid to begin simply: A pot of tea, a plate of mince pies and a willingness to begin can become something sacred this season. You may already meet with a midweek group, community café, workplace, wellbeing activity or neighbourhood gathering. You may be looking for a gentle way to explore faith together, or wondering what new Christian community could become possible there. Before finalising any plans, *Don't be afraid* to ask "What would you enjoy about a gathering like this?" and "What would help you feel comfortable taking part?" Let what you hear shape the place, timing and activities.

Remember to follow your agreed practices regarding recruiting volunteers, risk assessments, and safeguarding procedures.

Examples you might consider:

- Hosting a Good Food meal as part of your church's warm space, community pantry or larder and offer a shorter, conversational rhythm that people can join easily.
- In church settings, you can shape weekly Café Style services around the FEAST elements, with extra carols, prayers, and a sermon as needed.
- Creating a Crafty, Chatty Christmas Café in a school, library, or community hub that offers something for both children and adults. This could be a new space for parents/carers after the school run.
- Offering warm drinks, carols, and conversation on the high street or in a community garden/village green. Poetry and music can invite memories, present-day reflections, questions and imagination.
- Setting up a Festive Tea Break in your workplace, foodbank, or community kitchen. Ask whether a seasonal poem/thought of the day/week together with short conversations would be welcome during a regular break or activity.
- Homes and walking groups: Gather friends and neighbours around your kitchen table, or pause on a gentle walk for a reading and a question.

The FEAST Rhythm:

Each FEAST can stand alone or form part of a continuing journey. Plan for around 60–70 minutes using the rhythm below. The weekly pages offer choices: you do not need to use every reading, question or activity. **Facilitator notes are for preparation, rather than reading aloud.**

- **Friends (10 mins):** Welcome and an opening question.
- **Exploring (15–20 mins):** Poetry and Scripture and noticing words, phrases or images.
- **And (10 mins):** Receiving the gift of wondering through music and quiet.
- **Sharing (15–20 mins):** Conversations, stories, and an optional creative activity.
- **Together (10 mins):** A carol, gratitude, blessing and an invitation to return.

Don't be afraid to choose what fits your context and the time available. One thoughtful conversation may be enough. For a shorter gathering, use an opening question, one reading, music or quiet, one conversation prompt and the blessing. The crafting and additional prompts are purely optional. Above all, leave room for unexpected contributions and aim to finish at the time you have promised.

Resources and Preparation

Before each gathering, read the Scripture passage and weekly notes. Identify what you will use, check recordings, gather any craft materials needed, including any take-home items, and confirm the next gathering's date.

Each session uses the song "Someday at Christmas" as its anchor point*, and hearing this elsewhere in the shops, on the car radio, etc., can remind people of the friendships, conversations and next steps discussed at the FEAST.

*If you would prefer, the suggestions below offer different ways into wondering:

O holy night: Hope for a weary world, joy in Christ's birth, and love reaching towards freedom from oppression. Try to find a recording that includes the later verse about love and peace.

When a child is born: New beginnings and the possibility of a changed world. You will need to introduce its connection with the Christmas story, as Jesus is not explicitly named.

Mary, did you know?: Wonder about Jesus and the unfolding significance of his life. Introduce its questions as poetic reflection alongside Mary's own voice and understanding in Scripture.

What child is this?: Curiosity about who Jesus is, the vulnerability of his birth and the invitation to respond.

*Listen to your chosen recording beforehand, as wording, verses and length vary. Adapt the weekly introduction in the **And** section to connect to the theme as needed.*

The Creative Activity is optional, simple, and intergenerational. Using blank postcards and everyday craft supplies, people will be invited to create a postcard of hope, love, joy or peace.

The weekly pages list the materials and suggest ways to introduce it. An additional **take-home item** is included as a visual reminder of the theme and conversations. Week one is a feather, week two a small paper/card heart, week three a small piece of linen, week four a paper/card speech bubble and for Epiphany a star.

Hosting the FEAST Space: Please read this guidance before using the weekly pages, which offer additional notes specific to each gathering.

The aim is to nurture relationships in which people feel seen, heard and valued. Each facilitator is a companion, helping everyone to find their own way to participate.

- **Make room for everyone.** Welcome people of every age, ethnicity and cultural background, including LGBTQ+ people, disabled people and people with differing financial circumstances. Use language, images and examples that help everyone recognise themselves as welcomed and able to contribute. People may speak, listen, make, watch or pass, and sharing a personal story is always optional. Avoid assumptions about beliefs, relationships, circumstances or feelings. Ask what would help people participate, and offer different ways to contribute, allowing for language, literacy, learning and sensory needs, mobility, dexterity, pain or fatigue. *More guidance is found in the Inclusive Language Guide* https://www.methodist.org.uk/for-churches/the-inclusive-methodist-church/resources-events-and-support/resources/the-methodist-inclusive-language-guide/

- **Receive the readings slowly.** Leave a pause between the poem and Scripture, allowing each its own voice. Invite people to notice words, phrases or images before moving towards everyday connections. Welcome reassurance, questions, disagreement and uncertainty; there is no need to reach a shared interpretation.
- **Let wondering breathe.** The ***And*** section offers music and quiet without requiring an answer. Plan to play "Someday at Christmas" * in full, especially during weeks 1, 2, & at Epiphany. In weeks 3 and 4, you may briefly recall its vision and offer silence instead, if the group prefers and explain the connection for newcomers. If your recording uses "men" or "man" to refer to humanity, acknowledge this older language and affirm that the invitation includes everyone. People may simply listen, whether the words express their faith, raise questions or feel unfamiliar. Leave a little silence afterwards, without needing to gather responses.
- **Follow the conversation.** Offer one Sharing prompt at a time. A thoughtful conversation around one may be enough; use additional prompts only when helpful. Invite connections with faith without deciding what someone's experience means for them. Welcome questions about Jesus and offer brief explanations when helpful. You do not need to resolve every question. Something left open may become part of your continuing exploration.
- **Listen with care.** Leave room for quieter voices: "Would anyone who hasn't spoken like to add something?" Receive painful contributions without rushing to explain or resolve them: "Thank you for trusting us with that."
- **Respect privacy.** Ask everyone to keep other people's personal stories private. However, matters of Safeguarding must be shared through the appropriate procedures.
- **Carry a thread forward**. With the group's agreement, note one shared question, discovery or possible next step. Avoid recording private stories. Briefly return to it at the next gathering, welcoming fresh perspectives from newcomers. You might say: "Last time we wondered about… Would we like to return to that?"
- **Create with choice.** Making and conversation may happen alongside one another; let people choose where they place their attention. Offer help with materials or recording someone's words, with their agreement. Contributions may be imagined, suggest an action, or express a hope for the wider community. People can choose whether to keep their postcard or leave it; please explain that these will, with their permission, be part of the Epiphany gathering (if holding one). Invite people to include only words or images they are comfortable sharing, avoiding names, identifying details and sensitive personal information.
- **Share the shaping.** Notice gifts in listening, creativity, hospitality and thoughtful questioning. Invite people to help shape future gatherings in ways they choose. Ask what they would enjoy contributing, such as reading, choosing music, welcoming others or preparing refreshments. Where action is suggested, ask whose experience and knowledge should guide it.

- **Close with gratitude.** People may sing the carol or simply listen. Thank everyone for their contribution, including quiet presence; invite them to bring a friend to the next gathering; share the FEAST blessing, and finish at the time promised.

Beyond Advent and Christmas

After the four Advent gatherings, take some time to reflect: What relationships are forming? Have new people expressed curiosity about Jesus? What gifts or leaders are emerging? Are there any local concerns or connections that need further attention? The reflection pages at the end of this resource can help you notice what is growing.

During Epiphany, invite people to return for **A FEAST of Light and Discovery.** Drawing on the visit of the Magi, you can revisit the themes (gifts?) of hope, love, joy and peace through remembered conversations and the postcards you have received permission to display.

Welcome newcomers and fresh contributions as you ask: "Where might we recognise God's presence in this place and among these people?" and "What might we continue or begin together?" Let those gathered shape the next steps.

With Ash Wednesday falling on 10th February 2027, possibilities might include a regular space for prayer, some Faith Rooted Community Organising practices, or maybe some FEASTs for Lent, where we will continue to look at the words 'Don't be afraid.' Or perhaps people are ready to take a journey into discipleship using *On The Way*.

Agree on one manageable next step, including who will help, what support is needed and when you will reconnect. Another listening gathering is always worthwhile, especially if the direction remains unclear. Please feel free to contact kim.shorley@northamptonmethodistdistrict.org.uk to help you consider any possible next steps and future possibilities.

Whatever you discern, we hope these final words will be an encouragement to you:

Don't be afraid to discover what God is doing, and join in.

Rember to read alongside "Resources and Preparation" and "Holding the FEAST Space"

A FEAST of Hope and Possibility
Don't be afraid to begin small.

Suggested opening: Welcome to FEAST, Friends Exploring And Sharing Together. Today we will focus on hope and possibility through Scripture, poetry, familiar music, conversation and creativity. We will listen to an unexpected announcement to Zechariah, a priest serving in the Temple, and wonder where hope might be hiding in plain sight and what small beginning we could nurture in our lives and communities. You don't need particular beliefs or Bible knowledge, and you don't need to feel hopeful to belong here. You are welcome to speak, listen, make something or simply enjoy being here with us.

Friends: What is one small thing you look forward to at this time of year?

Notes for this gathering: If helpful, offer an example from your own experience, such as a favourite food, a familiar song, seeing someone, or a quiet moment. If looking forward feels difficult, people might name something they appreciate today.

Exploring: What words, phrases, or images are you sitting with?

- **Poem: *Hope is the Thing with Feathers* by Emily Dickinson.**
- **Scripture: Luke 1:11–17** The child announced to Zechariah will grow up to help people prepare for Jesus. This small beginning belongs to a wider story of God drawing near. As we listen, try to notice what reassurance sounds like in an uncertain moment.

Notes for this gathering:

- Read Luke 1:5-25 beforehand. Zechariah and Elizabeth's story includes longing for a child. This may reflect people's own situation (past or present), and they may be carrying grief or unanswered hopes, so avoid suggesting that every prayer receives the hoped-for outcome.
- If Zechariah's silence arises, acknowledge this challenging part of the story without drawing conclusions about anyone's faith from disability, difficulty or unanswered prayer.
- The Biblical encounter speaks of God's promise and reassurance; the poem offers an image of hope's persistence.
- If helpful, ask: "What do you notice about the words 'Do not be afraid' being spoken while so much is still unknown?"
- If people are curious about the child's purpose, briefly explain that John will help people turn towards God and prepare for Jesus. Notice that the announcement includes relationships being restored, as well as a child being born.

And: Receiving the gift of wondering, listen to the song and allow space for whatever it stirs.

Notes for this gathering: Introduce *"Someday at Christmas"* with words similar to: This song imagines a world free from war, hunger and fear, where people share and care for one another, a longing that remains with us today. You might notice a word, an image or a feeling, or just simply enjoy listening. There is no need to find an answer.

Sharing:

What connects with your experience in what we have heard, including anything that challenges or puzzles you?

Where do you notice a small beginning of hope in everyday life, and what might help it grow?

Whose hopes might we need to hear before deciding what to nurture in our community?

Notes for this gathering:

- Encourage people to name everyday examples and gently invite connections with faith: "I wonder where God might be found in what you have shared?" Welcome different responses and allow the question to remain open.
- If a deeper connection with Scripture would help, wonder: "John's calling includes helping people prepare for Jesus. What might making room for Jesus look like in the hope we have been discussing?"
- If an idea for local action emerges, gently explore whose experiences and knowledge could help shape it. A first step might be listening to someone else, strengthening an existing relationship or offering a small act of kindness. There is no need to agree on a project today.

Optional craft activity: Postcards of Hope.

Offer blank postcards, paper, feathers (paper/craft), coloured paper, pencils and glue.

Invite people to write, draw or colour a small beginning of hope they have noticed, or one they would like to see in their community. They might add a paper feather, draw a feather-shaped design or use feather-like patterns as a sign of hope. Ask whether people would like to leave their postcard for the follow-up Epiphany gathering. (Therefore, allowing permission for it to be displayed then.) They may choose to keep it instead. Those leaving a card may wish to photograph it. Please keep the cards somewhere safe, ready for your January gathering.

Invite people to take home a second feather. This, or hearing your chosen Christmas song during the week, can help them recall the invitation: **Don't be afraid: Hope is hiding in plain sight**. In that moment, they may wish to pause to give thanks, pray, or reflect on the hopes and possibilities they are carrying with them this week.

Together: Carol - O Little Town of Bethlehem.

Notes for this gathering:

- Introduce the carol as a song that brings together our hopes and fears within the Christmas story. If singing doesn't feel comfortable, play the carol and invite people simply to listen.
- **Offer an invitation** to the next gathering where we will be listening to Joseph's story and sharing a FEAST of Love and Courage. You might say: "Today we have noticed small beginnings of hope. Next time, we will wonder how care can help hope grow and what courage that might ask of us."
- With the group's agreement, **note one shared question or discovery** to return to next time.
- **Ask** "What would you like us to make room for when we meet again?" Invite people to help shape the next gathering through their ideas, as well as by inviting others, offering a reading or preparing refreshments.

Blessing: **F**riends, may our hopes be held around these tables, as we
Explore God's love with one another, wherever we meet.
And with joy finding room in our lives, let us
Share words of peace and acts of kindness, as
Together, in God's light, we hear the promise: "Do not be afraid" **Amen**

REMEMBER: You are welcome to bring whatever you notice to our next FEAST, whether it is a sign of hope, a question, or something still unresolved.

Rember to read alongside "Resources and Preparation" and "Holding the FEAST Space"

A FEAST of Love and Courage
Don't be afraid to put care into action.

Suggested opening: Welcome to FEAST, Friends Exploring And Sharing Together. Whether this is your first visit or you have been before, there is a place for you here. Today we will focus on love and courage through Scripture, poetry, familiar music and our own experiences and creativity. We will listen to Joseph's story as he begins a new chapter with Mary and wonder about the care we receive and offer, and the courage it takes when life asks something unexpected of us. You don't need particular beliefs or Bible knowledge, and please know that you are welcome to speak, listen, create or simply enjoy just being here with us.

Offer a brief, optional invitation so that everyone can contribute, whether or not they attended before: "Has anything stayed with you from our FEAST of Hope, or have you noticed a small sign of hope or care this week?" **If you noted a shared question or discovery last time, briefly recall it here**.

Friends: What small gesture helps you feel welcome or cared for?

Notes for this gathering: Begin with simple gestures: someone remembering your name, making you a drink or taking time to listen. There will be room to explore more difficult choices later. Avoid assuming that everyone experiences care within a family or relationship.

Exploring: What words, phrases, or images are you sitting with?

- **Poem: *Love Came Down at Christmas* by Christina Rossetti.**
- **Scripture: Matthew 1:18–25.** Matthew describes Jesus as "Emmanuel", meaning God with us. As we listen, try to notice what love and courage might look like amid fear and uncertainty.

Notes for this gathering:

- Joseph and Mary's story includes an unexpected pregnancy, Joseph's uncertainty about its circumstances, the possibility of public disgrace, and his intention to end their betrothal quietly. These may connect with painful memories or current experience. Avoid inviting personal disclosure or suggesting that one pattern of family life is the best measure of love and care.
- Joseph initially seeks to avoid exposing Mary to disgrace. The "Do not be afraid" dream opens a further possibility, and he changes his intended course. Allow room to wonder about his care, uncertainty and response without claiming to know all his feelings.
- Make clear that Joseph's particular invitation does not mean people should remain in unsafe relationships. Loving courage can include seeking help, the setting of boundaries and receiving protection.
- The poem celebrates divine love made visible in Jesus; the biblical encounter places God's presence within a difficult decision.
- If needed, ask: "What do you notice about how Joseph's response changes after the dream?" Allow people to wonder about the connection between "God with us" and Joseph's practical response, without needing to resolve it.

And: Receiving the gift of wondering, listen to the song and allow space for whatever it stirs.

Notes for this gathering: Introduce *"Someday at Christmas"* with words similar to: This song imagines a world where fear, hatred and division give way to care and peace. As you listen, notice what kind of world loving care could help make possible. Or simply enjoy listening, ready for our Sharing section.

Sharing: **What connects with your experience in what we have heard, including anything that challenges or puzzles you?**
What makes it difficult to offer or receive care, and what might help?
Where might care be needed in our community, and how could we discover what people would actually welcome?

Notes for this gathering:

- Make room for receiving care as well as offering it. Companionship, support and respect for someone's choices can all be expressions of love.
- If a deeper connection with Scripture would help, wonder: "Joseph changes his intended course. Can listening sometimes change what we understand a caring response to be?"
- If a local possibility emerges, begin by asking what would be welcome or learning from something already happening. People may choose one small act of listening or care to try; there is no need to agree on a project today.

Optional craft activity: Postcards of Love.

Offer blank postcards, magazine pages, pictures, newspaper, coloured paper, pencils and glue.

Invite people to choose images, colours, words or phrases that express care and love in the everyday: companionship, kindness, practical help, fairness, listening or making room for someone. The card can express something from their conversations or an imagined act of care; it need not be a personal story. Ask whether people would like to leave their postcard for the follow-up Epiphany gathering and give permission for it to be used then. They may choose to keep it instead. Those leaving a card may wish to photograph it. Please keep these cards, alongside Week 1's, somewhere safe, ready for your January gathering.

Invite people to take home a small heart made from card, paper or fabric. This, or hearing your chosen Christmas song during the week, can help them recall the invitation: **Don't be afraid: A new chapter is beginning**. In that moment, they may wish to pause to give thanks, pray, or reflect on the care they might offer or receive, and the courage that it displays.

Together: **Carol - In The Bleak Midwinter.**

Notes for this gathering:

- The carol is another work by Christina Rossetti. It ends by wondering what we can offer Jesus, within the gift of our hearts. Introduce this as an invitation, rather than another task to fulfil.
- **Offer an invitation** to the next gathering where we will be listening to the Shepherd's story and sharing a FEAST of Joy and Belonging. You might say: "Today we have wondered how care takes shape and what courage can ask of us. Next time, we will look at what helps people feel they have a place of warmth and welcome. You are welcome to invite others to join us."
- With the group's agreement, **note one shared question or discovery** to return to next time.
- **Ask** "What would you like us to make room for when we meet again?" Invite people to help shape the next gathering through their ideas, or contributions they would enjoy making, such as reading or preparing refreshments.

Blessing: **F**riends, may our hopes be held around these tables, as we
Explore God's love with one another, wherever we meet.
And with joy finding room in our lives, let us
Share words of peace and acts of kindness, as
Together, in God's light, we hear the promise: "Do not be afraid" **Amen**

REMEMBER: You are welcome to bring whatever you notice to our next FEAST, whether it is a sign of love, a question, or something still unresolved.

Rember to read alongside "Resources and Preparation" and "Holding the FEAST Space"

A FEAST of Joy and Belonging
Don't be afraid to come as you are.

Suggested opening: Welcome to FEAST, Friends Exploring And Sharing Together. Whether this is your first visit or you have been before, there is a place for you here. Today we will reflect on joy and belonging through Scripture, poetry, familiar music, conversation and creativity, noticing how joy is to be shared and what it means to be included. Through the shepherds' story, we will wonder who receives good news and where God might be closer than we think. You don't need to feel joyful, or have particular beliefs or Bible knowledge to be here, and you are welcome to speak, listen, make something or simply sit with us.

Offer a brief, optional invitation so that everyone can contribute, whether or not they attended before: "Has anything stayed with you from our FEAST of Love, or have you noticed a small sign of care in action this week?" **If you noted a shared question or discovery last time, briefly recall it here**.

Friends: What small, everyday thing brings a smile or lifts your spirits?

Notes for this gathering: Examples might include birdsong, a familiar joke, a favourite tune or someone remembering your birthday. Joy can sometimes be quiet or fleeting, and Christmas can bring mixed feelings. Avoid asking people to demonstrate happiness.

Exploring: What words, phrases, or images are you sitting with?

- **Poem: *The Christmas Life* by Wendy Cope.**
- **Scripture: Luke 2:8-20**. As we listen, try to notice who receives the angel's message and invitation, where they find Jesus, and what they do next.

Notes for this gathering:

- The shepherds are at work when an unexpected encounter interrupts their night. The announcement of joy begins with fear and reassurance; avoid suggesting that faith requires people to feel cheerful.
- Notice the movement from "good news of great joy for all the people" to the particular sign given to the shepherds: a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. Allow room to wonder about God becoming present in such an ordinary and vulnerable way.
- The shepherds receive the news and go to see for themselves. They then share what they have heard and return praising God, while Mary treasures and ponders their words. The encounter leaves room for both telling and quiet reflection.
- Avoid making unsupported claims that all shepherds were despised or excluded. The passage itself gives us enough to explore whose everyday lives become part of this extraordinary announcement.
- The biblical encounter announces joy through the birth of Jesus, prompting the shepherds to go and see; and the poem welcomes celebration, memories and loss into the same space.
- If a further prompt would help, ask: "What do you notice about this good news reaching people in the middle of their working night?"

And: Receiving the gift of wondering, listen to the song and allow space for whatever it stirs.

Notes for this gathering: Introduce *"Someday at Christmas"* with words similar to: This song imagines a world where people can live without fear, hatred or division. Today, you might listen for the joy of a world where everyone has a place. You don't need to feel joyful yourself; simply notice what comes close as you hear the song afresh.

Sharing: **What connects with your experience in what we have heard, including anything that challenges or puzzles you?**
What helps people feel they belong, even when they do not feel cheerful or have much to say?
Whose voices, presence or gifts might we be missing, and how could we discover what would help them take part?

Notes for this gathering:

- Welcome quiet joy, mixed feelings and the experience of finding joy difficult. Belonging should not depend on a person's mood or willingness to speak.
- If a deeper connection with Scripture would help, wonder: "The angel announces joy 'for all the people'. How might that widen our understanding of who belongs?"
- If a local possibility emerges, explore how people would like to participate, whilst recognising the need for further listening, including people and perspectives which are not yet present.

Optional craft activity: Postcards of Joy.

Offer blank postcards, paper, coloured paper, pencils and glue.

Invite people to use shapes, colours, or pictures to express a moment of joy or something that helps people belong. Joy might be found in laughter, music, nature, companionship or a quiet moment. There is no need to describe a personal experience or explain the design. Ask whether people would like to leave their postcard for the follow-up Epiphany gathering and give permission for it to be used then. They may choose to keep it instead. Those leaving a card may wish to photograph it. Keep these cards alongside those from earlier gatherings.

Invite people to take home a piece of linen fabric (recalling the cloths wrapped around Jesus) and the shepherds finding Jesus in the manger. This, or hearing your chosen Christmas song during the week, can help them recall the invitation: **Don't be afraid: God is nearer than we think.** In that moment, they may wish to pause to give thanks, pray, or reflect on where they find joy and what might help others feel they belong.

Together: Carol - Joy To The World.

Notes for this gathering:

- The carol welcomes Jesus and imagines the whole of creation sharing in joy. "Let every heart prepare him room" connects with our wondering about making room for one another.
- **Offer an invitation** to the next gathering where we will be listening to Mary's story and sharing a FEAST of Peace and Justice. You might say: "Today we have wondered about joy and belonging, and how we can welcome others. Next time, we will look at peace and justice and consider what needs to change so that all can live with dignity and security. You are welcome to invite someone to join us."
- With the group's agreement, **note one shared question or discovery** to return to next time.
- **Ask** "What have we discovered today that could help shape our next gathering?" Welcome ideas and offers to help.

Blessing: **F**riends, may our hopes be held around these tables, as we
Explore God's love with one another, wherever we meet.
And with joy finding room in our lives, let us
Share words of peace and acts of kindness, as
Together, in God's light, we hear the promise: "Do not be afraid" **Amen**

REMEMBER: You are welcome to bring whatever you notice to our next FEAST, whether it is a sign of joy, a question, or something still unresolved.

Rember to read alongside "Resources and Preparation" and "Holding the FEAST Space"

A FEAST of Peace and Justice
Don't be afraid to imagine a fairer future for all.

Suggested opening: Welcome to FEAST, Friends Exploring And Sharing Together. Whether this is your first visit or you have been before, there is a place for you here. Today we will explore peace and justice through Scripture, poetry, familiar music and our own experiences and creativity. We will listen to Mary's song and wonder what it means when God interrupts for good reasons, so that a fairer and secure future might be found and everyone can live with dignity. You don't need particular beliefs or Bible knowledge, or answers to difficult questions. You are welcome to speak, listen, make something, or simply be here with us.

Offer a brief, optional invitation so that everyone can contribute, whether or not they attended before: "Has anything stayed with you from our FEAST of Joy, or have you noticed someone making room for another person this week?" **If you noted a shared question or discovery last time, briefly recall it here.**

Friends: What small thing helps you feel more at peace in everyday life?

Notes for this gathering: Everyday examples might include fresh air, music, knowing what to expect, or someone taking time to listen. There will be space later to consider how peace connects with fairness. Do not assume everyone has a peaceful home or a place where they feel safe.

Exploring: What words, phrases, or images are you sitting with?

- **Poem: *Hidden Joys: A Sonnet for the Visitation* by Malcolm Guite.**
- **Scripture: Luke 1:46–55.** Earlier in Mary's story, the angel Gabriel says "Do not be afraid" before announcing news that will change her life (Luke 1:30–33). Later, welcomed by her relative Elizabeth, who is expecting the child who will become John the Baptist, Mary gives voice to a song of praise that reaches far beyond her own circumstances.

Notes for this gathering:

- Read Luke 1:26–56 beforehand. Avoid portraying Mary as unquestioning or suggesting that peace means remaining silent about injustice as her words reach beyond the personal. She celebrates God's mercy and sings of hungry people fed, the lowly lifted up and the powerful brought down from their thrones.
- Make room for reassurance and challenge. Mary's song connects peace with justice by describing real changes in people's material circumstances and their relationships with power.
- The poem attends to Mary and Elizabeth, whose lives and gifts may be overlooked; the biblical encounter celebrates God's mercy and the overturning of unequal power. Notice the images and contrasts: powerful and lowly, hungry and rich.
- The stories include pregnancy and motherhood, which may touch painful experiences. Avoid suggesting that these are the measure of someone's worth, calling or contribution.
- If a further prompt would help, ask: "Whose voices are being heard, and whose lives might change?"

And: Receiving the gift of wondering, listen to the song and allow space for whatever it stirs.

Notes for this gathering: Introduce *"Someday at Christmas"* with words similar to: This song imagines a world without hunger, war or fear. Alongside Mary's song, it invites us to imagine a peace that changes people's lives. As you listen, notice an image of a fairer future that stays with you, or simply enjoy, ready for the Sharing section.

Sharing: **What connects with your experience in what we have heard, including anything that challenges or puzzles you?**
What might need to change for all to live in dignity and security?
What could we learn from people affected by unfairness, and what next step might we take together?

Notes for this gathering:

- Let Mary's song retain its challenge. Alongside kindness, explore how decisions and resources shape people's lives, using an example such as food, housing or transport. Ask: "What might Mary's confidence in God's mercy offer us here?" Welcome different responses and allow people to make their own connections.
- Welcome disagreement, but do challenge language that demeans. Listen to people experiencing unfairness, especially those at the table, and recognise their knowledge, gifts and leadership.
- If an issue emerges, consider what you can do together, what requires partners, and what needs wider change. Always begin by listening to those affected before deciding on a response.

Optional craft activity: Postcards of Peace.

Offer blank postcards, coloured paper, pens, pencils, magazines, stickers and glue.

Invite people to create an image showing a community where peace and fairness flourish. What can people access, whose voices are heard, and how are neighbours living together? The design may be imagined or express a prayer. Ask whether people would like to leave their final postcard for the follow-up Epiphany gathering, with permission for it to be used then. They may choose to keep it instead. Those leaving a card may wish to photograph it. Store these alongside those from the earlier three gatherings.

Invite people to take home a speech-bubble card. They may add a word or phrase from Mary's song, or one possibility for peace and justice they would like to remember. This, or hearing your chosen Christmas song during the week, can help them recall the invitation: Don't be afraid: God interrupts for good reasons. In that moment, they may wish to pause to give thanks, pray, or reflect on whose voice needs to be heard.

Together: **Carol - It Came Upon The Midnight Clear.**

Notes for this gathering:

- Introduce the carol as a song that holds the angels' message of peace alongside the weariness and conflict of the world. It leaves room for both longing and hope.
- **Offer an invitation** to the Epiphany FEAST of Light and Discovery, with words similar to "Across these gatherings, we have explored hope, love, joy and peace. Next time, we will notice what we are discovering and wonder what we might continue or begin. You are welcome whether you have attended each week or have joined us for the first time today."
- With the group's agreement, **note one shared question or discovery** to return to next time.
- Thank **everyone** for the attention, questions, creativity and wisdom they have brought both today and at any previous sessions. If available, use spare campaign postcards to share the date, time and place. Welcome any ideas and offers to help shape the next gathering.

Blessing: **F**riends, may our hopes be held around these tables, as we
Explore God's love with one another, wherever we meet.
And with joy finding room in our lives, let us
Share words of peace and acts of kindness, as
Together, in God's light, we hear the promise: "Do not be afraid" **Amen**

REMEMBER: You are welcome to bring whatever you notice to our next FEAST, whether it's a discovery of hope, an act of love, a sense of joy or an unfinished peace.

Rember to read alongside "Resources and Preparation" and "Holding the FEAST Space"

A FEAST of Light and Discovery
Don't be afraid to ask what comes next.

Suggested opening: Welcome to FEAST, Friends Exploring And Sharing Together. Whether you have joined us throughout Advent or are coming for the first time, there is a place for you here. Today we will focus on light and discovery using Scripture, poetry, familiar music, conversation and creativity. We will listen to the story of the Magi and wonder what it means to recognise God leaving traces to guide us, as we consider what we might continue or begin together.

You don't need particular beliefs, Bible knowledge or a clear sense of direction. Bring your curiosity, questions and unfinished thoughts, and enjoy being here with us. **If you noted a shared question or discovery last time, briefly recall it here.**

Friends: Choose a postcard; it could be one that you made, a campaign postcard, or another card that catches your attention. What do you notice?

Notes for the gathering:

- Display the earlier FEAST Postcards (for which makers gave permission), together with any remaining "Don't be afraid" campaign postcards. Include blanks for anyone who would prefer to begin with their own word or image.
- Introduce the invitation: "Some of these cards hold hopes, care, joy and longing for peace shared around our tables. Others come from the wider Methodist Christmas campaign. You may recognise your own card, be drawn to one somebody else made, or use a blank card to begin something new. Everyone's noticing is welcome."
- Allow time to look before inviting brief responses. People might name a word, colour, image or question.
- When someone chooses another person's card, welcome what they notice without assuming it reveals the maker's intention. Nobody needs to identify themselves or explain their design.
- Keep the chosen cards nearby to return to later.

Exploring: What words, phrases, or images are you sitting with?

- **Poem: *The Work of Christmas* by Howard Thurman.**
- **Scripture: Matthew 2:1–12.** Notice the different responses to Jesus. The Magi seek and rejoice, while Herod feels threatened. Discovery takes place amid uncertainty and danger.

Notes for this gathering:

- Matthew names the visitors as Magi; he does not specify their number or call them kings.
- Avoid suggesting that every unusual event is a message from God or that faith always provides clear directions. The journey includes questions, other people's knowledge and a warning that changes the route home.
- The Biblical story follows the Magi's encounter with Jesus, whereas Thurman turns our attention towards living out the meaning of Christmas beyond its celebrations.
- If a further prompt would help, ask: "What do you notice about the different ways the Magi find guidance?"

And: Receiving the gift of wondering, listen to the song and allow space for what is beginning to come into view.

Notes for this gathering: Reintroduce "Someday at Christmas" with words similar to: We return to a song that imagines a world shaped by hope, love, joy and peace. Alongside our readings, it invites us to wonder where that future is already beginning. You might rest your attention on your postcard and notice what stays with you, or simply enjoy listening.

Sharing:

What have you noticed in your postcard, the readings or over Advent and Christmas that you would like to explore further?
Where might we recognise God's presence in the relationships, gifts and concerns emerging among us?
What might we continue or begin together, and whose voices could help shape our next step?

Notes for this gathering:

- Welcome fresh perspectives alongside those carried from earlier gatherings. Possibilities might include a relationship forming, curiosity about Jesus, a gift someone enjoys sharing, or a community concern needing attention.
- If a deeper connection with Scripture would help, wonder: "The Magi return by another road. Has anything we have encountered opened a different possibility for us?"
- Let Thurman's invitation to live the meaning of Christmas deepen the conversation without becoming a list of tasks to complete. Hear what people would value and help shape before offering suggestions. These might include FEAST gatherings during Lent, a space for prayer, listening together regarding a local concern, or exploring discipleship through On the Way.
- Before settling on an idea, consider who is not yet part of the conversation and what they could contribute. Another listening gathering is a worthwhile next step if the direction remains unclear

Optional craft activity: A Star for the Next Step.

Offer paper stars, pens, pencils and simple decorating materials. Invite people to add a word, image or question they would like to carry forward. They might begin: "I am discovering…" "I would like to explore…" "I could bring…"

The stars can hold different hopes; every contribution need not fit one plan. People may keep their star or leave it, permitting it to be used in planning a future gathering. Those leaving a star may wish to photograph it first.

Together: Carol - As With Gladness Men Of Old.

Notes for this gathering:

- Introduce the carol as a prayer that the Magi's seeking, joy and generosity might shape our own journey. Acknowledge its older language and affirm that the invitation is for everyone.
- If people seem ready, ask: "What would help us to take a next step together?" Agree on one manageable next step, including who will help, what support is needed and when you will reconnect.
- End with gratitude: thank **everyone** for the questions, gifts and attention they have brought.
- If no next step has been agreed, explain how and when people can help continue the conversation. Where possible, offer a date to reconnect.

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REMEMBER: Let your star remind you of the discovery or question you are carrying. Keep noticing where God may be at work, whose wisdom you could listen to, and what you can bring.

Dear Friends

Thank you for holding an Advent and Christmas **FEAST**. These pages are here to help you notice **what**, and nurture **where** God's spirit is already at work among you and your community. You don't need to write an essay; just **jot down a few words or phrases.**

You can fill it in quietly on your own, or **chat it through with your helpers or co-host**.

Friends and belonging
What helped us feel seen, heard and valued? What relationships are growing, and whose perspectives are still missing?
Notes:

Exploring faith
What did people express about Jesus, faith or God's presence? What wonder, curiosity or questions would we like to explore further?
Notes:

And noticing grace
Where did we glimpse hope, love, joy or peace? What surprised, challenged or encouraged us—and what remains unresolved?
Notes:

Sharing gifts and seeking justice
What gifts and contributions emerged? What are we learning together about care, fairness and the concerns of our community?
Notes:

Together discerning
What would those who gathered welcome next? What might we continue, change or begin, and who could help shape it with us?
Notes:

As Friends, Exploring And Sharing Together in the mission of God, let us pray for the courage and openness to nurture what is growing and for the Spirit's guidance in discovering our next faithful steps in shaping New Place for New People within our circuit and across the Northampton District. Amen.

Don't be afraid to discover what God is doing, and join in.

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Bring your curiosity, questions and experiences as we look for hope in small beginnings, love finding courage, joy making room for everyone, and peace shaped by justice.

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Friends gather, faces both familiar and fresh.
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A FEAST of Hope and Possibility

Friends:

What is one small thing you look forward to at this time of year?

Exploring:

Poem: *Hope is the Thing with Feathers* by Emily Dickinson.
Scripture: Luke 1:11–17
What words, phrases, or images are you sitting with?

And:

Receiving the gift of wondering, listen to the song and allow space for whatever it stirs.

Sharing

- What connects with your experience in what we have heard, including anything that challenges or puzzles you?
- Where do you notice a small beginning of hope in everyday life, and what might help it grow?
- Whose hopes might we need to hear before deciding what to nurture in our community?

Together:

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'Hope' is the thing with feathers by Emily Dickinson

"Hope" is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -

I've heard it in the chillest land -
And on the strangest Sea -
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me.

Public domain.

Source:https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/42889/hope-is-the-thing-with-feathers-314

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A FEAST of Love and Courage

Friends:
What small gesture helps you feel welcome or cared for?

Exploring:
Poem: *Love Came Down at Christmas* by Christina Rossetti.
Scripture: Matthew 1:18–25
What words, phrases, or images are you sitting with?

And:
Receiving the gift of wondering, listen to the song and allow space for whatever it stirs.

Sharing:
- What connects with your experience in what we have heard, including anything that challenges or puzzles you?
- What makes it difficult to offer or receive care, and what might help?
- Where might care be needed in our community, and how could we discover what people would actually welcome?

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Amen

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Love came down at Christmas by Christina Georgina Rossetti

Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love Divine,
Love was born at Christmas,
Star and Angels gave the sign.

Worship we the Godhead,
Love Incarnate, Love Divine,
Worship we our Jesus,
But wherewith for sacred sign?

Love shall be our token,
Love be yours and love be mine,
Love to God and all men,
Love for plea and gift and sign.

Public domain.

Source:https://thepoetryhour.com/poems/love-came-down-at-christmas/

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A FEAST of Joy and Belonging

Friends:

What small, everyday thing brings a smile or lifts your spirits?

Exploring:

Poem: *The Christmas Life* by Wendy Cope.
Scripture: Luke 2:8-20.
What words, phrases, or images are you sitting with?

And:

Receiving the gift of wondering, listen to the song and allow space for whatever it stirs.

Sharing:

- What connects with your experience in what we have heard, including anything that challenges or puzzles you?
- What helps people feel they belong, even when they do not feel cheerful or have much to say?
- Whose voices, presence or gifts might we be missing, and how could we discover what would help them take part?

Together:

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The Christmas Life by Wendy Cope

Bring in a tree, a young Norwegian spruce,
Bring hyacinths that rooted in the cold,
Bring winter jasmine as its buds unfold:
Bring the Christmas life into this house.

Bring red and green and gold, bring things that shine,
Bring candlesticks and music, food and wine.
Bring in your memories of Christmas past,
Bring in your tears for all that you have lost.

Bring in the shepherd boy, the ox and ass,
Bring in the stillness of an icy night,
Bring in a birth, of hope and love and light;
Bring the Christmas life into this house.

from If I Don't Know (Faber and Faber, 2001), © Wendy Cope 2001, used by permission of the author

Source:https://poetryarchive.org/poem/christmas-life/

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A FEAST of Peace and Justice

Friends:
What small thing helps you feel more at peace in everyday life?

Exploring:
Poem: *Hidden Joys: A Sonnet for the Visitation* by Malcolm Guite.
Scripture: Luke 1:46–55.
What words, phrases, or images are you sitting with?

And:
Receiving the gift of wondering, listen to the song and allow space for whatever it stirs.

Sharing:
- What connects with your experience in what we have heard, including anything that challenges or puzzles you?
- What might need to change for all to live in dignity and security?
- What could we learn from people affected by unfairness, and what next step might we take together?

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FEAST.

Hidden Joys: A Sonnet for the Visitation by Malcolm Guite

Here is a meeting made of hidden joys
Of lightenings cloistered in a narrow place
From quiet hearts the sudden flame of praise
And in the womb the quickening kick of grace.

Two women on the very edge of things
Unnoticed and unknown to men of power
But in their flesh the hidden Spirit sings
And in their lives the buds of blessing flower.

And Mary stands with all we call 'too young',
Elizabeth with all called 'past their prime'
They sing today for all the great unsung
Women who turned eternity to time
Favoured of heaven, outcast on the earth
Prophets who bring the best in us to birth.

from Sounding the Seasons (Canterbury Press, 2012), © Malcolm Guite 2012, used by permission of the author

Source:https://malcolmguite.wordpress.com/2021/05/31/hidden-joys-a-sonnet-for-the-visitation-9/

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A FEAST of Light and Discovery

Friends: *Choose a postcard; it could be one you made, a campaign postcard, or another card that catches your attention.*
What do you notice?

Exploring:
Poem: *The Work of Christmas* by Howard Thurman.
Scripture: Matthew 2:1–12.
What words, phrases, or images are you sitting with?

And:
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The Work of Christmas by Howard Thurman.

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among others,
To make music in the heart

from The Mood of Christmas and Other Celebrations (Friends United Press, 1985), © Friends United Press and is used by permission of Friends United Press. All rights reserved.

Source:https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/now-the-work-of-christmas-begins/

Someday at Christmas
Song by Stevie Wonder · 1967

Someday at Christmas men won't be boys
Playing with bombs like kids play with toys
One warm December our hearts will see
A world where men are free
Someday at Christmas there'll be no wars
When we have learned what Christmas is for
When we have found what life's really worth
There'll be peace on earth

Someday all our dreams will come to be
Someday in a world where men are free
Maybe not in time for you and me
But someday at Christmastime

Someday at Christmas we'll see a land
With no hungry children, no empty hand
One happy morning people will share
A world where people care
Whoa, someday at Christmas there'll be no tears
When all men are equal and no man has fears
One shining moment one prayer away
From our world today

Someday all our dreams will come to be
Someday in a world where men are free
Maybe not in time for you and me
But someday at Christmastime

Someday at Christmas man will not fail
Hate will be gone and love will prevail
Someday a new world that we can start
With hope in every heart, yeah
whoa, yeah

(Someday in a world where men are free)
Maybe not in time for you and me
But someday at Christmastime
Someday at Christmastime

Source: LyricFind
Songwriters: Bryan Wells / Ronald Miller
Someday at Christmas lyrics © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC

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Playing with bombs like kids play with toys
One warm December our hearts will see
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Someday at Christmas there'll be no wars
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When we have found what life's really worth
There'll be peace on earth

Someday all our dreams will come to be
Someday in a world where men are free
Maybe not in time for you and me
But someday at Christmastime

Someday at Christmas we'll see a land
With no hungry children, no empty hand
One happy morning people will share
A world where people care
Whoa, someday at Christmas there'll be no tears
When all men are equal and no man has fears
One shining moment one prayer away
From our world today

Someday all our dreams will come to be
Someday in a world where men are free
Maybe not in time for you and me
But someday at Christmastime

Someday at Christmas man will not fail
Hate will be gone and love will prevail
Someday a new world that we can start
With hope in every heart, yeah
whoa, yeah

(Someday in a world where men are free)
Maybe not in time for you and me
But someday at Christmastime
Someday at Christmastime

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