

All these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea.

No doubt as you prepare to celebrate Christmas this year it will be different than previous years because of the restrictions we still face as a country because of the coronavirus pandemic. Nevertheless, our celebrations will be authentic, they will be genuine, they will be spirit filled – we will acknowledge the coming of Jesus into our world as a baby in Bethlehem. We will just do it differently. God will guide us in how we should be Christians, how we should be the church in the time we find ourselves in.

As we look back on the history of the Church, maybe the history of our own churches we will know that there have been some significant things that have changed over time, some things that have been sudden changes and some that have developed slowly.

Think of the changes that were once controversial that are no longer:

female preachers – it seems ridiculous now that they were ever controversial

weddings taking place in churches (yes that was once controversial when the churches started getting involved in civil things),

the church's work in society like the start of the Salvation Army, the starting of the National Children's Home or Action for Children as its now known the Methodist children's charity,

the idea that the church might go to where the people are shown in Whitfield and Wesley's open air of field preaching

the introduction of pews in churches, and more recently fashion among churches to remove them (they were incidentally originally installed in many places for heat as they provided a place for coals to be brought from home) and we now remove them in many places to make worship more comfortable and inviting

In all these things, and probably all the other changes you can think about in your own minds that have happened over time, the church has responded to its place and time in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit sharpens us and changes us for the situation we are in.

The change that the Holy Spirit brings often always clashes against history, tradition, and expectation.

In this text Elizabeth gives birth and the expectation is that the baby will be called Zechariah after his father. The crowd of neighbours look on at the new father who has a choice to make – go with tradition and expectation – or go with the Holy Spirit.

When he takes the tablet, he does not just write a name. He chooses to go with the call of the Holy Spirit and turn the course of history; this child would prepare the way for Jesus, calling hearts and minds to repent. It is an uncomfortable moment. The eyes are on him. "Put your foot down and name him Zechariah the crowd are likely thinking". But he writes:

"His name is John." – and they gasp!

"God is predictably unpredictable." - R.T. Kendall

Are we being called to be controversial this advent and Christmas?

How are we being called to change, to be daring, to challenge expectation, to step out in faith in the power of the Holy Spirit this advent, the Christmas and beyond. As God leads us through a season of pandemic and lockdown how will the call of the Spirit challenge tradition, history and our lives and response to the baby in the manger.

Wednesday 23rd

When I see the beauty of a sunset's glory,
amazing artistry across the evening sky.
When I feel the mystery of a distant galaxy,
It awes and humbles me to be loved, by a God so high.
What can I do but thank You,
what can I do but give my life to You
Hallelujah, hallelujah
What can I do but praise You,
everyday make everything I do a hallelu ah
A hallelujah, hallelujah
When I hear the story of a God of mercy
Who shared humanity and suffered by our side
Of the cross they nailed You to, that could not hold You
Now You're making all things new by the power of Your risen life



Prayer

Lord, as we prepare to celebrate Christmas once again remind us how controversial your birth was.

Away from pretty photo finish of the children's nativity play your coming into our world was controversial.

The birth in a borrowed room
The few that would acknowledge the birth when leaders rejected it
The way Jesus loved all people and especially sought out the marginalised, the rejected and the shamed
The people he chose to break bread with
The people he called to follow him
The cross
The Empty tomb

This advent and Christmas Lord don't let us normalise this extraordinary story of Love coming down at Christmas.

Transform us by the power of your Holy Spirit that we might be the controversial church.

The church that loves extravagantly
The church That offers radical hospitality
The church That shares the Gospel without restraint
The church That is ready to make challenging decisions
The church that is ready to move from tradition, history and expectation to the church that we are called to be now as we take all that we have learnt about who we are and who we are called to be in this period of pandemic.
May we all know reassurance and the challenge of your spirit this advent and Christmas. **Amen**

Wirral Methodist Churches

New Song Wirral



Wirral Methodists

New Song Wirral

