

CHRISTMAS CHALLENGE

Christmas is a stand out time in the year. Whether you believe that Jesus came as God incarnate, or believe nothing at all, Christmas is hard to miss - it's everywhere. Christmas as Jesus' birthday celebration may not be a stand out fact in many people's minds. But to Christians it should be the central theme of all our celebrations. There is an attempt to make two kinds of Christmas. One which includes Jesus and one which does not. The fact that Jesus arrived in relative obscurity challenges us to make His arrival a stand out factor in the middle of all the hullabaloo made elsewhere. It is easy to listen to all the messages that surround us telling us what "Christmas is all about" and forget that it isn't about food, or gifts or families trying to gloss over problems instead of resolving them. The performance anxiety some people suffer for the sake of avoiding criticism over what they should do or buy or organise for Christmas leaves them exhausted and often quite cynical. This makes Christmas stand out for all the wrong reasons.



The promise of "God and sinners reconciled" is an amazing life-changing truth - a promise Jesus came to fulfil, and one which we are constantly encouraged by an unbelieving world to keep quiet about. It is a testimony to God's power that repeated attempts to take the Christ out of Christmas have never really succeeded. In the spiritual battle to hide Jesus, the alternative to renaming Christmas (as "winterfest" or just "the holidays", and many other attempts) is to recruit Christians into the whole mayhem of Christmas events and delivery. This is an attempt to make Christians just too busy, too distracted or too wrung out to stand out for Jesus.

The purpose for God was to reconcile the world to himself through Jesus. The purpose of the world is to reconcile the Christians back into the darkness to avoid the light shining. This is two kinds of Christmas, one of promise and one of compromise. To allow ourselves to become reconciled to the empty crazy mishmash of consumerism and sentimentality is to allow ourselves to be reconciled to the world. But our ministry of reconciliation is to stand out for Jesus. We are children of promise not victims of compromise. "God with us" is our celebration; there is no Christmas without Jesus. Let's take Christmas back. It belongs to the kingdom of God as the celebration of new hope and new life. All that a Christmas without Jesus offers is more of the same. We stand out because we are different (salt and light) and our Christmases should stand out because they too are different. We are children of the promise not people of compromise. We are here to stand out, and Christmas is one of our best opportunities to shine for Jesus and to season the season with the flavour of the Holy Spirit who leads into all truth.



Have an outstanding Christmas.

God bless you,
Graeme

Graeme Clark
Senior Church Leader
Bridgnorth Baptist Church

Bridgnorth Baptist Church, West Castle Street,
Bridgnorth, Shropshire, WV16 4AB
www.bridgnorthbaptist.co.uk
admin@bridgnorthbaptist.co.uk
Tel: 01746 768129
Registered Charity 1151894

RECONCILIATION

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18)



This year at Christmas we are thinking about reconciliation.

It is not unusual for people to lose touch, drift apart or even fall out with one another. Often the hardest part of reconciliation after a period of time is actually making the first move. To help this to happen we have provided some specially designed cards which enable this first contact. The cards are simple in design and have no overt Christian message and so are suitable for use by people who have no Christian belief. There is a small leaflet which goes with the card which has a gospel message for the sender. If you have someone you would like to contact or have a friend or family member who may find a card useful please contact the church office or speak to Graeme or Donovan.

Graeme Clark



TOGETHER AT CHRISTMAS

This is our chance to share Jesus’ love in our community, not just on Christmas Day, but up to the day and indeed after the day too. Would you like to come or help in some way?

- Pre-Christmas: Finding and inviting guests – an opportunity to be a part of a team visiting individual homes.
- Christmas Eve: Christmas Eve build up - morning only - set up and decorate the room, and eat mince pies!
- Christmas Day: Giving guests lifts to and from the venue, helping to love, greet, cook for, serve, eat with, and clear and clean up after.
- Boxing Day: We need help for an hour on Boxing Day morning for the tidy up.

How can I help? Tell Catherine Brown – tel. 768129. Come to a meeting on 16th December, 7.30pm at church.

The Castle Hall has been kindly donated free of charge by Anne Wilson of Bridgnorth Town Council.

Derek Bartlett
Member of the Core Leadership Team
Bridgnorth Baptist Church

together at Christmas

Do you know someone who might be alone on Christmas day?

We know there are many people living in our community who won't have the joy of spending Christmas with family and friends this year. This may be due to a change of circumstances, or loneliness, or perhaps just not having the means to celebrate this special day. We want to make this Christmas special by inviting them to a fabulous dinner on Christmas Day—free of charge.

If you do know someone, why not let them know about Together at Christmas and ask them to get in touch with us. Alternatively, you can let us know who they are and we will give them a call.

Please contact us using the details below.

Last year's Together at Christmas

Please call on 01746 768129. Alternatively, you can call in to the Church Office, which is 7, West Castle Street, Bridgnorth - (next door to Bridgnorth Baptist Church) between 09.00 and 15.00 Monday to Friday.

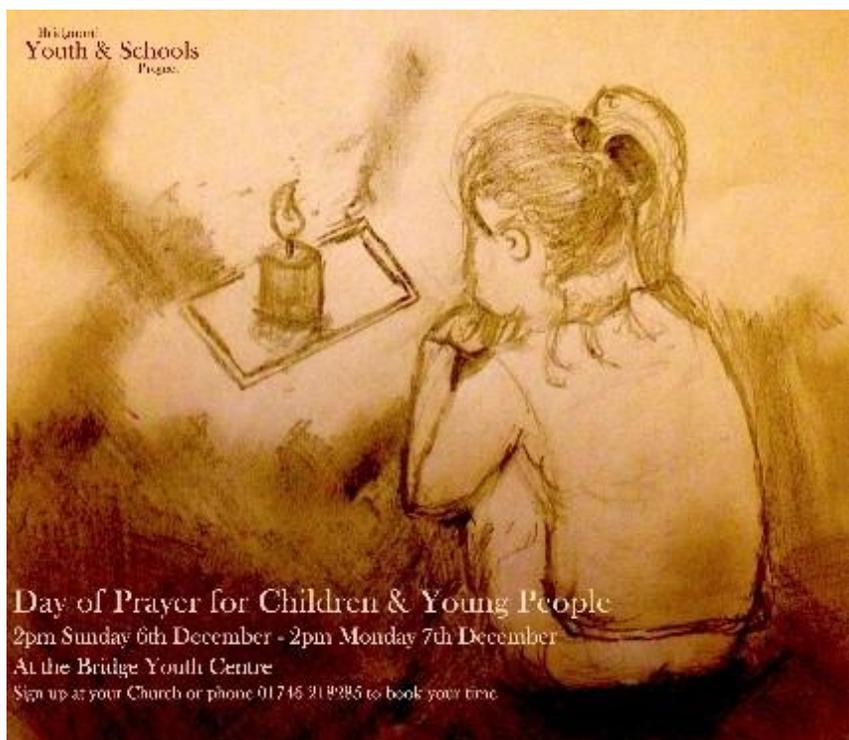
BRIDGNORTH YOUTH & SCHOOLS PROJECT

A Day of Prayer for Children & Young People - Sunday 6th December

At the beginning of November the BYSP team spent a week running a full programme of lessons for Bridgnorth Endowed School within the context of a creative reflective environment. They taught lessons on Christian Pilgrimage, Creation, Identity and the Sanctity of Life. Through the week the team taught around 400 students and gave each and every one of them a time and space to explore their own thoughts about life, their beliefs and their responses to issues in the world around them.

To put that into context, that's 400 students taught over 16 hour long lessons, weaved in amongst a programme that included assemblies for the whole school, 4 hours of targeted support meetings with students who have specific needs in both schools, and six evening clubs that are run with and/or by our central team. Each club has around 25 young people attending in the different areas at present, and that was the scope of work in just one week.

On Sunday 6th December we are encouraging churches to have a prayerful focus on young people and work with young people around the area whether the work is done through BYSP or not.



On the same day we'll also be opening a prayer room which will remain available for 24 hours from 2pm in the afternoon. If you would like to spend some time in the prayer room which will be situated in the café area of The Bridge Youth Centre, please do book your time slot with us by using sign-up sheets in your own church or by contacting the Bridge office on 01746 218285. You can also email me using the following email address:

admin@thebridgeyouthcentre.co.uk

John Prockter
 Manager of Bridgnorth Youth and Schools
 Project/Manager of the Bridge Youth Centre

INSPIRED LADIES' MINISTRIES

Inspired Together

Inspired Together is a place where ladies from Bridgnorth and beyond come together on the 1st, 3rd and 5th Thursday mornings each month to be inspired by God and each other. We spend the mornings in worship, teaching, discussions, sharing, praying and fellowship. This autumn we have been looking at growing spiritual fruit, not just for us and others..... the fruit that we bear is the food that God hungers for. So come on, let's go forward with the desire in our hearts to bear spiritual fruit for God to enjoy. Topics covered this term included:

Sep 2 nd	Why bear fruit and the way to do it
Sep 17 th	Kindness
Oct 1 st	Fruit salad
Oct 15 th	Self- control
Oct 29 th	Praise, prayer and proclamation
Nov 5 th	Goodness
Nov 19 th	Patience
Dec 3 rd	Joy, followed by Christmas lunch together

A big welcome is waiting for you. Doors at Bridgnorth Baptist Church open at 10.30am, for refreshments till 11.00, then we aim to finish the morning by 12.00 – 12.15.

For more information please contact Arlene Clark on: 01952 727231 or 07749564528

Arlene Clark
Inspired Ladies Ministries
Bridgnorth Baptist Church



OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD



For three years now, Number Seven has been a collection point for Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes, with an unprecedented number being dropped off here this year. Individuals, churches and schools have all contributed to the mountain of 427 boxes that were picked up to be taken to a Wolverhampton warehouse, where the boxes will be checked and shipped overseas to children living in poor communities. Last year 850,000 shoeboxes were sent from the UK to children in various countries in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Southern Africa and the Middle East; those collected in Bridgnorth were sent to Serbia.

Christmas shoeboxes have been collected in Bridgnorth for at least 13 years, with Cartway Church beginning to collect them in 2002, and continuing to be a collection point ever since. In Bridgnorth Baptist Church, shoeboxes first started to be filled around 10 years ago, mainly by the weekly Handicraft Group that used to meet here. Everyone was involved in making and collecting items throughout the year.

Many hats, scarves, mittens and toys were knitted, small boxes were made and filled with small gifts, and quite a few people were involved in wrapping the shoeboxes in Christmas paper. A packing session was held with great enthusiasm (and a little good-natured rivalry!), and the boxes were then handed over to Cartway Church for collection. When the Handicraft Group finished three years ago several people carried on making and collecting items for shoeboxes and having packing sessions to complete the boxes, which were added to others brought in by church members and friends.

This year we did a number of different things to try to encourage more people both from church and the wider community to get involved with Operation Christmas Child:

- purchased 100 specially designed flat-packed “shoeboxes”, so that people who perhaps didn’t have the time (or inclination!) to wrap a shoebox in Christmas paper could still participate. (This seemed a lot of boxes at the time);
- offered to be a collection point for individual items to go in the shoeboxes - as to fill a whole shoebox can be quite expensive. To help with this collection we asked for people to bring shoebox gifts as part of our Harvest service in October;
- planned a ‘Big Packing Party’, where people could come together to make gifts and to fill shoeboxes with donated gifts.

Displays in the window of Number Seven and in church attracted attention from people in the community and church, and by the time of the packing party 60 of the flat-packed boxes had been taken - so we had 40 boxes left, and enough gifts to fill around... 40 boxes. In the afternoon of the same day that we had done this reckoning, a lady walked into Number Seven with four bags filled with teddy bears to go in the shoeboxes! This was a real blessing that would add a special something to each of the boxes we would fill (and more).

It has been so exciting to see the number of people who have wanted to show love through Operation Christmas Child this year. Here are the words of Oxana Prohorova, who received a Christmas shoebox as a child in Belarus:

“As I look back in my life and wonder what the shoe box meant to me, the Lord brings me to Joshua 1:5, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ The days that I prayed as a child and wondered if God was listening, He gently reminded me through a stranger’s kindness that He was there when I wept and He was there when I rejoiced. He did not leave my side.”

We pray that each child who receives the shoeboxes that we have sent will truly know the love of their Father God.

Catherine Brown, Mandy Fortune, Ruth Smith
Members of Bridgnorth Baptist Church



REFLECT NOVEMBER 2015

Children and Young People were in the spotlight at Bridgnorth Baptist Church on Sunday 15th November. Church members and friends met to discuss and agree priorities for the youngest people in our church family, taking time to think, listen, test and pray about many ideas.

When considering a mission statement, shown below, the groups spoke passionately about children understanding forgiveness, grace, empowerment, the importance of church. They acknowledged and appreciated the people who already give their time and energy to helping children and young people develop in faith and relationship and expressed their desire to share the responsibility.

'We want children and young people to know and understand that:

- through the death and resurrection of Jesus they are made right with God (Romans 5:19);
- through relationship with our heavenly Father, Jesus his son, and the Holy Spirit, they can experience life in all its fullness (John 10:10);
- this promise and this grace does not depend on anything they do, is for everyone and it lasts for ever.

We accept our shared responsibility for this.'

When considering how each of us can play our part, several helpful comments were made:

- We can all model how Jesus influences our lives
- We can all pray for children using the church directory
This would be particularly beneficial for those in the Prayer and Encouragement Team
- We can all make an effort to learn the children's names
This would be particularly beneficial for those in the Welcome Team
- Worship leaders can do things like encouraging children to join in with musical instruments
- Those providing refreshments can set things out to cater for children as well as adults

To have the best chance of achieving our aims for children and young people, there needs to be effective partnership and communication between the group leaders and parents/carers. Many things were identified that would help this to happen:

- Parents/carers assisting with some sessions
- Email updates from leaders to families, with information about themes and activities (planning and evaluations)
- Partnership meetings for leaders and parents/carers

Other ideas for involving the congregation included:

- Mentoring
- Coaching for sticking up for their faith
- Designing and publishing an annual curriculum

A particularly fun bit of the evening was when we all had an opportunity to share any frustrations about children and young people in church, although we were all ready to admit that some of these might be our own lack of understanding and tolerance!

- Mobile phones
- Punctuality
- Loud screaming and crying
- Running around after services (particularly with hot drinks around)

We thought that, in order to help families, we should ensure all-age services don't go on too long. We should also invest in the sound from the main room being audible in the foyer and/or back room, so parents who take their children out of the main room for some 'calming down time' don't miss out.

We ended the evening with a wonderful time of prayer; celebrating the children and young people that we know in our church and praying for God's blessing on each one of them (we listed them by name).

It's now an exciting time as we plan, with God as our guide, to bring about the improvements that we have identified.

Mark Gibbons
Member of the Core Leadership Team
Bridgnorth Baptist Church



RUGBY WORLD CUP AT BBC

Armed with some material from Engage 2015, the thought that we could showcase games on the fabulous large screen at church and our collective love of rugby prompted Graeme, Derek and I to come up with the idea of using the World Cup as a way of bringing new people through the doors of our church to watch sport. Engage 2015 was a cross-denominational campaign set up to help UK churches engage in mission around the Rugby World Cup 2015.

We put on two events – one on the Saturday of the Quarter Finals which was a real sports fest with two games shown (Wales v South Africa and New Zealand v France). Phil Batten and his colleague Rita put on a superb Mexican meal for us in between the two games, we showed some video material on Christians in sport, and Graeme gave a great talk reflecting on how sport mirrors life. Over 50 people joined us throughout the afternoon and evening including non-Christians, old friends and church members. Sadly none of the home nations progressed beyond the quarter finals days although Scotland came the closest!

The Final followed two weeks later – this was our second event when Rosemary Anderson and Ruth Smith prepared a tasty lunch for us, we did a quiz, showed another video and Graeme spoke to us on "Finals". Just before 4pm, about 20 of us watched the Haka before enjoying a great game of rugby during which, despite a valiant recovery by Australia in the second half, New Zealand powered through to take the Webb Ellis trophy.

As another way of bringing non-Christians into church and talking to them about Jesus we felt that the two events were a success albeit in a small way but something which we might build on in the future – The European Championships next year maybe?

Thanks to all people who helped on the two days.

Mark Anderson
Member of the Trustees
Bridgnorth Baptist Church

MISSION PROFILE

Nicky Brand working with SIM in Jos, Nigeria

Nicky Brand is a former secondary school teacher who has been with 'Serving in Mission' (SIM) since 2005 as a member of the City Ministries team in Nigeria, where she works with orphans and vulnerable children in Jos. Her home church is Gateway Baptist Church in Sussex, and we came to know through her aunt who lives in Bridgnorth. She last visited Bridgnorth Baptist Church during her summer 2015 Home Assignment when she spoke at our morning service followed by 'bring and share' lunch at Number Seven.

'King's Kids' offers vulnerable children, a new start in life by meeting their basic needs of food, shelter and an education whilst nurturing them spiritually.

Many in this program are street children, abandoned by their families. Some have been involved in or accused of occult practices and have been tortured as a result. Some have come from extremes of poverty and others are from Muslim backgrounds.

When the children first arrive they are placed in 'Gidan Bege' (House of Hope) for six months to be nurtured, prayed for, medically examined, and taught how to look after themselves.

Many receive Christ as their Saviour. After 6 months they transfer to Children at Risk Educational Centres (CARE). The children live in family units with Godly house parents.

The largest CARE Centre is Gyero where 120 children live. There is a lot of space for them to play sports and get involved in a variety of extracurricular activities.

City Ministries run their own primary school 'Cornerstone Academy' in Gyero. Once finished primary education they transfer to a transition house for secondary or vocational education. The children stay in the program until they can live independently. For some, this can be many years. Wherever possible the children are reconciled to their extended families or fostered by Christian families.



Nicky returned to Jos in September and we received her latest prayer letter in October which is full of news and things for us to pray for. You can download a copy from the church website or you can ask to be included in the mailing list. Nicky also sends us a copy of her prayer diary each month which gives specific things (and people) for us to pray for each day. Again please ask if you would like to have a copy.

For more information about the work of SIM in Nigeria visit www.sim.co.uk and follow the link to Kings Kids Nigeria project 96901.



It costs £35 a month to care for each child through King's Kids. This pays for food, shelter, medical needs, education, clothing and caring parents. You can sponsor a child as an individual or with a group of others. Please speak with Donovan if you would like to know more about this or visit www.cityministriesng.org and follow the link to 'sponsorship'.

And please pray for Nigeria –

- Praise God for the amazing work that he is doing through King's Kids to offer children an eternal hope.
- Pray for those involved in this ministry who give so much of their time, love and compassion for these children.
- Pray for God's provision for these children in all their needs.
- Pray for peace in Nigeria, particularly in Jos.

Donovan Gibbons
Senior Church Leader
Bridgnorth Baptist Church



REACHING OUT AS A CHURCH

For the last 20 years as part of my pastoral responsibilities before and since retirement, I have been taking teams into the Third World to India, Kenya and Nigeria to help, encourage and minister to church leaders. Over 70% of all pastors have had no formal training. They will be Spirit-filled and called of God but desperately short of training and encouragement.

For the last 20 years I have had the privilege of spending several weeks at a time most years in these countries and immersed myself and the teams in their culture. In the last four years I have enjoyed the privilege of 6 visits to India, visiting Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Manipur States (this is in the far north on the border of Myanmar). The ministry focuses on gathering pastors to a central locality to spend about a week giving ourselves to teaching, prayer and personal ministry and counselling.

In January 2016 I will be travelling to India for nearly a month to spend time with pastors in Bangalore, Madurai and Chennai. Each of these centres will draw hundreds of pastors together for an intense period focusing on God's word. I will be joined on this trip by David Ball so please pray for us both as we minister during the week then preach in the main churches at the weekend. We will seek to keep you updated week by week while we are away, via Rachel and the church leadership team.

The itinerary

- January 7th - Fly to India (Bangalore).
- January 9th-12th - Ministry at Hope Baptist Church, Hope Theological Seminary and time with the students.
- January 13th - Travel to Madurai by bus (500km).

- January 14th-20th - Conference of pastors from the Indian Church Growth Mission. Ministry at the University of Madurai. Preaching in local churches at the weekend.
- January 21st - Travel to Chennai by train.
- January 22nd-31st - Pastors conference. Visit to Compassion Ministry – outreach to discarded Hindu parents.
- February 1st - Travel home.

For your prayers:

- For good relationships between David and I.
- For resourcing of all our needs, spiritual, physical and practical.
- For daily in-filling by the Holy Spirit for relating to impossible situations.
- For new vision in respect to continuity of ministry in India.
- For safety in all our travels.
- For good health.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you want further information or feel prompted to be practically involved.

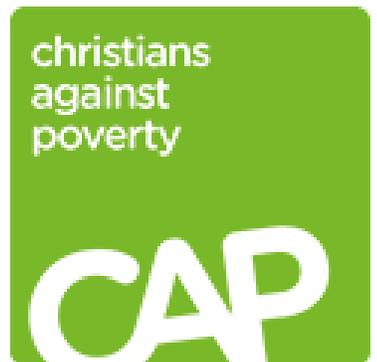
John Farren
Member of Bridgnorth Baptist Church/
Mission Advisor to the Core Leadership Team



A NEW DEBT CENTRE FOR BRIDGNORTH IN 2016

In 2016 we have the exciting opportunity to open a CAP Debt Centre in Bridgnorth based at Bridgnorth Baptist Church. We believe that this will provide new hope to people in our local community for whom life has been made utterly miserable by the burden of debt.

Christians Against Poverty (CAP) was founded in 1996 when John Kirkby believed God was calling him to give up his career in finance and use his knowledge and experience to help the poor. In his book 'Nevertheless' John tells the story of how he found a way out of a desperate situation. After the breakdown of his marriage he found himself burdened with debt and unable to provide food for his children. Jesus gave him a lifeline through his local church who gave him the practical help needed to get back on his feet. He opened the first CAP Debt Centre in his home town of Bradford with just a small donation. He used his expertise to negotiate with creditors, set up budgeting systems and offer a lifeline to those trapped in debt. He was able to help parents who couldn't feed their children, families facing eviction and desperate people living in fear and without hope. He was also able to introduce them to Jesus who was able to offer the biggest life change of all.



John knew that people all over the country were struggling in the same way and he began looking to replicate the work across the UK. With the vital ingredients of a church to partner with, a passionate person to be trained as a debt counsellor and the faith that God would provide, four new CAP centres were opened at the end of 1998.

Since then, CAP has rapidly grown its centre network and provides the best debt help service to those with the very least. The CAP vision is to open a CAP Debt Centre and offer a CAP Money Course in every town and city in the UK, bringing freedom and good news to people in every community through 1,000 CAP projects by 2021.

The new CAP Debt Centre in Bridgnorth will be one of those projects. We already know through our work with the Bridgnorth Food Bank that there are people living in our local community who have serious problems with debt. We want

to reach out to them and offer them a life line and real hope of becoming debt free. We also want to share with them the good news that Jesus died and rose again so they can begin a new life in a right relationship with God. This is a message of hope and reconciliation that is open to everyone.

If you would like to know more about the work of CAP, or if you know someone who is struggling with debt, visit the CAP website at www.capuk.org and listen to John talking about what CAP can offer. If you would like to support this project or offer your help as a volunteer, please contact Catherine in our church office and she will put you in touch with Donovan Gibbons or Janet Sharples who will be only too glad to hear from you.

Donovan Gibbons
Senior Church Leader
Bridgnorth Baptist Church



ALL-AGE SUNDAY SERVICE

On Sunday 8th November we held an all-age service. We had different zones for different activities, all connected to the theme of Salt and Light (Matthew 5).

Here is a poem that was written by some of our younger church members:



*A haiku poem contains 5 syllables on the first line,
seven syllables on the second line,
and five syllables on the third and final line.*

Here is another poem, written by one of our church members:

LET THERE BE LIGHT

Darkness:

Throbbing, pulsating, evil.....and God said, "Let there be light".

Darkness:

Thunderous, explosive, all enveloping.....and God said, "Let there be light".

Darkness:

Painful, fraught, blinding.....and God said "Let there be light".

Dawn:

Glimmering, moving, hopeful.....and there was light.

Dawn:

Cool, clear, crystalline.....and there was light.

Dawn:

Piercing, awakening, revealing.....and there was light.

Noonday sun:

Warm, welcoming, illuminating.....and God saw that it was good.

Noonday sun:

Enveloping, nurturing, expanding.....and God saw that it was good.

Noonday sun:

Feeding, supporting, soothing.....and God saw that it was good.

Darkness, dawn, noonday sun,

Calvary, empty tomb, resurrection.

God said, "Let there be light",

And there was light

And it was good.

Light of the sun – Son of God

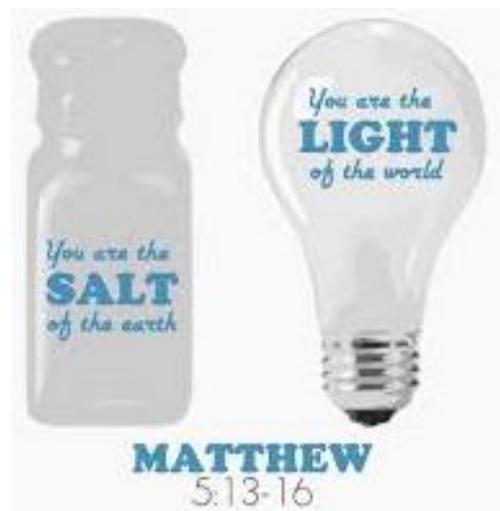
Light of my candle – poor flickering light

Enflame my candle with your flaming light

Two lights – now one.

Rachel Farren

Member of Bridgnorth Baptist Church



If you have anything that you would like to be considered for inclusion in a future edition of the Church Magazine, please send to:

Janet Sharples (email: janetsharples@icloud.com)