



Reflection of the Month: 'What child is this who laid to rest ..'?

The carol, 'What Child is this, who laid to rest, on Mary's lap is sleeping?' is one of my favourite since learning it in a college choir. I loved singing it both in the college as well as our church choir almost every year. However, this carol seems to have become a nightmare for me this year.



The picture of an innocent child, face down and dead on the shores of Greece this year haunts many of us. This one picture could depict well many of the unfortunate and unjust things that happened in 2015. The war in Syria with its destruction of lives, cultures, religious, social and historical monuments, and the targeted role that people played in trafficking people, and the manner in which profit is set before people in cheating them of what they have, and pushing them to uncertain and difficult realities, is deeply disturbing.

This forms the context in which we as Christians will be celebrating Christmas this year. How does Christmas or the birth of Christ become meaningful for us and others around us this year as well as in the New Year 2016? There are many ways to do it and this year I would like to reflect on mending ourselves or fixing ourselves and not others.

When I came to UK to work with the Council for World Mission (CWM) in October 2002, it was the first time I was experiencing winter away from the tropical Indian climate especially Bangalore where I was born and brought up. This was the first time in my life I had to travel by train to work. It was a very short 18 minute train journey from Baron's Court to James' Park. A few things caught my attention but something changed the meaning of Christmas entirely for me and made me understand what it was better than I had ever before understood. I am very grateful to God for that and share it.

Every day, as I passed through London Victoria Station, I would repeatedly hear this announcement, 'Mind the gap, mind the Gap between the train and the platform'. Initially, it annoyed me but also it reminded me that I will have to alight at the next station!

However, as days and months passed by, I began to appreciate this announcement. It just dawned on me, how important it is to mind the gap for our own safety. Also, the transport authorities were very particular to warn the people who in their hurry can miss it. Very often in our busy life we forget to notice many things. One of these is the growing GAP in relationship between us and our loved ones, neighbours, colleagues and of course enemies too. This is true not just in our individual lives but in our corporate lives too as communities, societies and nations too.

How good it would be if someone could remind us every day to 'mind the gap in our relationship – between husband and wife, parents and children, siblings, colleagues, employees and employers, men and women in relation to discrimination including wages, understanding sexuality; between Nations that struggle to bridge the gap of hostility and enmity. This is what exactly happened in the Garden of Eden after the fall when Adam and Eve along with the whole of creation became estranged from God. There was a huge GAP and it had to be bridged.

The event which initiated this process of bridging the gap is Incarnation through which God became a human person, Immanuel – 'God with us'. This is what the daily announcement 'Mind

the Gap' convinced me of, and I treasure this conviction.

Bridging the gap in relationship demands two actions from parties concerned at any level. Firstly, 'giving' for after all Christmas began with giving – 'For God so loved the World that he gave his only begotten son...' (John 3:16). Secondly, it demands 'Forgiving' – the ability to reconcile, forgive, love and let others live. If we strive to bridge the gap in our relationships, we need to remember that this will involve giving respect, lost identities, resources and opportunities to get back to a normal life. This demands a compassionate look at what we have caused in the name of development, liberation or even achieving peace. Giving will include restoring. This will then lead to forgiving – from both parties, at different levels, as no one individual or group can be totally just, pure or right.

This needs to happen in every home, community, society and nation. What prevents us from doing this? We fail to notice the problems within us and begin to reform others, specifically those with whom we need to reconcile! This is very similar to the story that Jesus says, trying to take out the spec in another person's eye when we have a log in our own eye. We are very keen that the other person, community or nation has to repent, change or be transformed.

Christmas reiterates the process of Theosis which is important in the Orthodox faith and understanding. Theosis is the process where we believe that God became a human being that we may become one like God. Theosis is the goal of Spirituality in the Oriental Orthodox Faith. It is not becoming God but like God. Incarnation, whereby God took flesh and became a human person in order that the existing gap can be bridged and we can grow in our faith and action to be like God. So, if we begin to understand why God became a human person and see where we have gone wrong to fix that first, we will be able to bring about Transformation.

May this season of 'Giving and Forgiving' enable us to 'MIND THE GAP' in all our relationships and bridge the gap with LOVE. May the birth of Christ bridge every gap that keeps us as communities and nations at war with each other leading us to experience the peace that passes all understanding.

Wishing you a very Blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year 2016!

Elizabeth Joy
NEO, MOSC (Indian Orthodox Church) and a Volunteer at CTE for [CCMS HT](#)

Related articles:

[Theosis](#)

[PCCP – Power of Communication and Communication of Power.](#)

[May we experience the birth of Christ in this world.](#)



Various statements collated and posted on the website of Churches Together in Britain and Ireland: https://ctbi.org.uk/churches-respond-to-vote-for-military-action-in-syria/?utm_source=hootsuite

A new date for Education Sunday



Sarah Lane-Cawte, Free Churches Education officer, writes:

Education Sunday has been celebrated by the churches for well over 100 years. For many years it has been observed on the ninth Sunday before Easter (or three Sundays before the first Sunday of Lent), a date which has had no particular links with the academic year. After extensive consultation with member churches, the decision has been made to adopt a new date for Education Sunday from 2016. The new date will be the second Sunday in September. In 2016 this is 11 September. We believe this will offer new opportunities to mark the beginning of the academic year and will encourage participation by more churches and schools.

We realise that some churches may have planned to celebrate Education Sunday on its traditional date in 2016, which would have been 24 January. Whilst we are not producing materials specifically for this date, we are making available a wide range of resources that can be used in services celebrating education on any date. We recognise that 2016 will be a year of transition. Churches may choose to observe the traditional date but include some elements of the new Education Sunday resources in their service on 11 September.

Resources for Education Sunday 2016, linked with the lectionary readings for 11 September, are being developed by an ecumenical working group and will be available in the summer through this website. We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause.

[Link to resources provided in previous years](#)

Churches and UN Climate Change COP21



Relating to the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris which drew world leaders and 40,000 delegates, various statements have been made by church leaders, networks and agencies. A few are:

Archbishop of Canterbury:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2015/06/archbishop-of-canterbury-join-faith-leaders-in-call-for-urgent-action-to-tackle-climate-change.aspx>

Cardinal Nichols interview on BBC re Pope Francis and the environment:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p02v0qv5>

Conference of European Churches:

<http://us9.campaign-archive1.com/?u=ebf90afe96f5033772b0ec5ea&id=b56fc4d4e1&e=34b5f027ad>

Christian Aid:

http://www.christianaid.org.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/november_2015/faith-leaders-speak-together-at-uks-largest-ever-climate-march.aspx

Joint Public Issues Team (Baptist/Methodist/URC):

<http://methodist-news.org.uk/BVI-3UVQ5-2AGQDDUCD/cr.aspx>

World Council of Churches:

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/executive-committee/2015-nov/statement-on-cop21>

Papal Preacher speaks to General Synod about Unity



"Rebuild my house" (Haggai 1:1-8) was a sermon by Father Raniero Cantalamessa, at a Eucharist in Westminster Abbey, London, on Tuesday 24 November 2015, marking the inauguration of the 10th General Synod of the Church of England.

Click to read the full [text posted on November 25, 2015 in Anglican News](#)
Download a [PDF of the full text](#)

Few prophetic oracles in the Old Testament can be dated so precisely as that of Haggai, which we have just heard in the first reading. We can place it between August and December in the year 520 BC. The exiles, after the deportation to Babylon, have come back to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. They set to work, but soon grow discouraged, each preferring to work on his own house instead. Into this situation comes the prophet Haggai, sent by God with the message we have heard.

The Word of God, once it is proclaimed, remains forever alive; it transcends situations and centuries, each time casting new light. The situation deplored by the prophet is renewed in history each time we are so absorbed in the problems and interests of our own parish, diocese, community – and even of our particular Christian denomination – that we lose sight of the one house of God, which is the Church.

The prophecy of Haggai begins with a reproof, but ends, as we heard, with an exhortation and a grandiose promise: "Go up into the hills, fetch timber and rebuild the House, and I shall take pleasure in it and manifest my glory there" – says the Lord". One circumstance makes this point particularly relevant. The Christian world is preparing to celebrate the fifth centenary of the Protestant Reformation. It is vital for the whole Church that this opportunity is not wasted by people remaining prisoners of the past, trying to establish each other's rights and wrongs. Rather, let us take a qualitative leap forward, like what happens when the sluice gates of a river or a canal enable ships to continue to navigate at a higher water level.

The situation has dramatically changed since then. We need to start again with the person of Jesus, humbly helping our contemporaries to experience a personal encounter with Him. "All things were created through him and for him"; Christ is the light of the world, the one who gives meaning and hope to every human life – and the majority of people around us live and die as if He had never existed! How can we be unconcerned, and each remain "in the comfort of our own panelled houses"? We should never allow a moral issue like that of sexuality divide us more than love for Jesus Christ unites us.

We need to go back to the time of the Apostles: they faced a pre-Christian world, and we are facing a largely post-Christian world. When Paul wants to summarise the essence of the Christian message in one sentence, he does not say, "I proclaim this or that doctrine to you." He says, "We preach Christ crucified" (1 Cor 1:23), and "We preach . . . Jesus Christ as Lord" (2 Cor 4:5). This is the real "articulus stantis et cadentis Ecclesiae", the article by which the Church stands or falls.

This does not mean ignoring the great theological and spiritual enrichment that came from the Reformation or desiring to go back to the time before it. It means instead allowing all of Christianity to benefit from its achievements, once they are freed from certain distortions due to the heated atmosphere of the time and of later controversies.

[Continued on the web page of the Anglican Communion News Service](#) - with grateful thanks

Fresh Expressions takes a new direction in 2016



As it looks to the future, Fresh Expressions will focus increasingly on building a strong coalition of partners who will 'connect, equip and release' the work in their own settings and beyond. This is an evolution from a centralised core staff promoting fresh expressions of church, and reflects the huge progress made in this respect in recent years.

The vision is for a partnership of denominations, streams and agencies to continue to embed the values of Fresh Expressions in their own organisations and collaborate together in developing the work of supporting, encouraging and developing new forms of church.

Since Fresh Expressions began, in 2005, it has been served by a national core staff team. Through the work of Fresh Expressions, many denominations and mission agencies have increasingly adopted the principles and practices of fresh expressions of church and shared in the overall task. Consequently, the size of the core-funded team is now being scaled down while seconded posts will continue to increase. Following a consultation process, the following posts have been made redundant: Director of Communication and Resources (with effect from 30th November 2015), Senior Writer and Media Officer (with effect from 31st December 2015) and Resources Manager (with effect from 31st December 2015).

A new post of Director of Communications will be created providing a strategic lead to connect, equip and release the communication of Fresh Expressions. Another new post of IT Services Officer will also be created to maintain the Fresh Expressions web presence and provide administrative computer systems services.

Archbishops' Missioner and team leader of Fresh Expressions, Phil Potter, said, 'The Fresh Expressions story is transitioning from initiative to movement and we continue to explore how we can best serve the Church in that. I am very grateful to those who have been part of the core team, past and present, for the invaluable contribution they have made, enabling us to reach this point of transition. God has multiplied the available resources beyond a single team, and our 'associate' and partner friends are increasingly taking up the baton in every sense as the movement continues to grow.

The work goes on. We increasingly look to catalyse, encourage and network the many, many people – both ordained and lay – who are working to champion fresh expressions of church in wide-ranging contexts across the UK and around the world. God has been generous and faithful and we continue to rely on God's guidance as we take on this new shape for Fresh Expressions in 2016.

Fresh Expressions will continue – with and through its many partners - to champion and resource new forms of church for those who are not already members of any church. It also seeks to consolidate all that has been achieved in terms of major projects and policy changes at national level, through:

- Promoting best practice;
- providing effective support;
- creating genuine partnership.

This is the text from the website of Fresh Expressions, with grateful thanks for use:
<http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/news/new-direction>

Changes at CT in the Merseyside Region



Recent months have been eventful for CTMR; most significant has been the departure of Ian Smith as Ecumenical Development Officer after many years of faithful service.

Ian's role came to an end through a process of restructure, which we expect to make us a lighter, more responsive organisation, equipped to bring God's people together for mission in our contemporary world. I speak for many when I express appreciation for all that Ian has done, particularly the way he has graciously enabled things to move forward throughout this process. We were able to make a small presentation to Ian at our Management Council in September. Ian's former role has been combined with that of Office Administrator to appoint a new Ecumenical Co-ordinator. This enables the basic operations of CTMR to continue, while also overseeing the work of a number of Project Co-ordinators who will take key initiatives forward.

We are delighted to announce that Elisabeth Hachmoeller has been appointed to this role and look forward to working with her. Elisabeth is already well-known to us through her former role as Administrator; she brings significant experience and vision for contemporary Christian ecumenism.

Revd Phil Jump, North Western Baptist Association Regional Minister

Spirit-led church unity



Thanks to the Evangelical Alliance and the Revd Israel Olofinjana who wrote this piece for EA Idea magazine:

The Spirit of God is currently moving in the UK, bringing together people from different church traditions and cultural backgrounds for the sake of God's mission (mission Dei). This is happening nationally, locally and regionally. Some churches are working together on mission initiatives such as food banks, Street Pastors and winter night shelters, while others are connecting through the sharing of church buildings by two churches. Still others are experiencing unity through local church networks such as Southwark for Jesus, Lewisham Churches United or Greenwich Church Leaders Forum.

Nationally, conversations are emerging through unity movements such as the One People Commission and Gather initiative, both of the Evangelical Alliance, and Cinnamon Network. My new book, *Partnership in Mission: A Black Majority Church Perspective on Mission and Church Unity*, explores these various expressions of Spirit-led intercultural ecumenism between black majority churches (BMC) and historic churches, such as The Church of England. The book highlights how historic church leaders can develop relationship with BMC leaders locally through the use and sharing of church building. This often poses lots of cultural, theological and ecclesial challenges, but building intentional relationships that seeks to know the people first before questioning their theology or doctrine is a good starting point.



An important aspect of unity is understanding one another and our worldviews, therefore the book begins by arguing that the term black majority churches should be changed to black multicultural churches, because diversity exists within these churches. Black majority churches are diverse in terms of ecclesiology, theology and missiology. Some of them are independent Pentecostal churches, while others are part of the historic churches, such as Baptists. Some are from Pentecostal, holiness and evangelical traditions, while others are Sabbatarians. Some of

them are Unitarians, while others are Trinitarians. 1 Some of them have embraced Black Liberation Theology, while others preach Prosperity Gospel. Some of them have grown to become church denominations, while others are still independent churches. Some are church plants from their denominational churches back in the Caribbean or Africa, while others are churches that have started here in London and gone on to plant churches in other parts of the world.

Looking at the history of working together between black and white Christians in the British context, the book explores examples such as the abolitionist movement. Olaudah Equiano (1745-1797), Quobna Ottobah Cugoana (1757-1790s) and Ignatius Sancho (1729-1780) were all African ex-slaves who were involved in an ecumenical movement of Christians from various denominations rallying together to abolish the slave trade and work towards the resettlement of ex-slaves back to Sierra Leone. This is a good example of missional intercultural ecumenism that leads to affecting structural change in society. However, this kind of Spirit-led intercultural ecumenism did not last long because of racial division in the church.

Today we are seeing different expressions of Spirit-led ecumenism developing, and my book focuses on examples within different parts of London. One example mentioned in the book is the South-East London Prayer Initiative, led by Pastor Emmanuel Obi Eze, founder of The Guiding Light Church in Bromley. This prayer initiative started in 2013 and attempts to bring together in prayer different churches in neighbouring boroughs in south-east London, including Bromley, Lewisham and Greenwich. The focus of the prayer initiative is to pray for revival in London. This is done through prayer walks, prayer gatherings, watch-night services and evangelism. How can this example of unity through prayers serve as a guide for church leaders in working together?

The churches involved in this initiative include African Pentecostal Churches, Caribbean Pentecostal Churches, Church of England, Baptists and independent Charismatic churches. The South-East London Prayer Initiative has also partnered with a South Korean prayer mission, which annually brings South Korean missionaries into the UK for prayer and mission mobilisation. This kind of intercultural ecumenism lays emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit through prayer, bringing together different people who are like-minded and would like to see Britain experience spiritual renewal. This is a clear example of Spirit-led unity.

For the full article use the link:

http://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/454357/Home/News/Latest_news_articles/Spirit_led_church.asp

[X](#)
[With permission from Evangelical Alliance for this news article](#)

Singing for Syrians



Christian Aid and the Hands Up Foundation are encouraging people around the UK to come together and sing to help support the people of Syria in their desperate time of need.

The conflict in Syria has created one of the world's biggest humanitarian and refugee crisis since the Second World War. As the violence continues and winter descends, the needs of the millions of Syrians forced to flee their homes will only intensify.

Singing for Syrians is a new nationwide initiative encouraging individuals, churches and communities around the UK to host fundraising carol concerts to help those whose lives have been torn apart by the conflict.

Amounts raised will be used to help Christian Aid and the Hands Up Foundation meet the urgent and ongoing needs of those affected by the devastating conflict.

Working through partner organisations inside Syria, and in neighbouring Lebanon and Iraq, this support to date has included providing emergency food, water and sanitation programmes as well as education programmes, psychosocial support for women and children, and support for medical teams inside Syria. During the bitter winter months families will receive much needed blankets, warm clothing, food stoves and fuel for cooking.

The initiative has been organised by artist, George Butler, Trustee of the Hands Up Foundation, and Victoria Prentis, MP for North Oxfordshire, and is championed by Basil Eastwood, former Ambassador to Syria.

Organisers of Singing for Syrians concerts around the UK will be invited to a special carol concert in St Margaret's Church on the grounds of Westminster Abbey on 15th December. Tickets are available via Billetto with a suggested donation of £10. There will also be a private reception at Speaker's House.

Link to the full article:

http://www.cte.org.uk/Articles/454354/Home/News/Latest_news_articles/Singing_for_Syrians.aspx

[A "How to" pack' full of ideas on organising your own concert can be obtained from the Christian Aid website](#) along with further details of the agency's work with victims of the conflict.

Enough: Our responsibility to meet families' needs re Benefit cuts, say Churches



Major UK Churches are warning that the Government's Welfare Reform and Work Bill marks a dangerous shift away from a core principle of the Welfare State and will make poor people even poorer.

A YouGov survey commissioned by the Churches has also revealed that 61% of UK adults believe that welfare benefits should be set at a level that allows families with children to cover their basic costs. In contrast, only 25% of those polled said they thought that benefits should be set deliberately low to encourage families to find work or get more work.

The Churches' [report](#) reveals that the Benefit Cap, which reduces families' benefits by an average of over £3,500 per year, has only resulted in a further 4.7% of families finding work. However, 46% of families affected by the Cap experienced increasing problems with rent arrears. This is despite the Government's claims that reducing the amount of benefits people are entitled to is an effective way of moving people into work.

"No child should be left without enough in order to motivate their parents," said Paul Morrison, Public Issues Policy Adviser for the Methodist Church and author of the report. "If children live in a family which doesn't have enough money they are more likely to die young, do worse at school, and experience worse health. Many of these families are already in work and working very hard. Any policy that claims that taking £1,000 from a family will enhance the life-chances of its children, as the Bill does, is not only supremely questionable but morally flawed."

The report, entitled "Enough: Our responsibility to meet families' needs", has been published by the Baptist Union, Church Action on Poverty, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church, Quakers in Britain, the Scottish Episcopal Church and the United Reformed Church, who together represent more than 840,000 people in Britain.

It highlights how the Bill threatens to undermine a founding principle of the welfare state: namely, that the amount families receive in benefits should be sufficient to meet their basic needs. The Churches say the Bill will break the link between what people need and the amount of support they can receive. Families with children will be hardest hit by this change.

"Fairness to the taxpayer should not be achieved at the expense of unfairness to children," Mr Morrison continued. "As Christians we believe all people are made in God's image. We do not believe that we should ever deliberately deprive a person, a family, a child of enough to thrive or to fulfill their God-given potential. We are asking that the welfare state holds to its founding principles, and seeks to provide enough so that every child can have the best chance in life."

People will soon be able to find out how different groups will be affected by the [Welfare Reform and Work Bill online here](#). The Churches are asking people to pray, to read and share the report and [write to their MPs](#).

[Click here to view the video: Why "enough" matters](#)

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 1,595 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 21st - 23rd October 2015. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+)

English Churches join in prayer and solidarity with French people



David Cornick, General Secretary of Churches Together in England writes:

Christians and Muslims alike have united in their condemnation of the indiscriminate brutality of the terrorist attacks in Paris on Friday night. The leaders of England's churches have offered their prayers for the bereaved and suffering and assured the French people that we stand in solidarity with them. As they do so, they speak for all England's Christians. Churches Together in England, its Presidents, Board, members and staff are all joined in prayer today, that the comfort and grace of God may meet and encompass those who are suffering such devastation. We hope that the statements of Christians and Muslims gathered here will not only provide witness of that solidarity, but also enable and deepen the prayers of us all.

The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster are both Presidents of CTE. Their statements are here:

<http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/5639/statement-on-paris-attacks>

<http://rcdow.org.uk/cardinal/news/cardinal-vincent-condemns-paris-attacks/>

The United Reformed Church Mission Council has authorised the following letter:

<http://www.urc.org.uk/media-news/1824-letter-to-france.html>

The Interfaith Network issued the following press release:

<http://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/statements-and-messages>

The Muslim Council of Great Britain has issued this statement of solidarity:
<http://www.mcb.org.uk/a-statement-of-solidarity-from-british-muslim-communities/>

The Methodist President statement:
<http://www.methodist.org.uk/news-and-events/news-releases/statement-on-the-paris-shootings>

World Council of Churches statement:
<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/wcc-strongly-condemned-terror-attacks>

Conference of European Churches statement:
<http://us9.campaign-archive2.com/?u=ebf90afe96f5033772b0ec5ea&id=19e7400102&e=34b5f027ad>

His Grace Bishop Angaelos, Coptic Orthodox Church in UK:
<http://copticcentre.blogspot.co.uk/2015/11/press-release-statement-by-his-grace.html>

A Faithful Presence

As the Together for the Common Good (T4CG) project continues to unfold we're delighted to tell you about the publication of [A Faithful Presence: working together for the common good](#) by Hilary Russell.



In an accessible and practical book, packed with case studies and real life examples, she explores how churches are working together to strengthen civil society through social action, service provision, community building, prayer and advocacy. A founder member of our steering group, she also traces some of the thinking underlying our work, not least the link between faith and action.

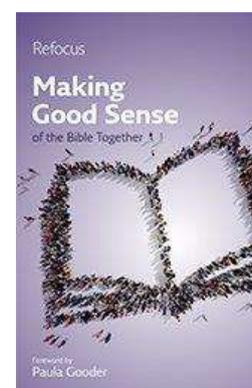
"This wonderful book is a distillation of deep theology and practical wisdom. In direct and simple form, Hilary Russell has given us a lifetime's treasure of prayer, hard thinking, analysis and joyous struggle. It's a handbook for all who want to make a bigger difference in their communities."

+Paul Bayes, Bishop of Liverpool

Making Good Sense of the Bible Together

Reading the Bible can sometimes be confusing and some passages can be difficult to understand. So what do you do when you can't make sense of them?

[Making Good Sense of the Bible Together](#) is a six-session introduction to biblical interpretation – ideal for home and study groups as together you dig deeper and explore the Scriptures. It's part of the Refocus guides – a collection of group study resources from Bible Society.



This user-friendly resource is ideal for all those who want to build confidence in Bible reading.

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Bible Society is a CTE Body in Association

County Ecumenical Development Officer for Northamptonshire



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For an informal discussion contact : [Sam Randall](#), Tel: 07967 120070

Closing date for applications: 8th January 2016

Interviews will be held on 29th January 2016

An Occupational Requirement exists for the post-holder to be a Christian in accordance with the Equality Act 2010.

And finally ..

*We wish all readers of CTe-News
a very happy Christmas and joyful
New Year ..*



Photo: Tim Hyde carrying Mary and Joseph board for Baptist initiative 'Get in the Picture'
Please note the office will be closed Thursday 24th December to Monday 4th January

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