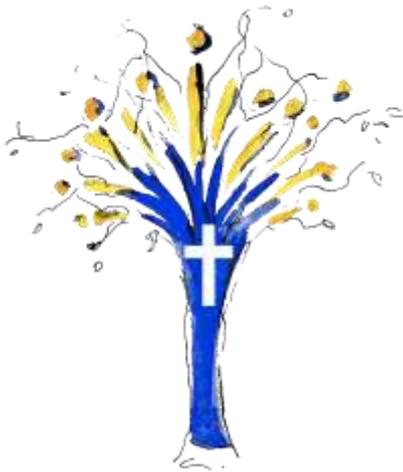


Off the Record



From **MAGOR**
BAPTIST CHURCH

*Growing and sharing
in God's love*



The baby that changed the world!

CHRISTMAS 2023

A Message from our Minister – Mark Thomas

This year I am finding it quite difficult to move into any mood of eager waiting, excited anticipation and that determined hopefulness sung so confidently in Christmas carols.

The past eight weeks or so have been hellish for all the peoples entrapped in violence in what it is becoming impossible to call "*the*



Holy Land". Every New Year, forced by that horrendous story in Matthew's gospel (chapter 2), I grieve the slaughter of the innocents, those far too easily forgotten infants who were collateral damage for Herod's paranoia and state sponsored terrorism in and around Bethlehem.

Long before Christ came, and in the two thousand years since, the slaughter of the innocents has continued. With modern technology and pervasive social media, we are now able to witness the human cost and consequences of war in all its destructive terror. The phrase "*the slaughter of the innocents*" takes on not only biblical, but digitally enhanced proportions.

What is happening in Israel, Gaza, the West Bank, and the border with Lebanon, gives little hope of peace with justice, of reconciliation and co-existence. So Christmas comes at the right time. Just as it seems the darkness wins again, the reminder of the birth of Jesus



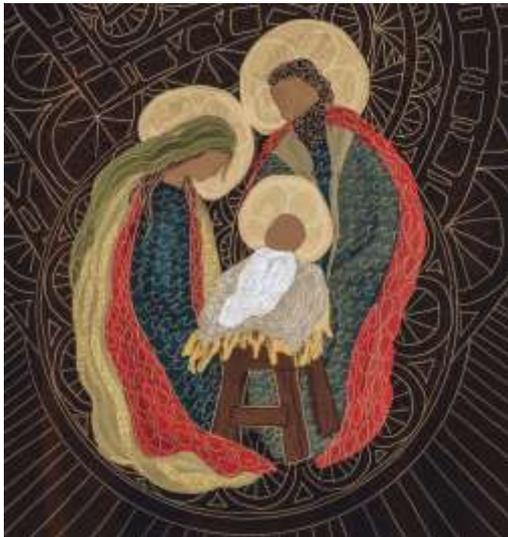
brings us back to God's invasion of our broken, often cruel, and sin-darkened world.

I believe that Bethlehem is a place where the unthinkable can be thought, the impossible can be conceived, and the hopeless can be redeemed.

This Christmas, more than ever, Christians are called to hope against hope, to defy despair, to insist on peace as possible, and to echo the words that contradict all military orders,

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace and goodwill amongst all people."

Thomas Merton, in a remarkable essay collection, *Raids on the Unspeakable*, wrote the following words at a time when the Vietnam war was spiralling into yet more slaughter of the innocents, Civil Rights protests were violent, and whole communities conflicted and at each others' throats:



"Into this world, this demented inn, in which there is absolutely no room for him at all, Christ has come uninvited."

"But because he cannot be at home in it, because he is out of place in it, and yet he must be in it, his place is with those others for whom there is no room."

"His place is with those who do not belong, who are rejected by power because they are regarded as weak, those who are discredited, who are denied the status of

persons, tortured, exterminated. With those for whom there is no room, Christ is present in this world."

In a world where the innocent are still slaughtered, where power is militarised and mobilised, apparently there is no room for the Prince of Peace. **But still He comes.** So, this Christmas I will celebrate in defiant trust, Jesus our Saviour and King.

*Hidden reality
Like life in the womb
Hidden reality
Like death in the tomb
Hidden away
For the appropriate day
Wrapped in enigma, cloaked in secrecy,
Awaiting a wake up call with urgency.*

Rev. Mark Thomas

CHURCH NEWS from Kathy Allen (Acting Church Secretary)

Greetings to all of you in our fellowship as we near the end of 2023. The world around us, including for so many in the UK, continues to be so hard for so many people in terms of the basics of day to day living. There has been sadness for individuals around us in loss of loved ones, and in loss of good health for some.



We are very pleased to welcome Mark and Anne us with on our journey. We were able to see more of Mark than we would normally have done in the transition process, as he, and we, moved from his being our supportive Moderator in the ministerial vacancy to being our minister in September.

As a fellowship we together show support for local, national and international charities, and our hope, based in God's love for us and his world is reflected in our generous giving.

The re-establishment of the Monday evening prayer meeting has been very positive, for those comfortable to pray out loud in groups, and for those who support by their presence. It can be attended when you can! Similarly the Saturday prayer breakfasts are an encouragement.

Looking back we can see that we have benefited from Tomi Brown's work among the children in this village, and in the local primary schools, and we thank those who have enabled this work to continue, especially Jeremy Lock in the schools and Bev Davies for the Superheroes group. We continue to pray that a new children and families worker will be led to us, and the advertising is under review. We wait to see how the new (for us) Open Book initiative, a team being trained to take part in school assemblies, will develop. I have named those who are currently covering Tomi's work, but we can all appreciate the many others who work in areas both seen and unseen.

We once again thank everyone who has supported the work of our church, in actions and in prayer. We will continue to need that support, as will Mark, as we move forward, and it is much appreciated. Everyone linked to us is a part of encouraging us, thank you!

Christmas and New Year Dates

December

Sunday 24 th	11.00 am	Nativity Service
	6.00 pm	Carol Service
Monday 25 th	10.00 am	Christmas Celebration
Sunday 31 st	11.00 am	Informal service

January 2024

Monday 1 st	3.00 pm	New Year Meditation
	4.00 pm	Communion
Sunday 14 th	6.00 pm	Joint Service with Caldicot at Magor

On behalf of Magor Baptist church the Editor would like to thank all contributors, printers and distributors for their hard work during the year. Ruth and I would also like to send best wishes for a peaceful and safe Christmas to all our readers.

Jean and Rachel Thomas wish a very Happy Christmas to all their friends at Magor Baptist and many blessings for the New Year.



Mens' Annual Curry Night at the Mango House

Fellowship News from Val Jones

November lived up to its name being very dark and wet and generally dismal, but now we shall soon come to the shortest day in December when we can start to look forward to more daylight and the knowledge that Spring is not too far away.

It was a pleasure to welcome to coffee morning the older children of Undy School and their teachers to share what they did in their assembly for Remembrance Sunday. It was wonderful to see so many children as they shared what they had learned about both the first and second world wars. Some were dressed in their costumes for the wars and others for Red Nose Day.



They were able to chat to those watching about their experiences of war. We thank the headmistress and staff for bringing them along.

It was also a pleasure to welcome the nursery children and staff from Magor Church School to see the nativity display. Their teacher brought them up in twos and threes to visit the manger and learn about the coming of baby Jesus and the role of the shepherds and wise men as they followed the star. They sang a lovely little song about this wonderful story.

We are grateful to both schools for allowing Jeremy Lock to visit on our behalf on a regular basis to speak to the children about Jesus. We thank Jeremy for taking on this important role.

We thank all those who give up their time each week to man the Community Fridge held every Friday at Magor Baptist. If you would like to come along and enjoy the food provided you would be made most welcome. You would be preventing food going to waste and a monetary donation can be made if you wish, but there is no obligation - simply come along and enjoy what has been given. We thank all the organisations who donate food so regularly each week. See also separate article.

Our Gift Service for the work at Raven House took place on Sunday 3rd December. Thank you to Frank Miles for getting the Christmas tree and the



children from Superheroes for decorating it so beautifully. A big thank you to all who brought gifts of toys, games and toiletries or food which will make a big difference to children in the local area. Thank you to all who give so regularly each month and

thank you too to Pat and Ron Coleman who collect donations each month and go out and buy whatever food is needed for the Trust.

Many attended the Frost Fayre and the chapel was open for tea/coffee and mince pies free of charge, but donations were given which were then forwarded to Raven House. The bric-a-brac stall also raised a good amount for charity and we were serenaded with carols from the balcony throughout the evening. We thank everyone who donated and worked to make the event a success.

It was with sadness that we heard of the passing of Alison Blackaby and we extend our sympathy and love to husband John and children Paul and Rhiannon and grandchildren Franklin and Issy and Hannah and Richard and grandson Noah. Alison was a well-known and much-loved lady and will be sadly missed. The service took place at Langstone Vale, and many people had to remain outside which was a tribute to how much she was thought of. We thank God that she is now at peace and rest and continue to pray for the family as they come to terms with their loss. We pray too for David Hammond and his family as they mourn the loss of David's mother.

It was also with sadness that we heard of the passing of Joan Collings on 2nd December. Joan joined Ebenezer Baptist many years ago as a young woman, on the loss of her husband, when their children Linda and Adrian were very small. She was a valued member as were her parents before her. Joan held many posts within the church over the years: Sunday School Teacher, Sunday School Secretary, Member of the Choir, 'Sunshiner', one of the founder members of Young Wives now Ladies Friendship, President of Womens Hour, Deacon, Branch Secretary and co-ordinator of the Magor and Caldicot Womens World Day of Prayer - retiring when she was 80. Joan

continued to play an active part in the fellowship. We extend our love and prayers to Linda and Bob, Adrian and Bev and granddaughter Rhiannon and Jim with great grand-daughter Robyn, grandson Rhys and Joan's sister Beryl and family. Joan married Ted in 1988 following a whirlwind romance after meeting at a Christian Conference. We extend the sympathy and love of the fellowship to Ted's daughter Margaret, husband Richard and their family. We ask for God to put his loving arms around the whole of the family and give them peace. A thanksgiving service for Joan's life will be held on Wednesday 20th December at 12pm at Magor, preceded by cremation at 11am.

On 8th December we were able to join in with Carols in the Square led by Rev Jeremy Harris. The weather wasn't very good with intermittent rain, but quite a crowd of villagers came and enjoyed the readings of the



story of the birth of Jesus and sang carols led by Severn Tunnel Band. A very enjoyable event. Our new minister Mark and his wife Anne are settling in well and Mark was able to take part on behalf of the Baptist Chapel. There were about 60-65 people at the Christingle service on Sunday 10th December (led by Mark and Anne) and it was most enjoyable.

Apologies for the mistake in the last Record Report. It was of course Evie and Andrew Wraight who had a baby boy not 'Auntie' Bev as stated.

I would like to thank all those who take part on the flower rota of the church. Flowers not only beautify the church each Sunday but also give a lot of pleasure to those who receive them after the service. Thank you too to Christine Foster who distributes them around to those who are sick, bereaved, celebrating a birthday or anniversary or simply as a love gesture.

May I take this opportunity to wish you all the blessings which only God can give as we celebrate his great gift of Jesus our Lord and Saviour. If you read this 'Record' before Christmas please come along and join us or the Church in Wales for the many services of celebration taking place. Or please think about joining us in the New Year. You will be made very welcome.

Restorative Revolution: A movement of the church to transform wealth, power and communities for a flourishing world.

When future generations talk about our impact on people and the planet, what will they say? Will they say we sat by as the world continued on a path towards hoarded wealth, extreme poverty and environmental destruction, or that we courageously chose a different path?

We're at a pivotal moment:

- a moment where we – as Christians united as God's church – can rediscover our place in God's restoration story and shape a fairer future, marked by love, hope and generosity.
- Or...a moment where we do nothing.

The choices we make now will set the trajectory for decades to come.

Right now, inequality is growing. The earth's life support systems are under threat. Wealth and power are in the hands of the few, at the expense of the majority – especially those living in poverty.

The root of all this is humanity's ancient problem: when sin entered the world, our relationships with God, ourselves, each other and the rest of creation were broken. The consequences include greed, corrupt governance, injustice, colonialism and the ransacking of God's creation. But together we can create a different future. A future where each of us can meet our basic needs and make sure the whole of creation flourishes. We invite Christians and churches around the world to take their place in a **restorative revolution...**

- To partner with God to cultivate flourishing churches that embody the love, hope and generosity of Jesus locally...
- To connect our churches in a global movement that transforms wealth, power and communities...
- And to hold the powerful, and each other, to account.

We will need courage and humility. But together we can move closer to a fairer, flourishing world.

We invite you to join us in making some courageous choices... choices that future generations will be proud of.

BMS World Mission Safe Haven 2023 Christmas Appeal

HELP REFUGEES ON THE ISLAND OF LESBOS THIS CHRISTMAS

How are you hoping to spend Christmas night?

Whatever comes to mind, you're likely picturing being somewhere cosy, warm and safe.

You're probably not thinking of a rough sea crossing, of biting winds and the anguish of fleeing the country you love. That's how Bibi (name changed) spent last Christmas night.

This Christmas, could you give a gift of hope to a refugee like Bibi who has lost everything?

Bibi, originally a schoolteacher, is from Afghanistan. Life there under the Taliban became crushing poverty for Bibi and her extended family. The seven family members were forced to flee, walking several thousand miles across mountain ranges with little food or water. Then they made nine unsuccessful attempts to cross the ocean from Turkiye, enduring sinking boats. Finally Bibi and her family got to a transit camp in Greece on Christmas night 2022. Later they found themselves living in a tent in a camp on the island of Lesbos. Thousands of refugees from a multitude of countries can wait months for a decision on their asylum applications, living in very basic tents or containers.

This Christmas, a BMS-supported welcoming centre just outside the camp will be providing a safe space for refugees to relax and experience the love of Jesus for the first time. A typical day will see the arrival of up to 200 new refugees – all desperate for basic help. Whatever you can give this Christmas to the BMS appeal will make such a difference, remember the parallels of the biblical Christmas story with Bibi's story.

After eight long months Bibi and her extended family were finally granted asylum in Belgium.

More and more frightened women will find themselves living in flimsy tents, trying to wash, dress and remain hidden behind the thin canvas to protect their modesty.

A heartfelt Christmas gift, given today, could provide a refugee from Afghanistan, Sudan or Palestine with clean clothes, good food and a safe place to wash and rest. Please give if you're able – envelopes available in church.



Photo: With your help, BMS partner worker Haniele from All4Aid can provide a warm welcome to desperate women.

Happy Christmas everyone,

As we work within Sudbrook we want to invite you to our carol singing on December 17th at 3:30pm. Please do join us as we meet at Sudbrook chapel opposite the old pumping station. We plan, weather permitting, to sing carols around some of Sudbrook.



Recently, I have been going into the schools at Magor, Undy and ARW Portskewett. I have been privileged to take their whole school assemblies once a fortnight. It has been so good to interact with the staff and children and this includes taking a Christian union group in ARW. The primary aim is to share with them Jesus and sow seeds of faith even in these little children. They have been very keen to be involved and also to ask lots of questions. Please pray with us for the children and staff of the schools along with the people of Sudbrook.

May the Lord Jesus bring you joy this Christmas.

Jeremy Lock

Our Hope for Light

by Ann Nias

During Advent, our daily readings inevitably include turning to Isaiah's lovely prophecy in chapter 9.

'Nevertheless that time of darkness and despair will not go on for ever....The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in the land of deep darkness, a light will shine.'

Yesterday, I got no further than the first two verses! Have you noticed how many times darkness is mentioned? And these same words are quoted by Jesus in Matthew 4:16:

"The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light. And for those who lived in the land where death casts its shadow, a light has shined."

So why this focus on darkness? Perhaps it's because of the contrasting hope we have in the coming of the Light, the Light of the world. Darkness in its many forms is horribly real, but Jesus brings us a glorious alternative heralded so many centuries before His birth in this proclamation by Isaiah.

It seems to me that darkness is mentioned in four differing guises in the verses above.

- A time, or a period, of darkness
- Walking in darkness
- Sitting in darkness
- Living in a land of deep darkness.

Perhaps fancifully, I think that those first-Christmas shepherds personify these states of darkness:

As long as they work as shepherds they exist in a period of personal social darkness, ostracised as unclean because of their job with animals. A kind of darkness inflicted upon them by others.



As they lead their sheep, they are consigned to walk in darkness (not just physical) because they are disqualified from worshipping with God's people, so are deprived of fellowship or spiritual growth.

Out of habit and resignation, their sights are set quite low, so they do not expect or anticipate a better way, so they sit out their lives in darkness, settling into a state whereby they fail to seek an alternative, it being too much of a climb.

And, to cap it all, theirs is a land dark with Roman occupation and oppression.

YET, it is to these people living in darkness that God chooses to send His angels to reveal the first news of the Messiah's birth, the coming of Light into their dark places!! It is to them that God gives first sight of that baby in the manger and first chance to spread the news to those who have shut them out.

What does this say about God's Plan? That He prioritises the underdog; that He trusts them with the greatest message of all time; He gives them unexpected glimpses of Heaven; He reveals Jesus to those who would normally be overlooked; that He over-turns society's traditions and brings a deeper, fairer, lovingly inclusive reality.

This is the Jesus, whose birth we celebrate, who brings light, His Light, into the world's dark places, whether it be globally, nationally, locally, or individually.

Update to the **September**

BMS Harvest Appeal –

Magor Baptist Church sent

£823 and the total raised

across the UK for BMS was

£101,391. This money will

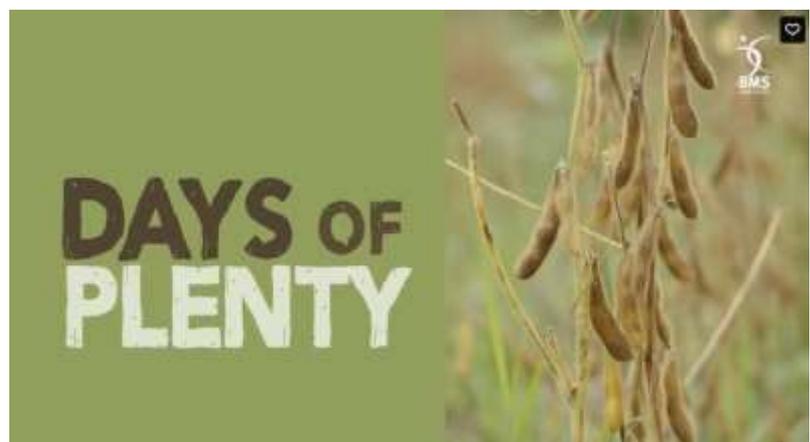
be used to support farmers

in northern Uganda. Every

pound makes a difference,

helping families lift

themselves out of poverty for good.



WELCOME TO MAGOR & UNDY COMMUNITY FRIDGE

In the heart of Magor & Undy, a great idea has taken shape – the Magor & Undy Community Fridge, a brilliant example of how a community came together in the battle against food waste. It is part of a nationwide campaign to salvage surplus food from landfill and has been driven by the dedication of 16 volunteers committed to making a difference.

The planning began back in June 2022 when Church member, and newly elected County Councillor, John Crook shared his idea for the possibility of opening a “Fridge” in the town. It took a year in the planning, but eventually it opened here in Magor Baptist Church on June 2nd, 2023. Since then, the doors have swung open every Friday from 10:30 to 12:00, welcoming our community to share in its mission.

At the core of this initiative lies a team of volunteers, all equipped with food hygiene training qualifications prominently displayed within the Community Fridge area. Supported by a generous grant from Monmouthshire County Council, and support from officers, the community fridge procured essential equipment, including a display fridge, freezer, vegetable racking, cleaning supplies, and stationery. We checked out and learned from the experiences of neighbouring community fridges in Caldicot and Chepstow, and we are learning and improving all the time.

The collaboration with Magor Baptist Church has been appreciated, giving us a secure and safe room, through a rental and electricity agreement. We have a well-constituted committee comprising a secretary, chair, treasurer, and trustees.

The community's response has been overwhelming, with 30-40 people visiting the fridge each week. Volunteers enjoy chatting with residents, having discussions on innovative ways to address food waste challenges and swapping recipes for the week's donations. The unwavering support of local businesses, including Suzie at The Gate Magor, The Co-op Magor, Subway Magor, Magor Services Spar shop, Chepstow Garden Centre Farm Shop and the restaurant, Morrisons supermarket in Newport, and local growers, has been instrumental in augmenting the fridge's success. If you visit these businesses, we'd love you to thank them for their support for us.

The impact speaks volumes – nearly 3,000 Kgs of food have been rescued from an otherwise destined fate in landfills. The Magor & Undy Community Fridge stands as a testament to the power of community-driven initiatives, uniting people in the pursuit of reducing food waste and creating a more sustainable future. We welcome any new ideas to source donations to save

from landfill and also hope it is helping people to stretch their household budgets a little further, check out our Facebook and Instagram pages, where we try to post each week with details of our donations that week.

Contact: magor.undy.cf@gmail.com

From Angela Sandles

WELCOME TO MAGOR & UNDY COMMUNITY FRIDGE



Christmas Greetings, 1973

Full of seasonal greetings from church members, friends from afar, and national and regional Baptist officials, who all donated at least 20p to the Baptist Missionary Society Fund for Hungry Children. The issue stated, *'The Fund has been in existence for just over 12 years and started when a missionary, Miss Mair Davies, suggested that one penny would buy a biscuit that would feed one hungry child in India for a day. It was first called the 'Biscuit Fund', but later changed to the present name. All money collected is sent to the BMS to be used especially for feeding starving children, and last year we sent £165.95.'*

My inquisitive mind wanted to know more about Miss Mair Davies and also whether she had actually visited Magor. I made some progress, but did not have time to complete my research before the editor's deadline, so ... watch this space! (And if you know anything about her – do get in touch.)

January 1974

It was reported that the Christmas Greetings Record, together with the Christmas morning collection, had raised £116. The magazine also reported that the total contributions in 1973 to the Home Mission Fund was £126.76 – only about £10 under the £1 per member for which the Baptist Association was aiming.

As I read the January editorial I thought there is nothing new under the sun: *'The present crisis leaving us short of fuel, heat, light, and also 'spending power', and the world wide waste over recent years, which is leaving us short of so many natural materials, is having its effect on the production of the Record. The ink in the duplicator gets so cold it won't flow, and the operator's feet get so cold that he becomes immobile! But rather more serious is the world shortage of paper which makes supplies difficult to obtain and prices become most expensive. In February, they would report that not only had the price of paper increased by 15%, it was also hard to get.*

In his letter, the pastor (Christopher Walton pictured right) wrote, *'Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace and goodwill among men'. What are these words for you? Are they just part of the Christmas story? An irrelevant piece of wishful thinking when faced with the realities of 1974?* He then referred to news items from December 1973:



- a car bomb injuring many in London [an IRA bomb was planted in a stolen car parked in front of the Home Office building in Millbank and injured about 60 people]
- a violent hi-jacking of an aircraft at Rome airport [a Palestinian terrorist group attacked a Pan Am flight bound for Iran via Lebanon, resulting in the deaths of 34 people]
- a Lufthansa plane hi-jacked, resulting in two more deaths
- the killing of hostages threatening the proposed peace talks in the Middle East [a summit in Geneva sought to bring peace between the Arabs and Israelis following the Yom Kippur War (also known as the Fourth Arab–Israeli War)]

*Crisis, or no crisis, let us in this new year clearly and boldly proclaim the message of God's care and love for the world in Christ and Him crucified. The electricity shortage cannot reduce the number of days we can witness, nor can it reduce the power of Christ. Let us in 1974 with renewed devotion use the exciting and expending opportunities the Lord is giving us in Ebenezer. 1974 – in it give glory to God and may you all possess peace and goodwill. Whatever happens, 1974 is going to be no more and no less than any other, a year of our Lord. **Let us re-read this quote, substituting 2024 for 1974.***

February 1974

Still hard times. Although Christmas parties were organized for the primary department of the Sunday School so that they were not disappointed, they still couldn't have parties for the older children because of the restrictions on the use of power.

The Women's Hour report began, *News of Britain's impending doom, freak weather, plus sickness, resulted in only a small number attending our first meeting in 1974.*

On a cheerier note, the 1st Magor Brownies came 3rd in the Penhow District Sports. Were you one of those Brownies?

Mary Did You Know

Words by Mark Lowery, music by Buddy Greene

The Thomas Street Baptist Church in Liberty, Virginia is an American mega church. In its old premises it had a tree-shaped choir loft, and this choir loft inspired an annual Christmas presentation called the Living Christmas Tree. It is reported that during Christmas time *"the choir could look like they are living ornaments."* The presentation started in 1970 and in 1984 Mark Lowery was asked to write the programme for that year.



Having been asked to write the programme Lowry found he was struggled to find a way to combine familiar Christmas music with something of the awe and wonder of the few individuals who experienced Jesus' birth. As he confided to his mother, also a singer/songwriter, she said, *"If anyone on earth knew for sure that Jesus was virgin born—Mary knew!"* That gave Lowry his inspiration.

Luke's account of Jesus' birth tells us some of what Mary knew from her conversation with the angel Gabriel. What else did she know? Lowry began to compile some specific questions in his mind and wrote a lyric that he kept to himself for years.

Mary, Did You Know?

Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Would one day walk on water?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Would save our sons and daughters?
Did you know that your baby boy
Has come to make you new;
This Child that you delivered
Will soon deliver you?

Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Will give sight to a blind man?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Would calm a storm with His hand?
Did you know that your baby boy
Has walked where angels trod,
And when you kiss your little baby
You've kissed the face of God?



Mary, did you know?
The blind will see, the deaf will hear,
The dead will live again,
The lame will leap, the dumb will speak
The praises of the Lamb!

Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Is Lord of all creation?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Will one day rule the nations?
Did you know that your baby boy
Was Heaven's perfect Lamb,
And the sleeping Child you're holding
Is the great, the Great I AM?

Oh, Mary, did you know?

In 1991, Mark Lowery was singing in the noteworthy Gaither Vocal Band along side other well know American Christian musicians and singers, including Buddy Greene and Michael English. Mark gave the poem to Buddy Greene and asked him to write music for it. Two weeks later, Greene began to study it and realized that the music had to be in a minor key. With that decision made, he wrote the music in about half an hour. He sang it to Lowry over the phone. Lowry loved it.



Mark Lowery

He asked Michael English to record "*Mary, Did You Know?*" and English included it on his first solo album, which, unfortunately, was released on New Year's Day, 1992. The odd day of the album's release has not stopped this modern carol becoming one of the most popular carols now sung across the world.

Christine Miles



Looking ahead



The theme for World Day of Prayer for 2024
I beg you, bear with one another in Love



The service will be on the 1st March 2024

Locally there are 2 services

10 am Caldicot Methodist Church and 1.30pm St Mary's Magor.

This service has been prepared by the Christian Women of Palestine and has been 5 years in the making. Between now and the World Day of Prayer please keep praying for the Christian women of Palestine.

Thank you

For more details, please see Christine Miles.

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