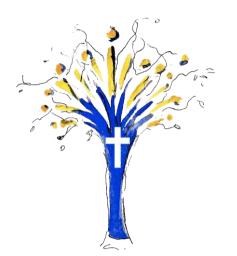
# Off the Record



## From MAGOR BAPTIST CHURCH

*Growing and sharing in God's love* 



CHRISTMAS 2024



## Advent interrupts our pessimism

Waiting in my dentist's waiting room is - amusing. I think they try to lighten the atmosphere from what can be a tense moment. The most recent poster read 'Chronic positivity is humanly impossible'. Underneath this were a series of evident proofs of this truth in the form of uninspirational quotes:-

If at first you don't succeed, then it will probably never happen. Every morning is another chance to have an even less productive day. It takes seventeen muscles to form a smile but only three to look at your phone.

No matter how big the challenge ahead, it's never too late to run away.



Certainly the waiting in that particular waiting room wasn't too bad. But waiting isn't always that easy. Waiting for a birth - only to find that when the moment came you weren't quite expecting it to result in the little one being whisked away to the critical care unit for a week. Waiting for a death - only to find that when the

moment came, you weren't quite expecting it, and are still numbed by it.

During this waiting-for-Christmas period, I'm pondering the ancient words of the prophet Isaiah

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned." (Isaiah 9v2)

There are different kinds of darkness within which we sometimes have to walk. Many of them can feel like living in a land overshadowed by despair,

anxiety, grief or loneliness. These bring an accompanying loss of motivation and appetite for life. Often life in our world these days is like walking in darkness, living under deep shadows of foreboding and uncertainty. **Advent interrupts our pessimism.** Isaiah declares the coming of the light of God's coming! Against a horizon of despair, hope dawns, as God says "Let there be light!" God is on the move and hope is rising.

#### "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders." (Isaiah 9.6a)

I can't read these words without hearing them set to Handel's music with its outspokenly joyous chorus! It's an irresistible Advent earworm! These words were first spoken to broken-hearted people who could see no good future. Government was Empire, and Empire was about force, control and loss of freedom. **The sign of the new born child was God's promise of a different future.** This Advent, when you celebrate the birth of Jesus, and open yourself again to the gift of God's Son, do so looking forward to the coming of God's Kingdom.

#### "And he will be called, Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9.6b)



The Advent story is full of name giving. Matthew who quotes the prophets dozens of times, writes at the very start "You will call his name Jesus" and "they will call him Emmanuel." Together with Isaiah's fourfold descriptor of the Son who is given, all **these names expand the horizons of our hopes and the range of our imagination.** Jesus is the personification of wise planning, purposeful power, protective care, and lasting peace. The rule of Jesus is not

aimed at self-promotion, but saving his people, being the presence of God amongst our humanity. Why not use this verse as a one line praise-prayer throughout Advent.

#### "And he will be called, Mighty God...,

Isaiah 9 was written in the dark days of the crushing power of Assyria. What Israel needed was a new king who would deliver them. **Isaiah's** 

words of comfort are like an arrow into the future when hundreds of years later, in Bethlehem, a child is born and a son is given. Against the might of Herod, Pilate, Caesar, and all other kingdoms, God came, not in annihilating power, but in the purposeful persistence and mercy of the mighty God, who saves and forgives human sins. His rule and reign are assured because the government will be upon the shoulders of God and of his Christ, whose name is Jesus, Immanuel.

"His name shall be called Prince of Peace..."

With Assyria's military machine in full swing against them, Israel had no chance. Isaiah spoke to their panic, and contradicted those resigned voices of despair. Never discount the Advent of God! **The coming of Immanuel is the reality of God come amongst us in Jesus.** The final revelation of God is the Word become flesh, the living embodiment of God's grace and truth, full of glory. Not the glory of military might, whether Assyrian, Roman, or empires of any other age, including our own. This Advent we celebrate Christ incarnate, crucified, risen, and ascended, the Prince of Peace, the peacemaker *par excellence*. "On earth peace to all the people, on whom God's favour rests." For that we wait, and pray, and hope, this Advent.

Mark

## **Christmas and New Year Dates**

| December       |                    |                                  |
|----------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| Sunday 15th    | 4.00 pm            | Christingle Service              |
| Sunday 22nd    | 11.00 am           | Family Nativity                  |
|                | 6.00 pm            | Carols by Candlelight            |
| Wednesday 25th | 10.00 am           | <b>Christmas Celebration</b>     |
| Sunday 29th    | 11.00 am           | Deacons service                  |
| January 2025   | 2 00 pm            | Now Yoor Moditation              |
| Wednesday 1st  | 3.00 pm<br>4.00 pm | New Year Meditation<br>Communion |
| Sunday 12th    | 6.00 pm            | Joint Service at Caldicot        |

## **Fellowship News from Val Jones**

I trust you have all managed to weather the latest storm without too much damage. We have three fence panels down, but apart from that everything is fine. We are now waiting for the wind to subside to put them back up.



We are pleased to share with you the safe arrival of 2 beautiful babies.

Baby Dylan James Turner (left) was born early on 13<sup>th</sup> October at 7lb 13oz. A son for Bethan and Matty Turner and little brother for Eleri 4 and Bonnie 2. Grandson for Anne and Graham James. We thank God for the safe arrival and pray for them as a family.

Alice Davies and Josh Perks welcomed Zachary

Jason Perks into the world on Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> November weighing 8lb 8oz. First grandson for Alyson and Jason Davies and first great grandson for Anne and Peter Davies. We thank God for new life and pray for them.

We extend our love and prayers to our minister Mark and wife Anne on the death of Anne's mother. We pray for the whole family as they come to terms with such a loss and ask for God to put his arms around them and give them peace.

A major highlight of the last few months was the baptismal service on 17<sup>th</sup> November. It was a real joy to witness the baptisms of Nico and Georgia, even though their son Ezekiel found it all a bit too much!



We were saddened to hear of the death of Barbara Hendy on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> November. Our thoughts and prayer are with her daughters and grandchildren. Barbara had a fall and broke her hip which had been reset and she had been transferred to Neville Hall and then to Chepstow for physio. We were pleased to be able to see her on the Thursday before she died and spend some time with her. Despite her accident she was able to pray for those less fortunate than herself. Barbara was a quiet lady and had been a member of Ebenezer for many, many years. She was someone you could depend on and an example to us all.



The annual gift service on 1<sup>st</sup> December was very well supported by all in the church and enabled a van load of Christmas goodies and essentials to be handed to Raven House Trust for distribution to those less fortunate this Christmas.

As we look forward to the Christmas season we pray for all those who will have an empty space at their table this Christmas. We ask that God will put his

loving arms around them and give them peace.

We pray for the whole Fellowship and ask God to meet them where they are at, to heal both bodies and relationships, and we look forward to serving him in the coming New Year.



Jean and Rachel Thomas wish all their friends at the Fellowship a very happy Christmas and a peaceful and healthy new year. Also, Jean Thomas would like to thank all her friends for her lovely birthday cards and kind wishes.

## Special delivery Christmas appeal

Can you provide life-saving medical care for mothers and babies in Chad this Christmas?

Chad has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world. For every 100,000 births over 1,000 women die within six weeks of having their baby. Far too many mothers and babies lack the essential medical care that they so desperately need.

This Christmas, **your** faithful support could change that. Your generous gifts will help BMS World Mission workers and staff at Guinebor II (G2) Hospital in Chad provide lifesaving medical care for mothers and babies. Give at the Christmas service at Magor.

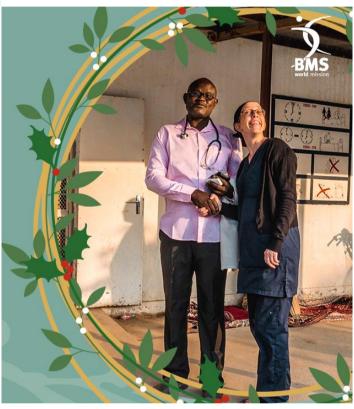
BMS World Mission workers Kalbassou Doubassou (Advanced nurse surgeon and Director) and Clare Bedford (Pharmacist) ask you to pray for their work as they share God's love with

patients on the maternity ward, where over 200 babies are born each month.

The *Seek First the Kingdom* **BMS harvest appeal** raised £940 for BMS work in Bangladesh from Magor Baptist Church.

The **Big Quiz** on 16 November raised £361 for **Tearfund** and the amount raised so far by quizzing churches across the UK is £139,100.

On behalf of Magor Baptist church the Editor would like to thank all contributors, printers and distributors for their hard work in 2024.





#### UGANDA NEWS – FARM Update



We thank God for the good weather at the farm. We have been able to grow food that is enough to take us through this last term of the year. We planted about 2 hectares of sweet potatoes which are ready and the children are already eating the food.



We also planted some maize which we have been able to harvest and crush into posho giving us around 400 kilograms of food and 100 kilograms of animal feeds.



About three months ago we set up a small pawpaw garden which has been very fruitful this term.

This has enabled us to give the children some fruits and now we are looking into setting up other fruits like watermelon.



This term we are looking into poultry. We would like to set up a chicken farm where the children will not only learn how to rear chickens for business but also will be able to supplement their meals. This is an exciting project that we are looking into setting up. We have so far been able to attain one female chicken with three chicks.



Also we are looking into setting up vegetable gardens that the Agricultural clubs could run, which equips them with both skills of farming, but also in the long run supplement their meals. This is a small nursery bed that we have set up and we have seedlings already coming out.

Food in Uganda is getting more

expensive but we have God who gave us enough space where we could set up different projects, and we believe that if we set them up it will not only save us the costs of buying food, but the children gain skills and also their meals will be supplemented giving them a healthy diet.

We want to say thank you to all our sponsors who have supported our farm work which has provided food to many of our learners.

#### **God bless**

Peter.

#### <u>'I FELT SORRY FOR THAT COUPLE' – the inn keeper's thoughts</u>

"I felt sorry for that couple, I really did. They were at their wits end, the pair of them, just about all in. But it was the woman who concerned me most; fit to drop she was, and hardly a surprise, given her condition – Not that I'm an expert in these matters, but I felt sure her pains had already started; and so it was to prove, poor lass.

As for him, he was beside himself, frantic with worry, almost abusive in his frustration; and I can't say I blamed him – I'd have been the same in the circumstances. Yet what could I do?



There wasn't a room to spare – that was the fact of the matter.

We were packed already, bulging at the seams,

and I could hardly turf someone else out just to fit them in, could I? I mean, be reasonable, that would have caused a right old to-do, no use to anybody.

So I offered them the stable, if they could make use of it.

Not much of a prospect, I agree,

especially on such a night as that turned out,

but it was a roof over their heads, a shelter from the worst of the wind if nothing else.

Alright, so I still feel bad about it,

I wish now I'd taken my wife's advice and given up our room for them, but to be honest, we were both whacked, what with all the extra custom to see to.

We had an inn to run, remember, and we were rushed off our feet, longing only for a good night's sleep ourselves.

So we gave them the stable and that's the end of it – no point brooding over what might have been.

And, to be fair, they were grateful, glad of anywhere to put their heads down.

But when I heard the baby crying, that's when it got to me – out there in those conditions! I felt ashamed, disgusted with myself.

So, we hurried out, the wife and I, anxious to help,

Not sure what we might find, though fearing the worst.

But what a surprise!

There was no panic, no sign of confusion. Quite the contrary – they seemed so peaceful, so full of joy, utterly content.

And the way they looked at that child – I mean, I've heard of worshipping your kids,

but this was something else. They were over the moon, ecstatic! And that wasn't the half of it,

For suddenly there in the shadows I spotted a bunch of shepherds – God knows where they came from.

I thought for a moment they were up to no good,

But they weren't – they just stood there gawping into the manger, Wide-eyed with wonder, almost as though they'd never seen a baby before!

And then they walked away, joy in their faces, delight in their steps.

It's all quiet now, the inn and the stable,

As if that night had never happened.

And, as far as I know, both mother and child are well.

You could say that's down to me in part,

For at least I did something to help if no-one else did.

Yet I can't help feeling I should have done more,

that I let everyone down somehow -

that it wasn't finally them left out in the cold, it was me."

Taken from 'A New Day Dawning' by Nick Fawcett and submitted by Ann Nias

### Africa News from John Reilly (Beryl Cox's son-in-law)

My eldest daughter, Joanna, took up a post as a teacher in Malawi after she left college and spent the rest of her working life in Africa, effectively as a missionary. She met and married an American, O Palmer Robertson, who has written a number of books about Christ, and together they worked on His behalf. In their final years in Africa, they headed up the African Bible University in Kampala, Uganda; Palmer was the Principal, and Joanna was Head of Staff.

A few weeks ago, I received her regular newsletter, and in it, amongst other things, she wrote

We are so encouraged by the news we hear from the African Bible University in Uganda. The freshman class is a whopping 40 students (in our day the usual class size was less than 20), and they are eager to soak up everything so that they can make a difference for Christ in Africa. The farm has been wonderfully revitalized by the introduction of Equipping Farmers International who have set up a demonstration farm on our campus.

Basically, this is an indication (amongst many) that the work carried out across the world by so many charities, people of goodwill, and so on, must be working. It's good news, and we should thank God.

#### **John Reilly**



The annual mens' curry night was not to be missed!

#### **Cataloguing a photographic collection** from Chris Leighton

In my '50 years ago' article in the last magazine, I began with an apology from the October 1974 magazine, which said that the Art Editor, Bernard Hill, had been so busy with the building of his bungalow that no photographs had been available since the July issue. Recently, the church was given a large collection of the photographs which Berni had taken, many of which were used in past copies of the magazine. But, archivists' nightmare, virtually none of them were named!



I was able to recognize some people but, before I could catalogue them properly, I needed help. I asked some of the people in the photographs if they could help and got a very enthusiastic

response. So, wearing nitrile gloves to protect the photographs, we enjoyed an afternoon naming and reminiscing.

But that was just the start. There are plenty more photographs to name so there will be another such afternoon in the new year. If you would like to help next time, do speak to me. And thank you to all who helped.

#### Pray today for children's futures to be 'brighter and better' from Tearfund

In Kenya, one of the many churches Tearfund works with is the Redeemed Gospel Church Pipeline situated in the middle of an informal settlement (or slum) in Mukuru on the outskirts of Nairobi. The church is a safe space for around **2,000 children** from the surrounding settlements, who regularly attend school holiday clubs and Sunday groups. The church also runs a school for 600 pupils.

Nairobi County, which includes the capital city of Nairobi, has about 200 informal settlements that occupy six per cent of the city's land. These settlements are home to about 60 per cent of Nairobi's population.

Life in the slums is difficult. Poverty, abuse, lack of sanitation are just some of the challenges faced by the 700,000 people who live in densely populated Mukuru. Children often suffer from malnutrition, miss out on an education and are at risk of trafficking. **Despite the challenges, hope for the future is alive.** 

Tearfund's life-changing Transforming Communities training envisions churches to look at the needs of their community and helps them identify the resources they have available locally to achieve their vision. In Mukuru, trainers have been working with churches in the area so they can reach out to people in need. At the Redeemed Gospel Church Pipeline, they have provided **food, healthcare, counselling and vocational training, as well as all the schooling and other children's activities.** 

'The Redeemed Gospel Church Pipeline is committed to minister to the children as part of the integral ministry which Jesus commissioned us,' says Grace Muthungu, Influencing Programme Manager in Kenya. **'Though there are many obstacles, prayer and love shall change things that are difficult and bring victory to the children of God, making their future brighter and better.'** 



How to pray for further hope and transformation in Mukuru:

• Pray that all the children in Mukuru will grow up knowing they are loved by God.

- Pray that the children develop a love of learning and that the school has enough resources and volunteers to help all those in need.
- Pray for protection for the children in Mukuru and slum areas around the world who are at risk of being trafficked.
- Pray that, through the church in Kenya, many more lives would be transformed in the community.

Thank you for your faithful prayers today. Poverty is not God's plan. You are.

#### From Tearfund Advent Living Hope email

#### Snippets from the magazines, 50 years ago by Chris Leighton

#### December 1974

Under the heading 'Hard luck the hungry' were the words of '*one of our newer hymns*'. It was sung to the tune of Pop goes the weasel!

Twenty fags a jar of ale,
 A quid each way on 'Monkey'.
 That's the way the money goes,
 Hard luck the hungry.
 Millions spent on our defence,
 Millions more on space probes.
 Our priorities are right –
 Me, Mine, and our Folks.

2. Polaris subs, atomic bombs, Germ research in progress.
That's the way the money goes, What price the homeless?
A bigger house, a second car – Pools, champagne, casinos.
That's the way the money goes, What price the poor folks? 3. Mini-skirts and motor bikes,
Children burned with napalm.
Which way should the money go?
Top discs or Oxfam?
Earthquakes! Famines! Refugees!
Leave the senses reeling,
Sorry all the money's gone!
Trust there's no hard feeling!

4. Subsidise the milk and beef, Subsidise the space search.
That's the way the money goes, Not cancer research.
Give to man you give to Christ.
Turn from need you strike Him, For the world's red bleeding need,

What price the Christian?

5. What you give away you keep, For what you waste, you'll answer. When you knock at Heaven's gate, What price your chance, sir? Shelter strangers, feed the poor, Share the fruits of labour, Help the weak, dry children's eyes, Christ is your neighbour.

The hymn was written by Jim Stringfellow and published in 1969 in *Faith, Folk & Festivity*. The book included 48 hymns, mostly in contemporary English in the folk / popular genre, with a focus on positive Christian truths and real-world events. Certainly food for thought.

#### January 1975

Some changes were announced for the youth discussion groups after the evening services. 'Coffee Bar' would be for 12 to 15 year olds, led by John Beard, and 'Image' would be for those over 15 years, led by the minister [Chris Walton]. Both groups aimed to learn more about the Christian faith, make disciples for Christ, witness for the Lord, and help in the education of responsible world citizens.

#### February 1975

#### **Building works**

Chris Walton wrote that plans to extend the Ebenezer buildings and to buy a plot of land off Neddern Way in Caldicot should be seen as part of the one ministry of the whole church. He stressed the need to follow the Lord's guiding or buildings could become millstones. He quoted from a booklet *Venturing with Christ*, by Rev. LR Misslebrook: `*There are real drawbacks to church buildings in the present attempt to demonstrate the relevance of Christ to modern man. The demand for upkeep takes a good deal of money that might be better used for Christ's mission. They tend to make the members think of the church as a place rather than a People. They foster a routine of meetings in which there is little genuine meeting and sharing. Whereas once buildings attracted people in, they now seem to keep them out.'* 

Chris added: '*Money is needed to buy the land in Caldicot. Even more is needed to build on the land. Great demands are laid upon us. But never let financial demands (even in these economically tumultuous days) overshadow the real demands of Christ: of caring and sharing in His name'.* He went on to say that he didn't envisage a conventional Baptist Chapel being built in Caldicot as that would be a lot of money for only occasional use. Instead, there should be a House Church. The money raised should provide the salary and accommodation (including a room for larger gatherings) for a minister to live amongst, and lead, the people.

#### St Athan's Boys Village

25 youngsters from Coffee Bar and the new Image group joined 100 people from other Gwent Baptist churches for a weekend conference at St Athan's Boys' Village in West Aberthaw. The village had been built on a 3½ acre site as a holiday camp for the sons of Welsh miners in the 1920s. Facilities included dormitories for up to 200 boys; a dining hall; concert hall; games hall/gym; swimming pool; tennis court; putting green; cricket pitch and pavilion; and a chapel which was opened in July 1937. Perhaps you went there and have memories you can share for a future magazine.

In the centre of a small formal garden, a First World War memorial was erected in 1930 which, following a local campaign in 2011, became Grade II listed. From 1940-46 the site was requisitioned by the military. After the war it continued as a centre until 1990 when, with the decline of the coal industry, the Boys' Clubs of Wales (who ran the camp) went into administration. Even then, the site was still used for residential Bible courses by church groups until it was sold in 2000.

After years of vandalism, arson, theft and trespassing since it closed, the site descended into a derelict state. In 2008 many buildings were demolished because of their dangerous and vandalised condition. Last year the Vale of Glamorgan Council ratified plans to build 14 new homes on the site. Although most of the old buildings will be demolished, the caretaker's bungalow will be retained and the old chapel will be converted into a home.

If anyone is interested, there are lots of photos on the Coflein [online database for the National Monuments Record of Wales (NMRW)] site (<u>https://coflein.gov.uk/en/site/411316/</u>).

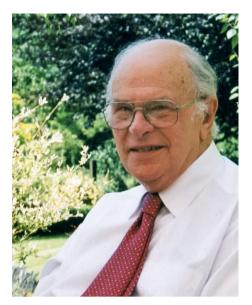
#### The 1975 Covenant

A Service of Thanksgiving for the making of a Covenant by the Presbyterian Church of Wales, the United Reformed Church, the Methodist Church, the Church in Wales and some covenanted Baptist churches (including Magor) was held at the Seilo Presbyterian Church in Aberystwyth on 18 January. The snow on the top of Plinlimmon was melting, perhaps symbolically. It was a moving service, once they got there. *`Our church minibus conveyed a dozen of the South Wales Baptists to Aberystwyth and one … never to be forgotten part of our forward journey was running out of petrol on the lower slopes of Plinlimmon and a 3 or 4 mile walk to the nearest garage!* 

**Chris Leighton** 

#### *No Small Wonder* Paul Wigmore 1925 - 2014.

Born in London in 1925 and educated at schools in Harrow, Bushey Heath and Barnstaple (N Devon), Paul had many occupations between the ages of 14 and 42. He had been an apprentice mechanical engineer, shop assistant, junior clerk, photo lab trainee, National Service RAF photographer in India, Burma and UK, Kodak medical radiographer and haematology lab technician, then technical author. Publications and PR



manager with air/sea lifesaving equipment manufacturer. PRO for the Christian Medical College and Brown Memorial Hospital, Ludhiana, Punjab. Freelance writer, graphic designer and photographer in Cambridge. Advertising editor and art director with Kodak UK from 1967 to early retirement in 1985.

He first wrote verse aged 10 in Port Isaac, Cornwall, getting as far as:

Clouds race like tattered rags across Port Isaac Bay,

... and then stopping. During a brief acquaintance with Penelope and John Betjeman from August 1982 until John's death in July, 1984, he was encouraged by the poet to keep writing verse and two collections of light verse were published in 1988 and 1990. The first attempt at a hymn text was 'May we, O Holy Spirit, bear your fruit' and was written at the request of Jubilate Hymns Limited and it was published in *Hymns for Today's Church*. Paul wrote nearly 100 published hymns plus a couple of cantatas and one opera.

#### In Paul's own words he tells of writing the carol No Small Wonder

"*Earworm*. This, I am told, is the correct name for that annoying scrap of music that insists on ringing in the ears and round and round the brain from the moment you wake in the morning until you fall asleep at night. You cannot stop it. One November morning in 1983 I woke to find I had an earworm. But mine wasn't music. I am a lyricist, so my earworm was considerate enough to present itself in words. Two words. 'Small wonder.'

Small wonder, small wonder, small wonde, small wonder – it went on and on throughout the morning, the afternoon, the evening. It was the same the next morning. I had to do something to stop it. And then I had a bright idea. I was in the middle of writing lyrics for a new collection of Christmas carols. Suppose I wrote one using the words 'small wonder'? Might that stop it? I began writing. And the carol **No Small Wonder** began to emerge. And, yes, the earworm stopped.

I wrote the three short verses about the wonders of the Christmas story. The crowd of singing angels! The strange star seen by the three wise men! The shepherds being told by the angels where the baby, Jesus, could be found! However, all through these three short verses there is a 'but'. All these wonders were small wonders when you consider the astonishing fact that God himself was coming to Earth as a human being! Over all these lesser wonders came that one truly enormous wonder; no small wonder indeed."

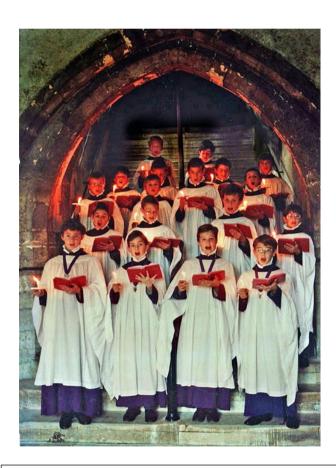
#### No small wonder

Small wonder the star. <u>small</u> wonder the light, the angels in chorus, <u>the</u> shepherds in fright; <u>but</u> stable and manger for God -<u>no</u> small wonder!

Small wonder the kings, small wonder they bore the gold and the incense, the myrrh, to adore; but God gives his life on a cross no small wonder!

Small wonder the love, small wonder the grace, the power, the glory, the light of his face; but all to redeem my poor heart no small wonder!

Tune: No Small Wonder Composer: Paul Edwards Words: Paul Wigmore



The Choir of Canterbury Cathedral, 1986. Dr Barry Rose invited me to shoot a series of pictures on the day they recorded the carol. (On 'LP'.)

#### **Christine Miles**

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