

SWANBANK

December Magazine 2026

Monthly Message

Dear friends,

Christmas is fast approaching, and with it the familiar challenge of finding just the right gift for someone we love. Sometimes we get it wonderfully right. Sometimes… well, it's the thought that counts!

But at the heart of Christmas is a gift unlike any other. The Bible describes Jesus as God's *"indescribable gift"* (2 Corinthians 9:15). Or, as another translation puts it, *"a gift too wonderful for words!"* And it really is astonishing.

The One through whom all things were created, the One who holds all things together, comes into our world as a tiny, vulnerable baby. God couldn't have made himself bigger to impress us. Instead, he made himself smaller to come alongside us.

Think of placing your finger into the hand of a newborn baby. That tiny hand curls around your finger and somehow tugs at your heart too. At Christmas, from a manger in Bethlehem, a tiny hand reaches out towards our world. It is love reaching towards us, inviting us to discover that we are known, valued and loved by God.

And perhaps that's something especially worth remembering during this season. Amidst all our worship, activities, serving and sharing, Christmas invites us to pause and rediscover the wonder at the heart of everything we do.

In Jesus, God has come close. God is with us. God is for us.

So, I really hope you'll find time to come along to some of our Christmas events and services as we celebrate this wonderful, life-changing truth. You'll see all the details in the magazine along with opportunities for us to make a difference to other people's Christmas too. May we together discover afresh the extraordinary gift of God's love this Christmas.

With love,

Leslie



Prayer Focus

Heavenly Father, as we get closer to this year's Christmas season, we are conscious of all the many preparations that we seem to have made so important, to making our celebrations of "The Big Day" a success. The gifts and presents, the wrapping, decorations, lights, food, the party invites – and even the carol singing and church services – all of which we can find so overwhelming – and expensive.

Please help us to look back to the time we are supposed to be celebrating. An event that you planned from the beginning of creation so mankind could be looking forward to and welcoming your Son Jesus - their Messiah.

There were so many events and happenings that you changed, so Your son Jesus could be born where you planned, using the people you planned and in the place you planned. Our Saviour - born simply, not in a palace that would be fitting for a Heavenly king, but laid in an animal's feeding trough, in a borrowed room. Thank you for being in control.

We ask that during this season, that we do not let ourselves get distracted by our earthly preparations, but recall all your preparations for the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We ask that we remember to thank you for offering us your greatest gift. Our perfect Saviour who lived his life to show us how to live, heal and forgive then promised to prepare a place for us in your kingdom – when we accept Him as our guide and Saviour. Thank you that we can celebrate this special birth, Amen

Dave Howe

Nan's Roller Coaster Challenge 2026!

The date was set for 23rd October, entrance tickets were donated, poster and sponsorship forms were created. Who would have thought when I booked the date that storm Austen would hit the country.

I arrived at Alton Towers in the pouring rain and the first thing I did was to go and buy a waterproof poncho, then off to my first ride on Wickerman. While in the queue I got to talk to a gentleman about the grocery and the roller coaster challenge, to my surprise the gentleman donated £10!

The rain continued to pour down, and the wind started to get up. I walked over to the rides Rita and 13 which were both closed. I was told that the Oblivion ride was open, I was halfway up the queue line when they closed the ride. I managed to get on Sky Ride, by this time 13 had re-opened, I got to the top of the queue, and they closed the ride again. By this time, I was very wet and cold, so I decided to make my way home.

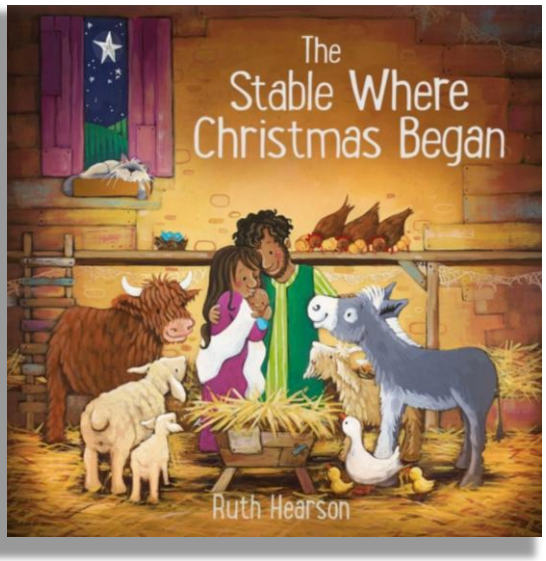
I want to say a massive thank you to everyone who sponsored me and gave their donation even though I did not fully complete the challenge due to the weather conditions.

Total raised so far is £766 for the work of The Burslem Community Grocery and the Message Trust.

Thank you,

Nan Hulse







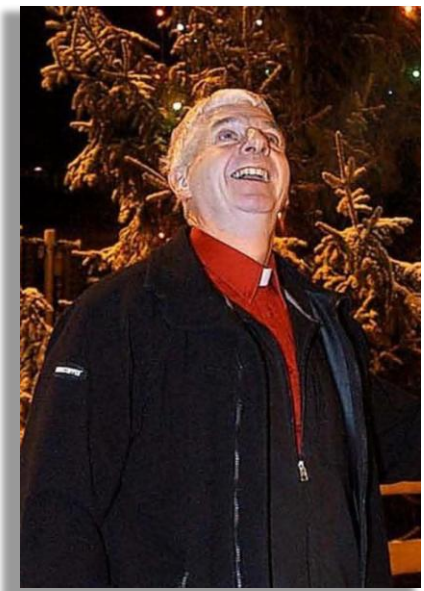
December 2026 - Circuit Preaching Plan

Venue	Time	6th December 2nd in Advent	13th December 3rd in Advent	20th December 4th in Advent	27th December
SwanBank	9.00am 10.30am 6.15pm	Andrews Stephens/Newton (Bap) L Newton	Stephens Stephens (Nativity) A Johnson	No Service Newton (Carols) Christingle (4 and 6pm)	L Newton Stephens (All age) No Service
Potter's Church	9.30am 11.15am	Price Price	Cooke Cooke	Hancock Hancock	Price Price
Oasis Church	10.45am	G Davies	Nixon	G Davies	No Service
Wesley Hall	10.45am	Own Arrangement	Boateng	Own Arrangement	No Service
The Gateway	10.45am	Mason	Chapman	Carol Service	No Service
Mount Pleasant	10.45am	J. Johnson	Mason	Carol Service at 3pm	Own Arrangement
Packmoor	11.00am	Harrison	Own Arrangement	Dutton	No Service
Village Ch	11.00am	Edwards	Brooks	Edwards	Own Arrangement
Whitehill	10.30am 6.00pm	Nativity Wakelin	Cooper Christingle	G Newton Carol service	Cooper No Service

Former MP Joan Walley has paid tribute to Reverend John Hibberts in her "Personally Speaking" column for The Sentinel.

Stoke-on-Trent was recently named top of the league for friendliness by The Times and former MP Joan Walley said John Hibberts's life epitomised the care and compassion that defines the city.

The newspaper's article sang the praises of Stoke-on-Trent with the writer walking the length of the Six Towns, sampling everything the city has to offer and most of all talking to local people along the way.



Joan said: "Being tagged the friendliest city in the country is not a status we acquired by accident. Looking out for one another, always showing how much people care, and being there for each other in the good times and bad has always been a way of life for people from round here. One sad occasion last month brought this home to me. It was the Reverend John Hibberts' funeral."

She continued: "Swan Bank was packed to the rafters, the singing was enough to raise the roof, and the many genuine tributes to John and his late wife Val for both their dedication to Burslem and help meeting the needs of local people could only be touched on in the two hours service".

"There was remembrance of the role his ministry played in Methodism, his backing for young people, his support for the vulnerable and homeless, his public support over many years for campaigns like that to save Burslem's post office, the ceaseless funding applications to upgrade SwanBank – its school room, facilities, entrance hall it remains today".

"John's legacy was epitomised by his having given up every Christmas Day since the 1980s to host a day for the lonely with 200 meals and a further 100 deliveries. It's selfless acts like this which sum up the way we are in Stoke-on-Trent".

"Many will fondly remember him for his allegiance to Port Vale through all the ups and the downs and for his stint as chaplain to the club. Home and away, John was a true valiant."

As Joan Walley draws her article to a close, she said that "... it's good to know that the traditional values which defined our communities are still very much self-evident in Stoke-on-Trent".

Network of Care - Gifts for all our 'At Home' members.

On 6th Dec, our pastoral visitors will collect a gift and Christmas card from church and deliver them to the 'at home' members of our congregation. We give out four gifts each year – Easter, Summer, Harvest and Christmas. The Easter and Christmas gifts include a card bearing a message relevant to the Christian season. Also, each month Jane Barnes sends the 'at home' members a friendly, handwritten letter and a copy of the SwanBank Magazine. Many thanks to Jane and our pastoral visitors who help us to stay connected with our brothers and sisters in Jesus.



Ann Worthington

The Dane and Trent Methodist Circuit Seeks a Pastoral and Outreach Worker

The role requires a committed Christian to provide pastoral ministry in three churches in the Holmes Chapel area, and to lead the congregations in community outreach, in collaboration with the minister in pastoral oversight. For an application pack or initial conversation please email: office@danetrentmethodist.org.uk.

Applications by noon on 13th January 2027, Interviews are on 20th January 2027. The Methodist Church is committed to safeguarding as an integral part of its life and ministry. Safeguarding is about the action the Church takes to promote a safer culture.

Full time or Job Share: £26,299 pa.

"All We Can" – Extraordinary Gifts Scheme



All We Can is a Methodist-linked international development registered charity that works with communities experiencing poverty and disadvantage around the world. Its ***Extraordinary Gifts Scheme*** offers a different way of giving presents. Instead of buying a conventional gift for someone, you can purchase something that represents support for people and communities in need. How does it work?

1. Choose a gift
Visit the All We Can Extraordinary Gifts catalogue and choose a gift that appeals to you (www.allwecan.org.uk/extraordinary-gifts). Each gift represents a particular type of development support.

2. Make your purchase
Pay for your chosen gift through the charity's website. You can usually include a personal message for the person receiving the present.

3. Give someone a gift card
The recipient receives a card explaining what their gift represents and how it helps people in communities overseas. This can make a thoughtful alternative to a traditional birthday or Christmas present. There is a deadline of 16th December for giving a gift in time for Christmas though.

4. Help support communities overseas
The money raised helps fund All We Can's international development work, delivered in partnership with local organisations.

The catalogue includes a variety of gifts such as, Busy Bees, Precious Water, Chirpy Chicks, Super Spuds, Change Begins with a Bike, Bookworm, Lighting up Lives and many more. These gifts offer different ways of supporting communities, from improving access to water and education to helping people develop sustainable livelihoods.

When you purchase a gift, you're not necessarily paying for a particular chicken, bicycle or other item to be delivered to an identified individual or family. Instead, your payment contributes to All We Can's wider charitable work. The charity and its local partners allocate resources according to the needs of the communities they support. This approach allows the charity to direct funding where it can have the greatest impact.

You can also ring "All We Can" supporter care team on 020 3758 7700.

ALL WE CAN
Methodist relief and development

225 YEARS OF SWANBANK



On Saturday 14th November we celebrated 225 years of SwanBank together with lots of food, fun, and fellowship!! The Bake Off was a great success and we want to say congratulations to both our winners and to all the contestants who provided some incredibly creative and delicious cakes. *Looks like the judges also had a tough time but someone had to do it!*

A big shout out to Michaleen at **Fabel & Bloom** who generously donated some beautiful prizes for our winners!



225 years into SwanBank's Ministry, we continue to praise God and express our gratitude to those who have and continue to give up their time to serve within this Church and the prayers that have been and will be prayed over this community!

Here's to another 225 years of loving God together, here at SwanBank…











Two Years, Thousands of Meals and One Very Special Team!

Just over two years ago in October 2024, Kathryn gave me and Jude the green light to put together a small team of volunteers and launch a soup kitchen here at SwanBank. On the 14th November 2024 our doors opened for the first time, and since then, volunteers have been serving hot food to local rough sleepers, the homeless and others struggling with the cost-of-living crisis.

Fast forward two years, and our doors are now open every Monday and Thursday morning offering a warm and friendly welcome to whoever comes into the coffee lounge. Unlimited Tea, coffee or hot chocolate is on offer, and the same applies to cereals and cooked breakfasts.

This important work could not take place without the amazing support from our volunteers and we even have a poet in our midst. To the right is a poem that Diane wrote on the 14th November 2026 to celebrate our two-year anniversary. Such beautiful words mean a lot, however, I'm not sure what she means about my jokes.

Speaking of which, have you heard the one about ……. DELETED by the Editor to save you groaning!



Keith and Jude Stubbs

Fun Fact

Someone (Keith, who else!) also worked out the total length of the 14,000 sausages that we've given out, if placed end-to-end, would stretch to about a mile!

Two years ago, a little idea began,
With Keith at the helm and a very big plan.
With Jude in the kitchen, the cooking underway,
They opened their doors and began serving each day.

Two years have passed, and just look what we've done,
Over 6,000 guests welcomed, fed and shown love.
14,000 sausages, beans by the ton,
And countless warm meals, all shared with everyone.

A team came together, with hearts full of care,
Volunteers giving their time, always willing to share.
No fuss, no glory, no wanting a prize,
Just helping those people who need us sometimes.

Now Keith, bless his heart, has a joke up his sleeve,
Though why he tells them is hard to believe!
We roll our eyes, shake our heads and despair,
But somehow his jokes keep filling the air!

And Jude in the kitchen, the real boss we know,
Keeps Keith on his toes and makes sure things flow.
Keith likes to think that he's running the show,
But we all know who's boss, even if he won't know!

Behind all the laughter, there's hard work to see,
Finding the funding to keep us running and free.
The hours, the effort, the worry and care,
Making sure there's a welcome and food to be shared.

You give more than meals, more than tea and a plate,
You give people kindness when life hasn't been great.
A friendly face, a warm welcome, a place to belong,
And the feeling that someone cares all along.

So, Keith and Jude, on this special day,
We want you to know what we're trying to say.
We're grateful for all that you both do,
And proud to be part of this wonderful crew.

Two years of laughter, of kindness and care,
Of sausages, beans and the love that we share.
Here's to the next chapter, whatever it brings,
More full plates, more laughter and hopefully better jokes from Keith!



Happy 2nd Anniversary to the Soup Kitchen! With love and thanks from all the volunteers.

Diane Jones

Fairtrade Stalls

Crafts from the developing world do not carry the Fairtrade mark but are made by people following the same principles. My stall offers these 'Fairly Traded' items:

- Felt robins from Nepal
- Wooden toys from Sri Lanka
- Olive wood items from Bethlehem
- Glitzy boxes from India
- Strong and colourful canvas bags from India

There are also quality greetings cards (60p each or 2 for £1). Bookmarks (50p). All these have a Christian message and are purchased from TLM (The Leprosy Mission). You can also find some Christian and Christmas themed items from Hanley's Christian Books Centre. The dates of the next Fairtrade stalls are after the 9am and 10:30am services on Sunday 13th Dec. and Sunday 17th Jan. Why not come along and take a look? You may find something for a family member, friend or even yourself!!



Ann Worthington

P.S. Don't forget, it's CASH only!



Regular Activities at SwanBank

Sunday

Sunday Services at 9am, 10:30am and 6:15pm.
Sunday Night Young Adults – Fellowship Rm, 8-9pm.

Monday

Bible Study – Coffee Bar, 10-11:30am.
Hope & Hospitality, Soup Kitchen – Coffee Lounge, 10am -12noon.
Dementia Activity Group – Coffee Lounge, 1-3pm.
SwanBank Community Choir – Fellowship Room, 7:30-9pm 2nd & 4th Mondays of each month.

Choir are having a temporary break

Tuesday

Little Treasures (0-4 year olds) – Lower Hall, 9:30 -11am (*term time only).*
Chatty Café – Coffee Lounge, 10am -12noon.
Tuesday Club – Coffee Lounge, 1:30 -3:30pm.

Wednesday

Friends in Fellowship – Fellowship Rm, 10 -12noon.
Community Lounge/Foodbank – Lower Hall, 2-4pm.
The Edge (School years 7-11) – 7 -8:30pm (*term time only*). See **Nick Jeffries** for details.

Thursday

Prayer Time – Prayer Chapel, 9 -9:30am.
Hope & Hospitality, Soup Kitchen – Coffee Lounge, 10am -12noon.
Younger Youth 'NOISE' (School years 3-6) – Upper Hall, 5:45 -7:15pm (*term time only).* See **Nick**.
Youth Club 'PULSE' (School years 7-11) – Upper Hall, 7:30-9pm (*term time only).* See **Nick** for details.

Friday

Games Night - Coffee Lounge, 7:30pm (*2nd Friday of every month*). Bring along your own snacks!

Saturday

Messy Church (Primary school aged children) - Lower Hall, 10am -12noon (*first Saturday of each month)* –Breakfast included and only £1 per child!
Women's Walking Group – (*3rd Saturday of each month*). See **Liz Thompson** for details.
One Step Forward (Men's Walking Group) – (2pm on *2nd Saturday of every other month*). See **Matt Nixon** for details. Next walk is planned to be in January.

Contact the office on 01782 575129 for further details of all our regular activities

SWANBANK NOTICEBOARD

Why are Christmas trees so bad at knitting?

They always drop their needles!

Tuesday Club Carol Service

The Tuesday Club are holding their Carol service on Tuesday 15th Dec. at 13:45pm. All are welcome to join in.

Mid-Week Service

The Stoke-on-Trent Mission Circuit hold a mid-week service at **Whitehill Methodist Community Church** (Whitehill Road, Kidsgrove, ST7 4DS) every Wednesday starting at 10:15am.

2nd Dec. Sue Simcoe
9th Dec. Helen Young
16th Dec. Rev. Leslie Newton
23rd Dec. Rev. Arthur Wakelin & Pastor Glynis Cooper
30th Dec. Sue Simcoe

All are welcome!

Gateway Coffee Mornings

The next Gateway Coffee Morning at Goldenhill is on **Saturday 12th December** (10am till 12 noon). All are welcome!



What do you call an old snowman?

Water!

What do you get if you cross Santa with a duck?

A Christmas quacker!

Why was the turkey in the pop group?

Because he had the drumsticks!

Christmas Treats!

It's that time of the year where we're starting to prepare for our Christmas activities! As part of that, it would be great if you could buy a box of sweets (the usual suspects – Celebrations, Quality Street, Roses, mince pies etc..) that the church can then use over the Christmas period.





Church Events or Articles for the Magazine

If there are any church groups or events (at SwanBank or even further afield) that you would like advertising on the noticeboard or if you have articles for the Magazine, then please contact either **Shirley Brooks** or **Nigel Johnson.**



Past issues can be also found at https://www.swanbank.org.uk/newsletter/

Swan Bank Church, Swan Square, Burslem, ST6 2AA
Office hours:- 10am - 4pm, Tuesday - Thursday
01782 575129 admin@swanbank.org.uk www.swanbank.org.uk

Sunday 10:30am Service, live stream links:-

www.youtube.com/@SwanBank/streams or
www.facebook.com/swanbank/?locale=en_GB

Issue No. 38

CHRISTMAS AT SWANBANK

SCAN ME

Christmas Day
Volunteers Needed

Can you spare some time this Christmas Day? Whether you can help with transport, deliver meals, prepare and serve food, or simply offer friendship and company, every little bit helps us share the love and hope of Christmas with our community.

If you can help with any of these, please sign up using the QR code or call the office on:
01782 575129

SWANBANK

Volunteering on Christmas Day

As usual we are looking for volunteers to step forward for the following roles on Christmas Day.

- Delivery of meals and 'At Home' gifts
- Collecting people from home to attend the Christmas Dinner at Church
- Picking up after the Christmas Dinner and taking folk home
- Kitchen – food preparation
- Serving Dinner
- Dishes, table clearing, room clearance
- General cleaning and tidying, washroom checks and topping up supplies and cleaning
- Checking in visitors
- Chatting and making all welcome in the auditorium
- Coffee lounge and quiet space, accompanying those who prefer this area

Look out for the sign-up sheet at church.

CHRISTMAS AT SWANBANK

JOIN US THIS CHRISTMAS TO FIND OUT WHAT THE MOST IMPORTANT CHRISTMAS MESSAGE IS!

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT EACH EVENT PLEASE SEE OUR WEBSITE OR FACEBOOK PAGE.



CHRISTMAS AT SWANBANK

2ND DECEMBER Advent Bible Study 7:30-9pm	5TH DECEMBER Christmas Messy Church 10am-12pm
6TH DECEMBER Baptisms, Memberships 10:30am	9TH DECEMBER Advent Bible Study 7:30-9pm
11TH DECEMBER Carols Crawl 6.30pm	13TH DECEMBER Nativity 10:30
16TH DECEMBER Advent Bible Study 7:30-9pm	18TH DECEMBER Family Film Night food at 5.30pm
20TH DECEMBER Traditional Carol Service 10.30am	20TH DECEMBER Christingle 4pm and 6pm
24TH DECEMBER Christmas Eve Communion 11.30pm	25TH DECEMBER Christmas Day Celebration 10.30am



CHRISTMAS AT SWANBANK



Carols in Local Care Homes



There is a wonderful opportunity to support the Care Home Ministry Team in singing carols in various local care homes. The full list of dates, times and venues are below,

- **Mon 14th Dec. 11am**, Golden Park, Greyhound Way, Cobridge, ST6 3LL.
- **Fri 11th Dec. 11am**, Camoy's Court, Moore St, Cobridge, ST6 2HF.
- **Tues 8th Dec. 11am**, Goldendale House, Plex St, Tunstall, ST6 5JQ.
- **Tues 22nd Dec. 11am,** Chatterley Court, Chell Heath Rd, ST6 6FG.

Please speak to **Shirley Brooks** if you would like to come along. Or email:- shirley@swanbank.org.uk

Give this Christmas

As many of you will already know, each year SwanBank hosts a meal on Christmas Day. This is one of our biggest events of the year and it's an opportunity to bring some festive joy into the lives of those who may not have the privilege of a hot Christmas dinner or loved ones to share the special day with.

This year we want to give YOU the opportunity to support vulnerable individuals within our local communities. Through the lead up to Christmas, we will be selling Christmas Baubles in the hopes of raising money for our Christmas meal.

For £5 you will be gifting someone a Christmas dinner, and for £10 you can gift both a Christmas dinner and a present! In return you will receive a bauble to hang on your tree as a symbol of your generosity and a reminder of the importance of giving at Christmas.

If you would like to buy a bauble and help to brighten someone's Christmas Day, there will be the opportunity to donate after both the 9am and 10.30am services throughout the lead up to Christmas. And if you aren't able to attend our services but still wish to donate, you can contact SwanBank by either emailing us at admin@swanbank.org.uk or phoning us at 01782 575129

Of course, this isn't the only way to 'Give at Christmas', here at SwanBank we have lots of volunteering opportunities throughout the festive season that we would love you to get involved with. If you are interested and would like to find out more, please get in touch with a member of staff, using the same contact information as provided above.

I hope that the upcoming festive season will bring you many blessings and pray that amongst the chaos of Christmas, you may find moments of peace and time to dwell in the presence of God.

Ellie Hibberts



A CHRIST-CENTERED Christmas

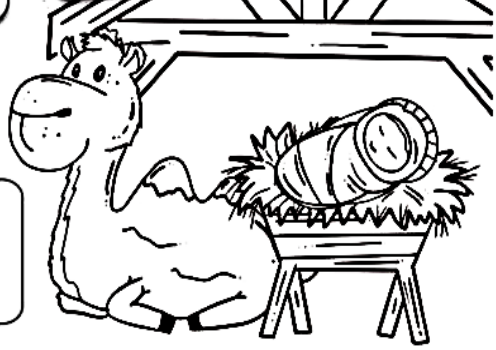
ADVENT READING PLAN

Explore the true meaning of Christmas as you travel through God's Word. Discover God's promises he fulfilled through the birth of His only Son, the **KING OF KINGS.**

1 Isaiah 7:14	2 Isaiah 9:6-7	3 Malachi 3:1	4 Micah 5:2-4	5 Luke 1:5-7	6 Luke 1:10-15	7 Luke 1:18-22	8 Luke 1:24-25
9 Luke 1:26-29	10 Luke 1:30-33	11 Luke 2:1-5	12 Luke 2:6-7	13 Luke 2:8-14	14 Luke 2:15-20		
15 Matthew 1:18-21	16 Matthew 1:22-25	17 Matthew 2:1-3	18 Matthew 2:4-6	19 Matthew 2:7-9	20 Matthew 2:10-12	21 Romans 15:13	
22 Galatians 4:4-5	23 Philippians 2:8-11	24 James 1:16-18	25 John 3:16				

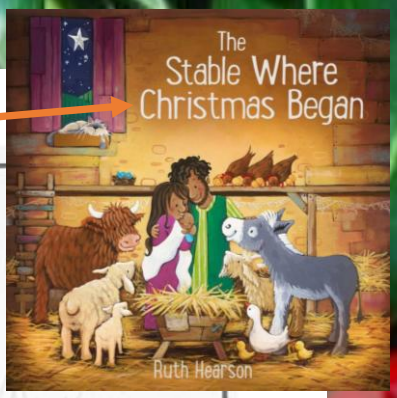






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Colouring page from Ruth Hearson's new book!





"The Stable Where Christmas Began" Ruth Hearson. SPCK Books 2026 ruthhearson.co.uk @ruthhearsonillustrator