



*"We exist to receive and share the love of God"*



## *Hurst Cross Fantasy Village*

*Twelve Months ~ A global Christian story  
in a local village*

# 1. Are you there?

If you look up the word fantasy in the dictionary you will find words like - impossible, improbable, unlikely, imaginary, creative, artistic....Hurst Fantasy Village is to be all of those ideas, mixing the real with the fantastic, hope and belief with fact. The first phase of the Hurst Fantasy Village explored our homes, our domestic identity - 'putting ourselves on the map'. The village has been built on a map which mixes the real, the improbable, the highly unlikely and the impossible. In Phase 1, a train skirted the edges of our village, passing Hurst Cross and St John's church, shops, schools - well, they are all real enough aren't they? We use the phrase 'safe as houses' and yet we know that only recently, the tragedy in Curzon Road, confounded that statement.

Take a moment to look at the Hurst Fantasy Village and let your imagination take you wherever you want to go. Put your own house on the map, recreate a factory which used to be in the area, or a cinema. What is missing? In a Fantasy Village we have licence to mix the real with the imaginary.

During the season of Advent, we embarked on the symbolic journey of Mary and Joseph to the stable. They travelled around our village, calling at the homes of members of our church community, seeking shelter and rest. We watched their journey, alongside the decorations, the Christmas trees and the steam train which chugged around our village

*'And the time came for her child to be born, and she wrapped him in rolls of newspaper and laid him in a cardboard box, because there was no room...'*

Is our Village up to the challenge of supporting the needy, the homeless, the helpless, the vulnerable, those on the edges of society? Who or what is missing from the Village. Are you there?



## 2. Everyday village life

Once the Christmas decorations had been stored for another year, the next phase of Hurst Fantasy Village sought to reflect the next stage of the gospel story. Our houses, all still there, together with shops, schools, and churches and ‘peppered’ through our village were snippets of Jesus’ life; his upbringing, his baptism by John the Baptist, the call of his disciples, his stories, teachings, his parables. All of these remain a part of our village sprinkled amongst our everyday lives; good news stories running alongside the hurt, the pain and the tragedy.

There was one very significant difference however : a desert had formed through the centre of our village, right through the middle of the main street, through the centre of our lives—a hard place challenging us to look at ourselves more closely, to make a change, to make a difference. No obvious crossing places, no train or bus to get us across safely to the other side. We had and have decisions to make.

At this phase of our Fantasy Village, the season of Lent was looming; just around the corner. The Fantasy desert exists to challenge us to step out of our comfort zone, to take a risk... maybe to conduct a difficult meeting or conversation, visit someone we have not seen in a long time, or to pray for someone who needs our support; to ‘get stuck into’ something, or maybe to walk away... to do something to make a difference, for us or to someone else.

Through the Christian story, Jesus' life and teachings run parallel to the challenges we meet in our everyday lives. We pride our 21st century culture on its sophisticated communication regime -its mobile phones, internet, social chat sites. However, anyone who has ever advertised an event in a newspaper, through social media or posters, will know that whilst these techniques work to a degree, there is no substitute for the power of the community, of 'real' interaction, where people talk to each other. Yes indeed, gossip is a risk, but that is how stories, good or bad, get around. Think of the activity at the school gate, parents and carers waiting to collect their children at the end of an all too short school day! That was how Jesus' reputation got around.

The desert is with us all in some sense—how we use our desert times, our desert experiences is up to us.

*Another question:* What is our approach to the desert? Do we run across the road hoping to avoid a confrontation, or pick our way through silently so as to not ruffle feathers—perhaps avoiding eye contact? Do we embrace our 'desert place' as an opportunity to make a change in our lives and the lives of others?

*Someone once said - 'Doing nothing is fine—just make that decision...'*

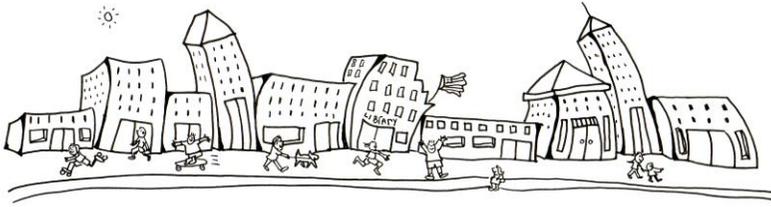


### 3. Difficult Times

The Baptism of Jesus, the prayer and reflection in the wilderness, the call of the disciples and Jesus' life and ministry have all been played out in our Fantasy Village. The scene was now set for the most significant journey of Jesus' life.

This phase of our story follows Jesus' journey from the entry into Jerusalem, through Holy Week, the last supper, his last hour in the garden of Gethsemane, and the events which led up to his final journey, the way of the Cross, the 'Via Dolorosa'

*And its all right here, not only in a far-away place thousands of years ago, but in this place and in this time, - played out in front of our eyes, in our own lives, amongst our own difficulties and challenges, our own life experiences.*



## 4. In joyful expectation....

The fourth phase of our Fantasy village reads like the 'happy ending. After the horror and sadness of the Passion Gospel charting the tragic events which led up to Easter Eve. The village hints at the power of the gospel in the lives of ordinary people. From this point onwards the spirit of Jesus really begins its work.

A series of resurrection stories confirm Jesus' ever living presence in the lives and experiences of ordinary people. Our village is completed by an explosion of flowers, created by many hands, symbolise the proof that the spirit of Jesus lives and breathes in the lives of each of us.

The next phase of the village, the coming of the Holy Spirit confirms this that God has no hands on earth but our hands,

Live the joy and have a very happy and blessed Easter.



## 5. Sending out - many hands.....

Have you noticed how much of the Christian Story is about journeys? The Bible is packed with stories about people journeying in search of something - often something better - in the Old Testament, the Israelites journeying across the desert and crossing the Red Sea, Abraham's journey in response to God's call, Joseph's capture by the Ishmaelites and subsequent journey to Egypt.

In the New Testament we have the journey of Mary and Joseph from Bethlehem to Jerusalem prior to the birth of Jesus and the flight into Egypt, when Mary and Joseph journeyed Jesus to escape the persecution by King Herod. Jesus tells the parable of the man journeying from Jerusalem to Jericho who is attacked by thieves, and we have Jesus' journey to the cross - the *Via Dolorosa*.

Journeys - all journeys. All for a reason - searching for something. And journeys happen all the time - refugees, armies, pilgrims - journeying towards something or someone. We all make journeys, however big or small, every day of our lives. We journey to work on a bus or train, maybe to work, to visit friends and family, to take holidays - all to make life better for ourselves and our families. We journey to shop for food, for clothes, for household goods, for presents. We journey for medical appointments. More often than not our journeys are in pursuit of something which will make life better - even when we run away to avoid something maybe we are hoping our situation will improve.

They do say that life is a journey - they also say that the grass is always greener on the other side!

Our Fantasy Village itself has reflected our journeying lives, its train tracks, roadways and pavements marking our routes for us and for our families and friends.

Jesus' final journey looks to have been one way. However, with the twist of any good story or thriller, the tables are turned in the last scene and the roles are reversed.

After the Ascension, we read in our gospel stories of the Holy Spirit. Jesus disciples were empowered, given confidence to reach out, to journey into the everyday, to mend, heal and make new people's lives and join in their respective journeys.

Between Ascension and Pentecost the Fantasy Village begins to reflect this new energy, in the form of our many hands as a congregation and a community, reaching into and touching lives with the love of God.

Make sure your hand is one of the many spreading across Hurst Cross in the coming weeks and months as we mark our daily journeying amongst our communities. Those journeys are there for the making and are ours to make.

*Christ has no hands on earth but our hands.*



## 6. 'Homeless Jesus'

October 2017 saw homeless people appear on the streets of Hurst as we picked up the theme of homelessness for our Harvest theme.

The national statistics for Homeless people suggest that there are 70 x more people on the streets of Manchester towns than ever before and that Manchester City centre is one of the most challenged places in terms of the homeless.

The reasons for homelessness are many fold. the greatest percentage of victims of homelessness are people who have lost their employment and as a result join the

downward spiral of insufficient money to maintain a place to live, buy food.....

Take away money and you take away the means to make choices. Take away freedom and dignity and the options become very limited. It could happen to any of us.

One of the most powerful homeless images is of a person sinking into the concrete pathway, seemingly a one way trip to becoming invisible in society. For the Harvest Service this year, the young people of the Junior Choristers created a presentation about Homelessness. The inspiration for this presentation was ' Homeless Jesus' - fashioned in bronze by Canadian Sculptor, Timothy Schmalz. A homeless figure sleeps on a park bench. On close inspection the figure bears the stigmata ( wounds ) of Christ and the crown of thorns. This Sculptures of this challenging figure are being installed in a growing number of cities - including outside St Ann's Church in the centre of Manchester. The Homelessness presentation was based on the reading from Matthew's Gospel where Jesus is asked the question - '*When did we see you homeless, or sick, or a stranger?....*Through drama and poetry the young people sought to communicate some of the issues of homelessness we face today as a community.

Harvest gifts this year were invited for the Manchester Booth Centre.



## ***7. Where have all the flowers gone?'***

You may remember, if you are old enough, a song written by Pete Seeger made famous by Peter, Paul and Mary in the early sixties. 'Where have all the flowers gone' is a profound comment on the rhythm of life.

We are born, we have choices made for us, then we make our own choices. We live the best life we can and then that rhythm of life passes to others.

The Song moves through the cycle of creation and life choices and then to the end of life, hinting that there may have been regrets along the way.

During the season of Remembrance our Fantasy Village takes on an air of parting, of loss and of misgivings. Our Remembrance Sunday theme will take a look at the fallout of war, the killing fields which hold the painful memories of waste and loss but also the fallout of those left behind when huge sections of the community were conscripted.

There were those who never saw their partners again, children who never met their own fathers, indeed partners, mainly women for whom life moved on whilst their husbands, boyfriends were in service. Many men returned from war but never really came home in their hearts - too much had changed and life seldom goes back to where it was.

The poetry of Victoria Kelly challenges us to think very differently about the experiences of those who do not actually go to war, but are still part of the picture. Her poem -'When men go off to war' is not easy reading..... here is a short excerpt..

'What happens when they leave  
is that the houses fold up like paper dolls,  
the children roll up their socks and sweaters  
and tuck the dogs into little black suitcases....  
... some of our own men won't come home again;  
and sometimes, a wife or two won't either.  
She'll meet someone else, say, and it's one of those things  
we don't talk about, how people fall in and out of love,  
....

And then, a few days before the planes fly in,  
we return. We roll out the sidewalks and make the beds,  
tether the trees to the yard.  
On the airfield, everything is as it should be—  
our matte red lipstick, the babies blanketed inside strollers.  
Only, our husbands look at us a little sadly,  
the way people do when they know  
they have changed but don't want to say it.  
Instead they say, What have you been doing all this time?  
And we say, Oh you know, the dishes,  
and they laugh and say,  
Thank God some things stay the same.'

Earlier this year. some of our local Scouts made a pilgrimage to the killing fields of Ypres, and shared their experiences at the Remembrance Sunday service. Every day at Ypres, the dead are remembered , the Last Post is sounded and two minutes silence is observed.

*When will we ever learn?*

*When will we ever learn*

So there it is - twelve months in the life of a community played out alongside twelve months of the Christian Story.

# The Hurst Fantasy Village

is a Community Art Project currently on display in the North Transept Exhibition space at St John the Evangelist Church, Hurst, Ashton u Lyne OL6 8EZ

Wendy Diamond November 2017

*For more on the life and activities of St John the Evangelist Hurst Cross visit our website*

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