

connecting faith and daily life



A deep clean

Katharine Smith *reflects on* Luke 3:1-6 and Malachi 3:1-4

The woodwork, walls and ceilings are being repainted. Threadbare carpets are being replaced; soft furnishings are being cleaned. Something exciting is happening. The news is in the air we breathe. He's coming, the king is coming at long last – quick, get ready, prepare for the promised day of the Lord, bringing freedom and peace.

And us? What about us? Aren't we clean and smart enough to meet the king? Certainly we'll wash and put on our best, maybe even new, clothes. But inside? We have to be clean inside as well? Suddenly, we remember speaking unkindly about a colleague, being impatient with a friend,

feeling jealous of someone's good fortune, hanging on to an old grudge.

Suddenly we think of the words of the prophet Malachi: "who can endure the day of his coming... he is like a refiner's fire..." Suddenly we don't feel so excited, after all. We're afraid of standing before the king "to whom all hearts are open, all desires known", as the Collect for Purity puts it. We become aware that we need God's refining fire and the deep waters of baptism. We know we need God's forgiveness and help to be ready to receive the Son, both in the Bethlehem stable, as we remember his birth, and at his coming again in clouds of glory. ☺

Lord Jesus, as we prepare to celebrate your birth, help us also to prepare for your return. Give us a vision of your glory, shine your light in our darkness and bring joy and peace into our hearts and minds. Amen.

Fuel Poverty Part 4 – generosity

by Lee Tulfer

The looming festive season is an added source of anxiety for those facing fuel poverty. Bills are over twice what they were a couple of years ago, while incomes have barely risen. Where is the money going to come from for the prepayment meter card, to keep the heating on over the holidays while trying to give the children a "normal" Christmas? Will it be possible to buy any of the presents

on the list they posted to Lapland? Hebrews 13 tells us, "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have". There are many local and national charities who support those struggling with fuel poverty. If you are in need of help, don't be afraid to ask for it. Or if you are fortunate enough to be in a position to help, why not help to make someone's Christmas that bit happier?

Lee is Training and Events Officer for Severn Wye Energy Agency, a non-profit company and registered charity mainly operating across Wales and its English border counties, supporting communities, residents and businesses to create a sustainable, affordable, low-carbon future. ☺

Advent

Part 2 – the composer who set Christmas to music

by Julian Smith

Christmas is a time of tradition and nowhere more than in the field of music. For many people the soundtrack of Christmas comprises the carols they grew up with and can sing from memory. One person who was largely responsible for forming this musical tradition was the composer and folk-song collector Ralph Vaughan Williams.

RVW, as he's known, loved Christmas, creating his own

traditions around the season. An annual reading of A Christmas Carol and a gathering of friends to sing Christmas music were among his seasonal highlights. His catalogue of Christmas compositions is vast, testifying to a long and active musical life.

But it is as an editor that RVW created the music of Christmas. Through *The English Hymnal* and *The Oxford Book of Carols*, RVW preserved the best of the old, introduced timeless new carols and drew on the English folk tradition to give us many much-loved melodies. ☺

“Christmas has lost its meaning for us because we have lost the spirit of expectancy. We cannot prepare for an observance. We must prepare for an experience.”

Handel H. Brown, author