

CHURCH NEWS

First Hollywood Presbyterian Church

Christmas 2019



Records and Notices



Deaths:

25th October 2019
Hugh Coulter

Any contributions to the Church News are welcome at any time. Please forward to office@firsthollywood.co.uk or Tel 90425035

*Cover Image: Taken by Mark Shields
Image: New Worship Centre Banner*

First Holywood Christmas Services 2019

Sunday 8th December

6.30pm Cancer Research Christmas Carol Service

Thursday 12th December

12.30pm Seniors Christmas Lunch

Sunday 15th December

11.00am All Age Christmas Service

Sunday 22nd December

11.00am Christmas Carol Service

Wednesday 25th December

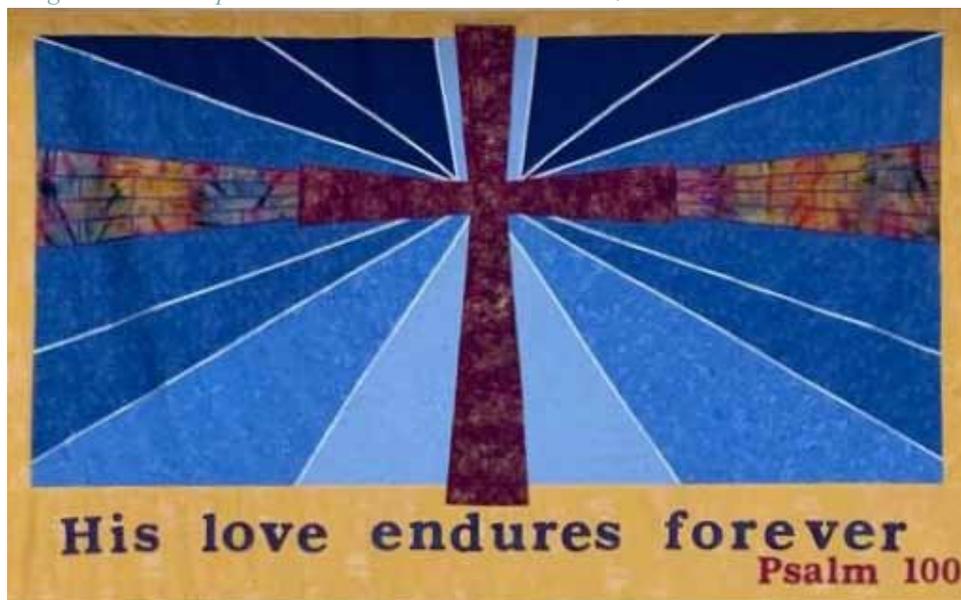
10.00am Joint Christmas Day Service at High Street Presbyterian Church

Tuesday 31st December

11.30pm New Year's Eve Service

Please plan to join us for our Christmas celebrations.

www.firsthollywood.co.uk



A Wonderful True Story

One of the television programmes I like to try and watch during the year is Masterchef. I love the series when it involves the non-celebrities and the non-professionals, in other words, the normal people like you and me!

It's interesting to see how they handle a test situation and how well they interpret the task they have been asked to do.

Sometimes they play it really safe and use one of their gran's classic recipes for something everyone loves, while there are times they try to be almost too clever and the dish resembles nothing like what it's called. So, often you hear them say, for example: "this is a deconstructed steak and kidney pie". There is some steak here and a little gravy over there with a tiny disc of pastry off to one side. I find myself looking at it and praying no one would ever try to serve me something like that and call it "steak and kidney pie". For me, I would rather have the good old faithful pie my gran and my mother always made for me. It would be one I could recognize immediately and anticipate the textures and flavours. I love it because there is a sense of everything being in the right place and, in a way, that is familiar.



When it comes to Christmas, there can be pressure on ministers to present a Christmas to their congregation that is different and original and even slightly quirky. There is a sense that we can't keep doing the same old story of Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in the manger the way the Bible tells it. We need to shake it up a bit, we

need to rearrange things to cause our congregation to think about it and not let it wash over them. There is a sense that we need to deconstruct Christmas in such a way as the congregation is left trying to piece it all together. It's an unpleasant feeling when you approach Christmas and you feel that you have to make the most wonderful of stories wonderful again by repackaging them. Of course, changing the angle on who is telling the story is sometimes helpful, being culturally aware of the time and place is also an interesting way to gain a new, and perhaps much needed, fresh perspective. However, it is such an amazingly wonderful true story that it really needs little from anyone to make

it any better. In fact, when you consider it, you realize that it cannot actually be improved upon. God, in His love for the world, gave His son as a gift that we did not deserve, so that we could learn from Him and trust and follow Him. God let Him come in the shape of a tiny baby to fulfill an ancient prophecy. He allowed Him to come to the two people He trusted to raise and protect His Son until such times as He could care for Himself. He allowed His Son be born into a world that would not accept Him but beat and eventually kill Him for being honest about who He was.

It's an absolutely amazing story of unconditional love and grace and if we try to retell it so it's different or fashionable or mentally challenging, then we lose the wonder and sense of the Father's love for us, that while we were still sinners, God sent His Son to die for us.

This Christmas, can I encourage you to enjoy the season with family and friends but hold onto this wonderful, untouchable story and allow God through His Holy Spirit to make it alive in your heart once again.

May I wish you and yours a happy and peaceful Christmas and New year from myself, Tracey and our family. God Bless for 2020.

Your friend, Alan.

HARVEST 2019





SUNDAY 1ST SEPTEMBER - NOBLE'S RETIREMENT LUNCH

We would like to thank the congregation for the very special concluding day of ministry in First Holywood. The whole occasion was overwhelming and outstanding and something we will never forget.

The generosity demonstrated through the gifts we received was excessive and greatly appreciated. We find it difficult to put into words the effect of the affection and kindness we have received, and the expressions of appreciation have touched our hearts.

Our prayer is that the congregation will continue to flourish and that the next few months will be exciting as a new minister is sought.

Yours in the service of the Lord,
Noble and Florence





GB/BB Enrolment Service on Sunday 3rd November 2019

Blythswood Shoebox Appeal 2019

First Holywood sent 114 shoeboxes to the Blythswood Appeal this year.
Thank you to everyone who contributed.



THE BANNER

Having seen scripture banners in various churches over the years, a few of us were inspired to have a go! With Session's blessing and Noble's request for a contemporary piece, we met to prayerfully discuss the way forward.

All of us liked to sew and Elizabeth had lots of experience with patchwork and quilting but none of us had made a banner before. So where to start? We visited the banner group at Bangor West where Roberta and her team gave us lots of advice and inspired us to get going.

There were many decisions to make. Initially, not all answers were made clear but we did feel led to create a banner which would tie in with our church's 400th Anniversary, albeit a few years late, and which would rejoice in the faithfulness of God. We spoke to Jenny Russell about our thoughts and she kindly drew up a design for us to follow. We chose Psalm 100: 5, from which we selected the words 'His love endures forever'.

So then to work! Materials were sourced in Windmill Fabrics, Saintfield and the Wool Shop in Newtownards, but who was brave enough to start cutting?



Fortunately, Fiona was a marvel at setting angles and she gave us the confidence to take the next step. The majority of the banner is hand sewn and Pamela, who ensured we didn't dilly dally and kept us on task, is convinced there are in the region of three million small stitches holding the many layers together!! She is joking, I think! With all hand

sewing completed, the next step was to secure the border. With all hands on deck Elizabeth set to work with her trusty sewing machine.

And so it was finished, and our sincere thanks go to Stephen Woodrow who hung the banner and to Colin Dewar who transported the essential extension ladders. It may have taken a little longer than anticipated but we worked as a team around each other's work, family commitments and holidays. During that time our little sewing group also became a fellowship group where we prayerfully supported each other in good times and bad. There were many challenges along the way due to the size and non-traditional improvised sewing techniques but the Lord always made the way plain when we waited patiently on Him. We trust the banner will bring blessing to our church family and encourage us all to reflect on the faithfulness of God.

Elizabeth Boland, Pamela Stevenson, Fiona Woods and Joy Michael



NOT SO AULD!

Congratulations to Reverend John McConnell (Con) Auld, who celebrated his NINETIETH birthday on 15th September and has enjoyed a lifetime association with this congregation. Con was born in Clanbrassil, Cultra, and after attending Sullivan Upper and Belfast Royal Academy, he studied for his degree at Trinity College, Dublin, afterwards gaining a scholarship to Princeton, New Jersey. He was licensed and ordained for the Presbyterian ministry in June 1954, following which, he went to Goodwood in Adelaide, Australia, with the Commonwealth Mission of the PCI where he ministered for three years before returning to Northern Ireland and taking up a teaching post at RBAI, where he remained for over thirty years.

In the 1970's and 80's he represented Holywood on the North Down Borough Council and served as Mayor of North Down on four occasions. As a founder member of the American Youth Foundation, he spent ten summers at Lake Michigan teaching sailing and lecturing. After purchasing an old water-mill at Port Braddon, Con converted a farm building into a small ecumenical chapel for members and clergy of Catholic, Reformed and Orthodox churches. Over the years he raised more than £100,000 for local charities.

As a local historian, Con has written a number of important books about Holywood, its buildings and its residents.

He celebrated his ninetieth birthday amid lots of laughter at a lunch hosted by Sally Guertler and accompanied by a close circle of long-time friends. We wish him God's continued blessing, good health and many happy returns!



Let's tell the coming generation!

Nigel Craig

Recently I had the immense honour of speaking with the great-great-great granddaughters of the late Reverend Professor Roger Watts. Watts was one of the most distinguished theologians to arise in the history of Irish Presbyterianism. A massive portrait of this spiritual giant hangs in the Gamble Library of Union Theological College. Watts, the youngest of fourteen children, was raised in a God-fearing Presbyterian home in Co. Down. Aged twenty-seven he emigrated to America. After studying law, Watts read theology in the



prestigious old Princeton Seminary in New Jersey, where he came under the influence of the godly Charles Hodge. Watts then went on to serve as a minister in Philadelphia and Dublin, before being called to the Chair of Theology in the Presbyterian College in Belfast (now Union Theological College) in 1852.

Under Watts' principalship, the College became known as a 'Second Princeton'. Watts, along with his theological contemporaries in the US, BB Warfield and AA Hodge, was well known for contending for the historic Reformed faith in an era when German theological liberalism, in the form of higher criticism, was beginning to impact negatively Presbyterian churches across the world. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland recognised Watts' fidelity to Christ and His Church by electing him Moderator of the General Assembly in 1879. Union Theological College, with the help of the Holy Spirit, continues to guard the deposit entrusted to it. (2 Timothy 1:14)

Watts, however, was no mere dry academic. According to R.E.L. Rodgers, 'He was an orthodox theologian but he was of the Spurgeon type. None in preaching gave a freer or more urgent offer of salvation to the sinner.' (Incidentally, C.H. Spurgeon commented favourably on Watts' writing.) How blessed I was, then, to speak with Watts' great-great-great granddaughters, Jenny and Kimra. These young ladies, like their great-great-great grandfather, both love Jesus Christ and have been serving Him in mission. How awe-inspiring to see the Lord keep His covenantal promises to the late Professor Watts, namely, that He would be his God, and the God of his descendants after him.

May this be an encouragement to each one of you as you teach your children the ways of the Lord, point them to Jesus Christ, and pray for the Holy Spirit to work invisibly in their hearts. Although passing on the baton of faith is primarily the role of the family, we are not to labour alone. The church, through its mission and ministries, has a vitally important role in this task, which has become increasingly challenging. I am pleased, therefore, to see the emphasis on youth and children's ministry in First Holywood. We pray that this would be sustained and developed under our next minister, and would impact children yet unborn.

R.E.L. Rodger, The Life and Works of Robert Watts, (Tain, Ross-shire, Christian Focus, 1989) 21

VACANCY UPDATE

As you will know by now we were granted 'Leave to Call' by the Linkage Commission on 22nd October 2019. We are very grateful to Craig Russell for making a concise and positive presentation to the Commission, on behalf of the congregation. We also acknowledge the attendance of Joe Campbell, Fiona Woods and Graeme Thompson who helped answer questions.

Before we begin looking for a minister we are required to draw up a list of voting members. Voting members, essentially, are 'communicants on the roll of the congregation who are listed as having contributed to stipend or weekly freewill offering (FWO) of the congregation in the last financial year'. We would love for all of our communicants, especially our young people, to be a part of this exciting process. Kirk Session is aware, however, that some communicants may not be listed as having contributed in 2019. If that applies to you, we would encourage you to contribute formally to the FWO by the end of 2019. If you would like more details as to how you can do this, or if you are not sure if you are entitled to be on the Voting List, please speak to Craig Russell, or any other member of Kirk Session.

Once we have our Voting List compiled in January 2020, we will be inviting voting members to propose the names of possible candidates.

Please continue to pray for this process, for all of us who are involved in leading the congregation and process, and for the one whom the Lord will call. And as a covenant community let's pledge with the Psalmist: '*We will not hide them from our children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done... that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God.*' (Psalm 78:4,6-7 ESV).

Manse Repairs/Update

Although the manse is only twenty-eight years old and is structurally sound, it has had no major refurbishments during that time, and this is our opportunity (and indeed our requirement) to do those works.

This has been carefully considered by all involved and various quotes have been received which come within a required budget of £75,000.

1. New kitchen including electrical and mechanical items to be replaced.
2. Two new bathroom refurbishments including electrical and mechanical installation and new bathroom suites including showers.
3. The current windows have some double glazed units that have started to break down and have condensation. Survey to be carried out to inspect and replace any defective double glazed unit. At the same time all opening sashes are to be serviced, with rubber gaskets replaced if required.
4. The interior of the property to be redecorated.
5. All existing carpets in the property to be replaced.
6. Existing gas boiler to be serviced and an inspection carried out on the heating installation. Valves and radiators to be checked for operation and system to receive a power flush.
7. Currently the concrete window cills are showing signs of reinforcement rusting and this is causing the cills to crack. All defective concrete window cills are to be replaced.
8. There are large overhanging trees that need trimmed during the winter months.
9. A NIAC electrical inspection was carried out and has identified some remedial works.

We have funds to do these works without delaying the vacancy process, but we would ask members to be mindful of the needs for this and other church maintenance matters in your considered giving at this time. Donations should be made to the Building Fund for these repairs/replacements.



An Italian Christmas

Tracey Johnston

Everyone enjoys Christmas!

Everyone enjoys seeing Christmas sneak into our favourite shops.

Everyone enjoys mince pies and turkey, Christmas cake and Brussels sprouts.

Everyone loves to go to the carol service in the local church.

Everyone enjoys the television showing all the classic Christmas shows and films.

Everyone enjoys going to the Christmas morning service after Santa Claus has paid his visit.

Everyone except the Italians that is.

It's not that they don't enjoy these things, it's just that it doesn't happen, especially within the evangelical church.

Christmas still happens in public and more so over the last ten years.

The German Christmas markets creep down over Austria and the Alps and set themselves up for a few weeks before Christmas where all the usual German delicacies can be bought and enjoyed, but come Boxing Day they are packed away and the piazza that held them is empty and forlorn looking.

Christmas dinner consists of fish and vegetables with none of the trimmings



we enjoy in this country. If you can imagine me trying to tell the local butcher that I wanted him to bone a turkey so that I could bring him a stuffing mixture I had prepared at home! Thankfully his brother was in my English class and he was gracious enough to do what I had asked of him. It was a wonderful turkey and it went well with the amazingly sweet Brussels sprouts I had bought at the local market.

While our church did not entertain



much to do with Christmas, as they see it very much as a Roman Catholic event, they did put up a small Christmas tree (or they let me put one up!) There was no carol service so we sneaked down to the neighbouring Roman Catholic Church to hear them singing carols on the steps outside the church. People in the community would put up a nativity scene in their gardens and the council would provide us with a list of where they were, so you could walk around and have a look.

No morning Christmas Day service and Santa is somewhat hit or miss depending on what part of Italy you lived in.

There were many familiar things that we associate with Christmas missing. But it wasn't all bad either. It was nice to see Christmas in the shops in December and not starting immediately after Halloween.

It was nice visiting different Christmas markets and all the differences that there were between them. Verona was our nearest one but if we travelled a little further north into the Alpine foothills to Trento there was a huge one with the snowy peaks surrounding it.

Santa Lucia arrived around the middle of December and she filled the children's shoes with sweets (once again she was very regional and depending on where you lived she would visit you!)

After Christmas on the 6th January, La Bafana (a benevolent witch) would also come and fill a stocking for the children. In fact, La Bafana was talked about and looked forward to more than Santa Claus.

To be honest, living in Italy for four years allowed us to think and ponder over why we do the things we do.

What things are important at Christmas time?

What traditions have become more important to us than the Christmas story?

What does the way we celebrate Christmas say about our faith?

We love all the things listed at the top of this article but without Jesus at the centre they are hollow and offer no hope.

Jesus is the reason for the season.



STORIES OF CHRISTMAS

Mark Shields

We settle down by a glowing log fire, the last of the daylight already ebbing away in the late afternoon. Outside, the wind rises in the trees and speckles of sleety rain cut across the windowpane. Just a few glimmering candles light the cosy room and our thoughts turn to Christmas. Many of the things we associate with Christmas, giving it that special atmosphere, actually tell us very little about the first Advent. Snow rarely falls in Bethlehem and reindeer sightings are even rarer. Every year the task to find Christmas postage stamps with some vestige of the Christian story becomes more arduous. It's the same with cards. Wintry landscapes, plum puddings, polar bears, teddy bears, partridges, pear trees and robin redbreasts. It seems we simply don't want reminding of what started it all off. Difficult as it is to find some significance in these disparate things, there are still some links to be found with that world-



important event so long ago.

Admittedly, the redbreast presents a problem. It's said that images of this hardy little bird made their way onto cards because the Victorian postmen who delivered them wore redbreasted tunics, earning them the nickname, 'robins'. Delve a little deeper into folklore and one comes upon a story told of a clever, kindly robin who, when the fire keeping the Christ child warm in the stable began to fade, fanned it up into life again with its beating wings. Sadly, its chest was struck and burnt by an errant ember. Thus, the robin and its progeny have glowed red ever since! It's a fanciful tale that adds little to the Christmas story but perhaps reiterates

humankind's natural desire for stories of a mysterious, miraculous realm hidden behind the outer appearance of things. Maybe, if we get a card adorned with a robin this year, we might simply see it as a little natural symbol of hope. Bringing colour, life and song to the dreariest, coldest and darkest part of the year, it reassures us that warmth and light will return with the spring. Sometimes God ordains that the smallest things in His world bring us most cheer.

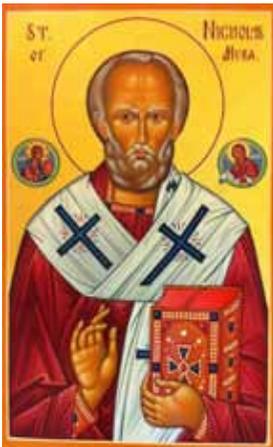
But what of other symbols of Christmas and the quaint tales that accompany them? Many of them have associations with pre-existing winter festivals. The evergreen tree symbolised life and immortality during the 'dead' of winter.

Martin Luther was one of the first to bring a fir tree indoors and appropriate it for the celebration of the arrival of the Messiah, the true and ultimate source of eternal life. Holly too was utilized, reminding us of Christ's eventual sacrifice. Its red berries for His blood and the spiked leaves for His crown of thorns. The Christmas wreath, with no beginning and end, symbolises the eternal love of God.

The Christmas tree was further adorned with candles honouring Christ as the light of the world. Sparkling tinsel, like frost on the branches or the twinkling light of the stars above the nativity, was added. There's a strange tale of tinsel's origins.



An old story goes that when the Holy family were fleeing Herod's soldiers, they sheltered in a cave. Spiders supposedly spun a web across the mouth of the cave leaving the soldiers to assume from its undisturbed state that no one could have entered, so they continued their search elsewhere and the child was saved. It is said that tinsel is strung around the tree to record the spiders' miraculous deed. It's an invention of course, but it again reflects our dim sense that even the most trifling of events may be serving some grander Divine purpose. Crowning the top of our tree with the Bethlehem star draws our gaze to the vastness of space. Even here, the cosmic motions of distant stars obey a great all-present will.



And the jolly old bearded chap with the red suit will show up - no, not Jeremy Corbyn - Santa, of course. He has his origins in stories of the benevolent St. Nicholas of Myra (in present day Turkey). A follower of Christ from a wealthy background, he was renowned for secretly helping the poor and vulnerable, sometimes throwing money down the chimneys of people he wished to help. His feast day is 6th December and he is known as the patron saint of children. We might allow a certain feeling of irony that he is also the patron saint of pawnbrokers, given the rampant cost of Christmas for some families today! His Dutch name is 'Sinterklaas' from which

we get our Santa Claus.

The giving and receiving of gifts reminds us of those offered to the Christ child. Gold, frankincense and myrrh, brought by astrologers, probably from Babylonia or Persia. They were the first non-Jews to recognise the significance of Jesus' birth and, in the gospel according to Matthew, His very first

worshippers. Naturally we are led to contemplate God's great gift to humanity and our own response. At Christmas we sing our response with Christina Rossetti's poem, "what I can I give him: give my heart".

Bells ring out to celebrate joyful events but bells were also worn along the hems of the Jewish priests' robes. The joyous peeling at Christmas might also call to mind Jesus as the great High Priest, our wonderful means of entry into the presence of God.

Returning to our tree, we can't have enough baubles. They hang like glowing winter fruits. And why should they not be symbols for us of the fruit of the Spirit? As we delight in the bright tree, could there be any better season to contemplate gathering this fruit in our lives? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. It seems we need these now more than ever.

Snow, which Isaiah compares with the word of God gently falling on humankind, has a magical quality. Wilson Bentley, who was first to photograph snowflakes, wrote of these miracles of six-fold symmetry, "every crystal was a masterpiece of design and no one design was ever repeated."

Think on that when you try to count the first flakes this winter! Even what is invisible to the naked eye and beyond, reveals the intricate fashioning of the Divine hand and something of His eternal beauty.



The mistletoe was another evergreen symbol carried over from pre-Christian lore. In Nordic traditions, enemies who met under the mistletoe were obliged to drop their weapons and embrace. Thus it symbolised the protection of life and was hung above the threshold of the home. We might see it as symbolic of the one who protects both life and soul. Jesus Christ, whom Isaiah called "*the beautiful and glorious Branch of the Lord.*"

We've grown accustomed to animals in nativity scenes. Their presence was assumed because the Christ child was laid in an animal feeding trough. There is no mention of ox or ass in the gospel accounts, yet they appear in nativity pictures as early as the second century AD. It is thought that the tradition again comes from the prophet Isaiah's words. "*The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.*"

It's a verse that is perhaps more relevant than we realise. The Christmas season seems to begin earlier each year. From October, anticipation, excitement, and even dread, begin to build and we reach a crescendo of buying, eating, viewing, partying and much else. In the excess of it all, how many of us 'do not know, do not understand' the profound meaning at its heart?

Perhaps some of these reflections on the ubiquitous emblems of the season might help us tell those around us of their deeper significance.

"The world is expression, news of God," wrote the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, "therefore its meaning is God and its work to name and praise him."

CS Lewis postulated that all folk traditions, all fairy tales, myths and legends were but stammerings and glimpses of the Deep Truth. Everything points towards this one great event that would change human life forever.

The fulfillment of all the stories that thread through nature. GOD'S INCARNATION.



Christmas is approaching and as Christians we want to bring practical aid to those in need; at Storehouse they are preparing for the busiest time of the year. Since starting in 2012, over 11,000 hampers have been supplied to people in need and each Christmas extra hampers are requested. Last year, just over 500 were delivered and this year the number is expected to be higher.

Local butchers donate meat vouchers and one voucher is put in each parcel. Local farmers and businesses continue their weekly support in abundance, and we cannot thank them enough. Special requests would include Christmas puddings, mince pies, family-size tins of biscuits and sweets, large tins of ham, bottles of Shloer etc., treats for the children, selection boxes, crackers, chocolate coins, festive bubble baths and soaps, etc. anything to make Christmas special. During the holidays, emergency hampers will be available. This Harvest, the response from schools and churches was fantastic and we hope the Christmas response will be equally so. Please remember Christmas donations should be left at church no later than **Sunday 8th December**. We would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your continued generosity to this very worthy cause.



When I want to take time out from the busyness of life, I sometimes visit the website Proverbs31.org. I enjoy it's inspirational and encouraging devotional reflections and I thought this Christmas one was worth sharing. Enjoy - Kathleen Spence

Are you ready for Christmas?

How many times on the run up to Christmas do we say to each other 'are you ready for Christmas?'

What does that mean exactly? If I were to guess what people mean when they ask one another 'are you ready for Christmas?', most may not be talking about spiritual readiness. What they mean is 'have you



made the list of all the things you need to do before 25th December?' and checked it off, ticked all the boxes?

Usually the answer is a long list of 'to do's' like sending Christmas cards, buying and wrapping gifts, baking, preparing for guests or preparing to travel, putting up decorations. What if those who were there on Christ's birth day could advise us on getting ready for Christmas, what would be on their list? Joseph might recommend we listen closely to the voice of God to prepare. Mary may suggest we ponder the miracles of heaven.

Possibly the wise men would teach us to give Jesus our most valuable gifts. The innkeeper may suggest hospitality – open your heart and home.

Jesus would likely encourage us to be a light on a hill, pointing the way for others to know him.

Comparing our 'to do' list to the ones above, I wonder, if we lived at the time of Christ's birth, would we have missed it? Does our busyness keep us from taking time to worship in the stable? Maybe we have missed many Christmases in the here and now, because we've not slowed down long enough to bow our knees and experience the miracle.

Are you ready for Christmas?



A Tale of Three Countries

I wonder how many would-be songwriters are at this very moment trying to come up with a Number One Hit? Some Christmas hits that are repeatedly played in shops, restaurants, movies and adverts year after year have allowed their writers to retire on the royalties. They've become the perfect combination of words and music that prompt the label 'classic'. Many of our Christmas hymns also have the feel of classics. Whenever the opening bars of "O Little Town of Bethlehem" are played, we immediately have a vivid picture of the first Christmas, as well as an emotional recollection of past Christmases from our own lives. The words and music fit like a glove, as though they've always existed together. But if you happen to be singing this hymn in the USA, you may find yourself thrown by a less familiar tune. Known as 'St Louis', the tune most used in America is actually the original. It came to its composer, Lewis Redner, in a dream on Christmas Eve, 1868. Which is just as well, since his choir was due to sing it next morning! Redner was the organist of Holy Trinity Church, Philadelphia, where the rector was Rev. Phillips Brooks. Brooks had just returned from the Holy Land, where he found a measure of peace after the bloodshed of the Civil War and the death of Lincoln, whose funeral oration he had given. He recalled listening to the sound of hymns 'of the wonderful night of our Saviour's birth' being sung in Bethlehem, and shortly after returning home, he wrote the lyric "O Little Town of Bethlehem". It was over twenty years until it was published in America, eventually appearing in Britain in 1903. At around the same time, English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams was tramping the lanes and villages of England making wax-disc recordings of old folk songs which he feared would be lost. One day he came upon an old villager from Forest Green in Surrey, called Mr Garman, who sang a moralising old folk song about a disobedient ploughboy. Vaughan Williams hastily scribbled down words and tune. Three years later, as musical editor of 'The English Hymnal', he read Brooks' Bethlehem carol and immediately recalled Mr Garman's song. He thought the tune, which he named 'Forest Green', a perfect match. Thus a series of strange events involving an American preacher in the Middle East, a renowned English composer and an old singing villager from Surrey, combined to give us a classic Christmas carol whose wondrous message and warm familiarity give us such pleasure, year after year.

"So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heaven."

Mark Shields

TURNING BAD NEWS INTO GOOD NEWS

Mark Shields

The tragic discovery in October of the bodies of thirty-nine Vietnamese migrants in a refrigerated container, was made more shocking as the subsequent international investigation pointed to the involvement of individuals from Ireland, north and south. Even though we sense that no country is unaffected by



human trafficking, it remains somewhat remote to most ‘ordinary’ folk. This incident suddenly brought it home to our own doorstep with the vague feeling of shame that it could be happening under our very noses. For many, it has aroused a desire to look more deeply into this crime and search for ways to help uncover and deter this inhuman ‘trade’.

**Humans-
Not For
Sale**

The idea that men, women and children, created by and loved by God, should be treated like cargo and commodity, deceived, abused and finally erased from existence by people interested only in control and financial gain, is abhorrent. Vulnerable people are being promised a brighter future when their captors are fully aware that, at best, they will be pressed into long demanding hours of labour for little or no reward

or, at worst, be sold for sex, ‘organ harvesting’ or simply disappear into the dark underbelly of what we now call ‘modern slavery’.

It has been said that there are more slaves today than at any time in human history.

Someone is in slavery if they are:

- Forced to work through mental or physical threat.
- Owned or controlled by an ‘employer’ usually through threat of abuse.
- De-humanised, treated as a commodity or bought and sold as ‘property’.
- Physically constrained or have restrictions placed on his/her freedom.

For those of us who know the joy of family love, who have more than enough food, clothing, shelter and opportunity, and, beyond these, have an awareness

that it is not ‘bread alone’ that gives our lives meaning, but spiritual hope and fulfillment, it is all the more important that we act to end human exploitation. It is our privilege to learn to see everyone through God’s eyes. “No child should be born without hope; no person should live without freedom”, to quote Desmond Tutu.

It is encouraging to be able to report that Presbyterian Women, under its current theme of ‘Restore’, has taken a lead on this by supporting, with one of its overseas special projects, the International Justice Mission as it seeks to combat cybersex trafficking. Their prayer and financial support has helped in the rescue of over one hundred children in the last year, and the conviction of



four woman traffickers.

In the broader work of our church’s outreach, the International Meeting Point on the Lisburn Road continues to give support to refugees, migrants and asylum seekers in our own province, intervening with kindness, practical and spiritual support before they might be influenced by unscrupulous traffickers. IMP always welcomes volunteer help.

<https://www.presbyterianireland.org/Mission/Mission-Projects/International-Meeting-Point.aspx>

The evil of human trafficking is on a vast scale, but it is something that every Christian should be informed and concerned about. An increasing number of websites exist with information on ways in which we can be more directly involved in combating this. Some of the facts are surprising. While the



recent tragedy involved Vietnamese people, most victims in the UK have not come from abroad. Homeless people are offered jobs, then abused, teenagers are groomed by gangs, girls and women forced into prostitution, all of these involve trafficking. Of those victims who are foreigners, most are not smuggled, but arrive through known means of transport. In other words, much of it is happening before our very eyes and either we're not equipped to notice it, or, if we're honest, we don't want to get involved.

The Salvation Army are responding with deep Christian commitment to this horrific crime, raising awareness, supporting victims and survivors, telling their stories and connecting globally with governments and organisations in 131 countries to stop trafficking at its source.

salvationarmy.org.uk/modern-slavery

The Church of Scotland has a valuable resource page on the issues. Its Anti-Human Trafficking Group is encouraging churches to work together to eradicate human trafficking.

churchofscotland.org.uk/speak_out/building_global_friendships/human_trafficking

One interesting article on their World Mission Council blog asks how our unconsidered purchasing could be buying into slavery. We all search for bargains online, but at whose cost?!

cofswmc.wordpress.com/tag/human-trafficking

A local organisation with a Christian emphasis, Embrace, based at 48 Elmwood Avenue, has a very helpful website with prayer points, news, volunteering opportunities and links to other Christian responses.

embraceni.org

The World Council of Churches also has useful information from a Christian perspective at oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/migration-and-social-justice



Other sites well worth visiting include -
unseenuk.org/our-impact/modern-slavery-is-real
nomoretraffik.com/awareness
antislavery.org
nidirect.gov.uk/articles/human-trafficking

As we celebrate Jesus, 'Light of the World', expressing hope, joy and peace and enjoying happy family gatherings this Christmas, remember those who will be cowering in the darkness, without hope, joy or peace, and pray for a heart and will to set them free.

Jesus said:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."
Luke 4:18-19



PCI is launching a new Bible study resource on the Book of Ruth entitled 'home' – six studies which take you through Ruth's story, the story of a foreigner in a foreign land. It will introduce you to some of the people who have come to Ireland looking for a home and will help you to think about your response.



- Pray for all those living as refugees or who are displaced. Pray for their safety and that those in need of humanitarian and / or medical assistance will receive it.
- Remember those who are unable to flee or who choose to remain in places of danger and / or severe economic difficulty. Pray that they too will be protected and for humanitarian and medical assistance to reach all those who need it.
- Pray for PCI's new resource called 'Home' to encourage members of our congregations to think about our response to migrants arriving here.



Life is better together.

We have something exciting to look forward to in 2020.

In this period of vacancy we don't want to stand still but rather we want to develop our faith and grow stronger individually and together.

To help us, the Kirk Session want to invite you to be part of a short six week programme launching in January.

As a congregation we will be working through a programme called:

“Fruitfulness on the Frontline”. This will involve teaching from the pulpit on certain areas of our Christian growth along with small groups meeting once a week for six weeks.

The programme is produced by the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity using DVD films to help us better see where God might be working with and through us in our different contexts during the week.

There will be opportunities to ask questions together about ideas raised by these films and to think about how we can live fruitfully in our significant ‘frontline’ encounters with non-Christians. Sessions will include Modelling Godly Character, Ministering Grace and Love, Moulding Culture and much else, with suggestions for applying what has been discussed during the week to our various ‘frontlines’. Each session will have a key question, a central aim and a core Bible passage for study. ‘Fruitfulness on the Frontline’ aims to spark our imagination and enrich our sense of wonder at the greatness and grace of the God who not only gave His life for us, but invites us to join Him in His glorious transforming work.

We want to encourage everyone to seriously consider being part of a small group for the six weeks so that you get the most from the programme.

We know that it's tempting to shy away from the idea of joining a small group but we don't think it is too much to ask for a minimum of six weeks.

If you are already part of a small group, your group may continue as normal except that every group will meet once a week for six weeks.

If you are not part of a small group, we will be starting new groups. These groups will meet in a variety of places from homes to rooms in the Church. They will meet at different days of the week and at different times to accommodate as many people as possible.

You will meet and have fellowship with other members of this congregation.

You will not be asked any direct questions nor will you be asked to say anything if you would rather not. You will receive a booklet and there will be someone to lead the conversation.

So, what do you have to do?

Step 1: Pray and plan
to be part of this programme



Step 2: Decide
to join a small group during
the six week programme

Step 3: Sign up
on the sheets provided at the end of
November and during December for the
small group you would like to join



Step 4: Invite
others to join you!

We really want to encourage you to join a small group for the six weeks. However, if you feel in your heart that you cannot, then we still very much want you to be part of the programme.

A book will accompany the programme and we will be able to offer it at a greatly reduced price so that every Sunday you can listen to the relevant message and read along with the book during the week.

We ask everyone to seriously consider being part of this exciting venture in January 2020

Many thanks,
The Kirk Session



FRUITFULNESS
ON THE **FRONTLINE.**

Making a difference in Burundi!

Lynda Francis

30 Sept - 11 Oct 2019



You are going where?

This was always the first question asked when I told folk I was off with four others to Burundi to bring back stories of the those who are supported and funded through Christian Aid!

Answer on Burundi's location at the end!!!

The Highlights:-

Inspiring women

Most members of each farming cooperative are females who enjoy learning together how to grow better crops, mainly maize, which is then ground into flour, worth five times more than selling raw maize! The women are so keen to provide a better lifestyle for their large families, that they give up two days a week to work in the field schools, then apply better methods of farming on their own small plots of land at home. They were thrilled to have two cows (provided by Christian Aid) for organic manure as fertiliser! The "milk is like medicine to the children" and the surplus is sold for extra income.

The cooperatives can only afford to build storage rooms and processing plants through Christian Aid buying land and providing guarantees for the loans, which are paid back from the income earned by the sale of maize flour. With the profit, the beneficiaries can set up small businesses such as sewing or growing tomatoes, etc., and can afford to purchase their own land, or even buy a pig or goat. One lady, Violeta, was a real entrepreneur. She is now able to rent extra land growing palm oil fruits; she harvests the fruits and presses them at home and a private company collects and pays her for the oil so she can now afford her four children's secondary school fees!



Church Leaders giving practical help in development

Christian Aid always works through local partners, especially churches. Leaders support the training of peace-makers and help to settle problems in communities especially among the youths of different political parties. They train people in non-violent communication, mediating in disputes over land. We heard from Evelyn who, after mediation, was supported by her brother-in-law after her husband abused her, wanting her (and her children) put out of the home to bring in a new ‘wife’.

We were welcomed to Burundi by Archbishop Martin Nyaboho of the Anglican Church; he later accompanied us to the largest cooperative, Igogoretse, in his Diocese. The church provided the 10 hectares of land for the field school and also pays staff, e.g. Gerard, who trains the workers in climate-smart agriculture. The Archbishop arranged for Rev Tony Murphy to officially open the new processing plant at Igogoretse Cooperative because it was funded by Cork Diocese through Christian Aid.



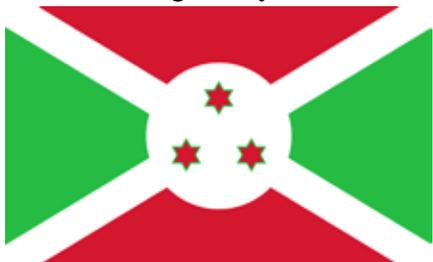
The Mothers’s Union in Rumonge Diocese is very active in training on matters of SRH (sexual and reproductive health) e.g. Viola who enjoys teaching the communities the benefits of a healthy, balanced diet and better awareness of personal/household hygiene.

Young Leaders aged 25-35 years

We were impressed by those taking responsibility for the recently set up after-school ‘clubs’, to educate young folk in aspects of sexual reproductive health and help them get into income-generating activities. This programme is aimed at young people avoiding early pregnancy and to become responsible citizens in future.

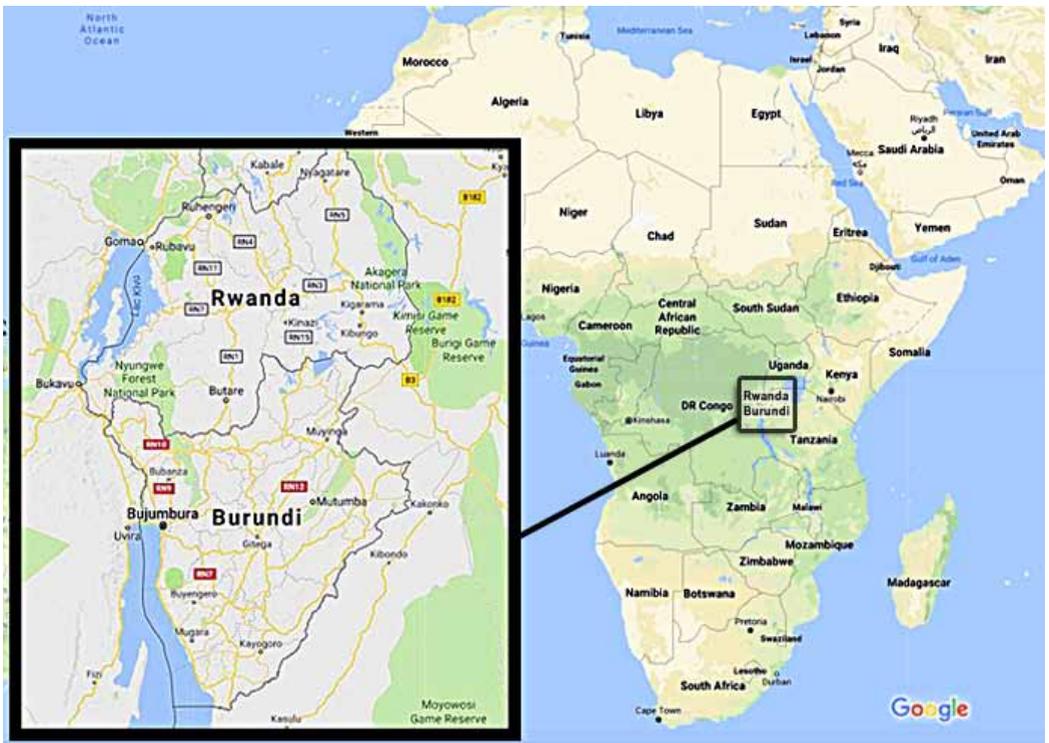
Signs of hope in Burundi

The welcome given by local communities, by church leaders and the staff of the Burundi office of Christian Aid was very humbling! Christian Aid is not just helping people through humanitarian relief projects, but helps families become more food-secure and makes development sustainable. Resilience is being built into communities to face



the challenges of providing enough food for a growing population, climate change, job creation, etc. A challenge is encouraging the government to take more responsibility for the people they should be serving. The whole-hearted commitment of Christian Aid is so impressive when I saw just how much difference they are making to the lives of individuals in Burundi; the trip was such a tremendous learning experience! I am thankful to the church family for their support in prayer which surrounded all five of us, keeping us healthy and safe through all our travels! Thank you! Please continue to pray for Burundi, especially for peace and good government after the April 2020 Elections.

Where is Burundi?



Burundi is a beautiful country, the size of Wales approx. with 11.4 million people, its capital is Bujumbura. Lake Tanganyika forms its western boundary and it is surrounded by DR Congo, Tanzania and Rwanda.

Young Life (Year 10+)

Our Friday Young Life Club resumed in Bangor Road in September and it's been great to be back! We have loved

getting to reconnect with kids we have now known for years. Please pray that the Lord would send more leaders for our Friday club - we have a great team in place but really need at least two more leaders.

Wyldlife (Year 7-9)



This year we have moved our Wyldlife Club in Hollywood Baptist Church to a Tuesday evening. That has been a positive step as we have seen young people with more consistency. So far, we have been really encouraged by the amount of boys who have come but would love to see more girls coming along. Our hope is that our clubs would serve as a way of reaching young people who have no opportunity to hear about Jesus and the love He has for them and we would love to have the opportunity to tell more kids about that wonderful news.

Football

This year we have continued our football ministry in Queen's Leisure complex. It has been going for almost a year now and we have had the privilege of building relationships with many boys who otherwise have no connection with church. Please pray for us as we introduce the idea of a small group to them as a way of helping them to think about Jesus and what He has done for them.



Priory

At the beginning of November we started a lunchtime Wyldlife Club in Priory College. From being in Priory over the last few years I was very surprised by the small number of pupils who actually live in Hollywood. Our hope is that this club would serve as a way of allowing pupils (from Hollywood and further afield) to hear about Jesus and give them an opportunity to think about Him for themselves, while keeping in line with Priory's integrated ethos.

*Thank you for your continued prayer and support for Young Life International in Hollywood,
Carl, Josh and Joanna*

Youth Update Loading....

It's official, winter is here...and it's cold but this doesn't stop us at all!

Over the past few months our youth organisations and volunteers have been

“flat to the mat with the party hat”- Hit the Diff!

“The youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow” Nelson Mandela



LOADING...

Connect

This term, we have been taking in the whole picture of the Bible, looking at the main themes:

Creation - Inhabited, Ruined, Repaired and

Restored. The Connect group have breakfast once a month, and the remaining three Sundays are split between our own Connect session and listening to the sermons in church. Connect is run by a dedicated team of Volunteers led by Graeme Thompson.



Pitstop

This term at Pitstop we are very blessed to have an amazing team of dedicated volunteers. Each week we ‘Stop, Pause and Go in Christ’s Name’ to live out our faith in a Christlike manner. This year, our series has been based on the Book of James: ‘Doing the “Christian” thing’?! We have been exploring each section of James through group discussion and Bible teaching.



Cafe Service

For those who haven't heard about or had a chance to go to our New Cafe service, we have turned the Sunday Evening Youth Service into a cafe once a month! The aim of the Cafe Service is to be more inviting to young people and adults who are not from the congregation while hoping regulars will keep coming. We are working through a teaching series at the moment called ‘Lean In: to what God is calling us to’! The aim is to hopefully grab a sense of what God is calling us to as a church community during this time. In the Old Testament, Esther when she was called to the land of King Xerxes, was called for “such a time as this”. God had created opportunities for her to serve her Father in Heaven in that land. I believe God still does this, and has commissioned the local church/people/communities to this calling for such a time on this earth. I hope to see you at the next service!

Looking Forward:2020

As we look forward to 2020, we believe God has a heart for those who are rejected, mislead, unwanted and unloved within our community in Hollywood! God has a heart for young people in this area. Pray and Ask: is there more we can do for



our community for young and old? As we think ahead for summer activities (too soon??) the question I encourage you to ask is can I help in any way? Even the smallest help during the Summer Drop-in, GLEEM Holiday Bible Club, giving lifts or even making food: whatever way God has gifted you, ask yourself that question.

Please Pray: We cannot do this in our own strength and will, only in God's will!

Prayer Points:

- Our Volunteers: for their own relationship with Christ, so they can do the work they believe they are called to.
- Our Program Leaders: for their own relationship with Christ so they can help lead and develop programmes for the young people of this community.
- Young People: for Christmas exams that are currently taking place, for strength and courage in their walk with God, to live boldly in Jesus' name!
- For YoungLife: pray for the young people who come each week to hear who Jesus is, for Josh and Carl as they mentor, minister and plan Club and other weekly activities in Hollywood.
- For more help: pray for willing and dedicated people who are gifted to work in any of these ministries!
- For our Community: pray that we, as the local church, can affect real change in the heart of the community where God has called us!



Andrew McCaw- Student Youth Worker



UNIVERSITY LIFE

Janet Cunningham

I have been in Cardiff for seven weeks now and it has been a big adventure. It has been very challenging physically, emotionally and spiritually! I am living in university accommodation, sharing a kitchen with five other girls, which has been great fun but also hard work as we are all very different people.

I have really been enjoying the start of my pharmacy course and have made some good friends there. Four of us, in our year of a hundred and thirty, are Christians, which is amazing because lots of my other Christian friends are the only one in their course. It is definitely not 'normal' to be a Christian here but it has been incredible having such an open platform to share my faith with others daily. I have been challenged lots on why I believe in God but I have been pleasantly surprised to experience that most people are very open-minded and are intrigued by my faith. Many a conversation with other students has left me encouraged and falling down in prayer asking God to show Himself to them. The Christian Union is fantastic and is where I have met lots of new people. I go to a weekly small group for Christians living in the university halls where I stay three weeks in a month. We read the Bible together and on the final week we run an event with the idea of bringing our flatmates along. The first one was a desserts night and, unsurprisingly, my flatmates were happy to come and hang out while being given free cake!

I have had ups and downs as I'm sure everyone has in the first term of university but I am really starting to settle now. I would appreciate prayers that I would get involved in the church I attend, for great friendships with Christians and non-Christians to continue to develop, for boldness to share my faith when the opportunities arise (as they frequently do!) and for lots of energy as I continue trying to balance work, sports, church and a social life!

UNI-TALES

Andrew Gallagher



I have now been in Ulster University, Coleraine, for two months and I can say without a doubt, these have been the best two months of my life. While it is a massive difference leaving home, at least I get to visit home most weeks. Any homesickness however hasn't arisen, in part down to 'winning the lottery' with roommates.

In the two months we've been here, we've formed a tight knit bond, from cooking as a flat to doing assignments together. This, in addition to making a great group of friends, has meant I have never had a quiet day in university. The biggest change is without a doubt having only my alarms to rely on to get up. The end result of this is six alarms for my 9am lectures. The added independence has definitely resulted in more naps between classes, but we never fail to be ready for five-a-side on Tuesday nights.

Of course, living as a student is not cheap. But I have been gifted with being offered a new job back in September. This requires long hours, but it pays off by allowing me to pay my bills and build up my savings. However, my church life has begun to suffer as a result, as I often find myself without the chance to attend due to work commitments, especially in my starter weeks. So, if you feel drawn to pray for me in any aspects, the main one for me would be to pray I can get a better balance.



NATIVITY WORD SEARCH

NATIVITY
CHRISTMAS
MANGER
DONKEY
STABLE
DECEMBER
ANGEL
SHEPHERD
BABY
STAR

NIGHT
SHEEP
MOTHER
GIFT



I O I D O N K E Y S
M N A T I V I T Y H
V V N I G H T D T E
D E C E M B E R A P
U M A N G E R Y R H
G I F T S T A B L E
C H R I S T M A S R
G T A A N G E L S D
S T A R S H E E P D
B A B Y M O T H E R

COLOUR THE WISE MEN

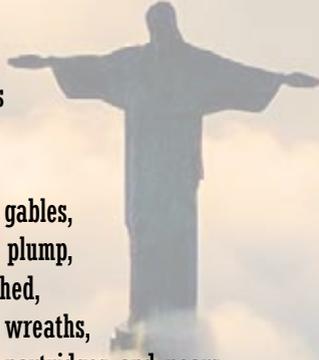


Wise Men Worship Jesus
Matthew 2

The Whole of Incarnation

One time of the year
the newborn child
is everywhere,
planted in madonnas' arms
hay mows, stables,
in palaces or farms,
or quaintly under snowed gables,
gothic angular or baroque plump,
naked or elaborately swathed,
encircled by Della Robbia wreaths,
garnished with whimsical partridges and pears,
drummers and drums,
lit by oversized stars,
partnered with lambs,
peace doves, sugar plums,
bells, plastic camels in sets of three
as if these were what we need
for eternity.

But Jesus the Man is not to be seen.
We are too wary, these days,
of beards and sandalled feet.



Yet if we celebrate, let it be
that he
has invaded our lives with purpose,
striding over our picturesque traditions,
our shallow sentiment,
overturning our cash registers,
wielding his peace like a sword,
rescuing us into reality,
demanding much more
than the milk and the softness
and the mother warmth
of the baby in the storefront creche,
(only the Man would ask
all, of each of us)
reaching out
always, urgently, with strong
effective love
(only the Man would give
his life and live
again for love of us).

Oh come, let us adore Him -
Christ - the Lord.

Luci Shaw