

PORTREE PARISH CHURCH OF SCOTLAND



CHRISTMAS 2020

Church Office Bearers

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Roll Keeper	Miss D McEwan	612266
Treasurer	Mr W Marshall	650405
Clerk to the Congregational Board	Mrs M MacKay	612690
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SESSION CLERK'S REPORT

At this point in the year, in addition to all the preparations for Advent and Christmas, I would normally be starting to think about the Annual Accounts of the church.

As you are no doubt aware, the Accounts are divided into two separate sections. The first section – the “Narrative” - includes basic information about the church, its Office Bearers and Auditors. It also lists all who have served on the Congregational Board or Kirk Session during the year. There are also sections on the *performance* and *achievements* of the church during the year.

The annual accounts of any charity are public documents and can be viewed by any interested party. In addition to sending a copy of our accounts to OSCR (Office of the Scottish Charities Regulator) we publish our accounts annually on our church website. The aim of this section of the document is to provide any reader of the report with a good understanding of the activities and achievements of the church.

To be honest, this section of the Accounts normally gives me more concern than the financial part which I will detail in the Treasurer's Report. I usually have to try to remember all that has happened in the last year and make sure I don't offend anyone by missing out something important. This year it is much simpler because what has happened ? - Between March and the beginning of October we have had no services, no Communion, no family services, no AGM, no Ladies' Bible Study, no Prayer Fellowship, no fellowship etc, etc etc

We did however manage to keep the church alive through regular telephone contact by the Elders, via Sandor's wonderful *Messages* and *Read, Meditate and Pray* on the church website and the occasional church magazine.

Kirk Session continued to meet via Zoom which allowed us to discuss the various guidelines issued by the Scottish Government and the Church of Scotland and plan for a safe reopening of the church in the first week of October. The Elders are to be congratulated on the work done to ensure the church was cleaned and sanitised before and after each service and that all necessary procedures were in place before any worship could resume.

Those who have attended services would, I'm sure, agree that, whilst church is not quite what it was pre-Covid, it is wonderful to be able to praise the Lord and give thanks for his blessings *inside His house*.

Attendance at our services to date has averaged out at about 32 worshippers and under the present regulations we can accommodate up to 50 people, so there is plenty of space. While we appreciate that for health and other reasons many could not contemplate returning at present, if you feel you are able to return we would be delighted to see you.

God bless you all

Bill Marshall

TREASURER'S REPORT

In March of this year, the closure of our church for worship caused a shockwave of spiritual and emotional distress amongst our congregation. Our church bell continued to sound out the hours each day reminding us that the church was still there. On Sundays, the 10.55 am and 11.00 am "call to worship" bells had an additional significance – but the church doors were firmly locked.

With no services in the church there were obviously financial implications to the lockdown. A large part of our regular income – the Sunday offerings dried up. We are extremely fortunate to have so many members of the congregation giving directly to the church via Standing Orders through their banks. It was also very encouraging to have several members taking out new Standing Orders or sending cheques to me to be deposited in our church accounts.

Nevertheless, as the table below shows for our General Account there was a considerable impact on our financial position.

Jan – Oct	Open Plate	FreeWill Offering	Gift Aid Donations	Tax Recovered	Total
2019	£6,700	£5,700	£33,100	£13,000	£58,500
2020	£2,500	£4,800	£29,200	£11,100	£47,600
Decrease	£4,200	£ 900	£3,900	£1,900	£10,900
	(- 62%)	(- 16%)	(- 12%)	(- 15%)	(- 19%)

In addition to this our Church Hall has been closed with no external groups being able to use the facilities. The hall is an asset of the church and a source of additional income to our Fabric Fund from rental charges paid by these external groups. The closure this year has resulted so far in a fall of almost £4,000 compared with last year.

We are fortunate in Portree Church that we have still been able to meet all our financial commitments but there has been a considerable drain on our reserves.

It was very gratifying to see that those who have returned to church since it reopened have demonstrated their commitment to the church by putting aside their offerings each week and bringing them with them. It is hoped that when others return to worship they follow this lead and further reduce our deficit.

Portree Church has always taken great care of the fabric of our buildings. Before lockdown we had plans for several projects to improve the health and safety of our congregation and make improvements for the benefit of all users. We hope that the exceptional generosity and commitment to the church shown over the years by the congregation will continue during and after this period of crisis.

Bill Marshall

CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR SERVICES

One of our favourite services of the year is the Watchnight Service, traditionally held at 11.00 pm on Christmas Eve. This service attracts not only members of our congregation but also many others from the local community who come together to enjoy the singing of favourite carols and hearing the Christmas story.

The Scottish Government and Church of Scotland regulations introduced to halt the spread of Coronavirus have had extreme consequences for the church.

The building has to be fully cleaned and sanitized before and after each service held, the maximum number of people permitted to attend is 50, all attending have to wear face coverings throughout the service and notably that no singing is permitted.

Regrettably therefore, there will be no Watchnight Service held in the church this year.

However, in its place a video recorded service is already in preparation and that will be posted on the church website on Christmas Eve. This video will contain all aspects of our traditional service – Readings, carols, Minister's Christmas message, lighting of the fifth Advent Candle. We hope that this will be an acceptable compromise given the exceptional circumstances which prevail at present.

As with the weekly Sunday Sermons, printed copies of the text of the Watchnight Service will be available to those without internet access. A Christmas Day service will also be posted on the website with printed copies made available.

Please note that as a printed copy cannot show all the details of the video it is possible, using a memory stick, to copy the item to the hard drive of a laptop or tablet which can then be used to view the service without internet access.

The restricted pattern of services over the festive period this year will be as follows

Sunday 27 December at 11.00 am - Morning Worship

Friday 01 January 2021 at 12.00 noon - New Year's Day Service

Sunday 03 January 2021 at 11.00 am - Morning Worship

We look forward to resuming "normal Service" in 2021 !

PSALM 122 AND ADVENT

'I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord. Our feet are standing in your gates, Jerusalem.' (Psalm 122:1,2). These words from Psalm 122 inspired Hubert Parry's great Coronation Anthem *'I was Glad.'* As a Song of Ascent (Psalms 120 to 134 are known as Psalms of Ascent), it was used by pilgrims going to the great festivals in Jerusalem. For the Jews this represented *'coming home'* to worship at the Temple, the place of God's presence.

Our Worship of God:

As God's people today, we are also called to worship in praise and thanksgiving: *'That is where the tribes go up – to praise the name of the Lord'* (4). Of course, currently our coming together in church to sing our praise to God is greatly restricted. We are a *scattered* rather than a *gathered* community. However, as individuals, we can still offer God the worship of our lives using the resource of psalms like this one.

Our prayer to God:

The psalm encourages the pilgrims to pray for the peace of Jerusalem: *'Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: May those who love you be secure.'* (6). The peace referred to here is more than simply an absence of conflict. Peace speak of wholeness of life in every aspect. This must be our prayer as we continue to struggle with the effects of the pandemic and as we seek the prosperity of the wider community: *'I will seek your prosperity'* (9).

Last month saw the beginning of Advent, the season when we affirm the hope of Jesus' return. As we pray for peace, we know that it is fulfilled in the coming of God's kingdom in Jesus. Despite living with so much uncertainty, we have the assurance of God's future purposes for our lives, churches and the world.



With the dark nights now having drawn in, here is part of an ancient Celtic prayer from Benbecula asking for God's provision, redemption and protection from evil.

The Gates of the Kingdom

Give us, O God, the needs the body feels,
Give us, God, the need-things of the soul;
Give us, O God, the balm which body heals,
Give us, God, the soul-balm which makes whole.

O great God, thou who art upon the throne,
Give to us the heart repentance true,
Forgiveness give us of the sin we own, –
The sin inborn and the sin we do.

Give us, O God, a yearning that is strong,
And the crown of glory of the King;
Give us the safe home, God, for which we long
In thy kingdom's lovely gates to sing.

May Michael, archangel warrior white,
Keep down hostile demons of the fall;
May Jesus Christ MacDavid guide our flight
And give lodging in his peace-bright hall.

Amen



WE WILL REMEMBER – 80 YEARS ON

This year we've been remembering the Battle of Britain, described by Winston Churchill in August 1940 as *'one of the decisive battles of the war... never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.'* It was a dramatic turning point in the history of the Second World War. The occasions for Remembrance this month will provide us times of gratitude for what was achieved in the darkest moments of war.

However, this year we are very aware of our own struggles with the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic. We face an unseen enemy, but the effects on our lives and society are almost as devastating as world war.

Remembering is not just about focusing on past events. It is also about making present past events, as we give thanks for all that took place. The Battle of Britain was fought by the Few and won in the skies over the Channel. In our battle with the virus, we can call to mind the victory of Jesus: *'Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David.'* (2 Timothy 2:8). Jesus secured the victory of death by His cross and resurrection, so that we don't need to fear death, but trust in His loving purposes for our lives.

Currently we can't see clearly what the future holds for us; it may be very different from what we might expect. However, we can pray for God's will to be done and that we will play our part, just as each of those airmen did so many years ago.

'They shall grow not old as we that are left grow old: Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun and in the morning we will remember them.'



With Remembrance in mind, we print a poem by one of Britain's best loved poets and hymn writers. Christina Rossetti wrote the words of two of our favourite Christmas carols—"In the Bleak Midwinter" and "Love Came Down at Christmas"

The Blessed Dead

They lie at rest, our blessed dead;
The dews drop cool above their head,
They knew not when fleet summer fled.

Together all, yet each alone;
Each laid at rest beneath his own
Smooth turf or white allotted stone.

When shall our slumber sink so deep,
And eyes that wept and eyes that weep
Weep not in the sufficient sleep?

God be with you, our great and small,
Our loves, our best-beloved of all,
Our own beyond the salt sea-wall

By Christina Rossetti (1830-94)

29th November was the start of Advent...

The Promise of Advent

Stir up our hearts, we beseech you,
to prepare ourselves to receive your Son.
When He comes and knocks, may He find us not sleeping in sin,
But awake to righteousness,
Ceaselessly rejoicing in His love.
May our hearts and minds be so purified,
That we may be ready to receive His promise of eternal life.

from The Gelasian Sacramentary, c. 500 (the oldest official prayer book of the Western Church)

PSALM 23 - A PSALM FOR THE PANDEMIC

There are few psalms as personal and real as Psalm 23. It records David's experience of God as his Shepherd going through dark times. In the midst of the effects of a global pandemic, this psalm speaks to the fears that can overwhelm us.

He Knows Me:

'The Lord is my shepherd...' Just as a good shepherd knows every sheep in his flock, so God knows each one of us intimately.

He Provides for Me:

'He makes me lie down in green pastures...' Just as the shepherd knows the needs of his sheep, so God will provide what we need in our lives and circumstances.

He Guides Me:

'He guides me along the right paths...' Just as the shepherd leads the sheep to the best pastures, so God provides the best for us, as we listen and follow Him.

He Protects Me:

'Even though I walk through the darkest valley...' Just as the sheep have no need to fear danger when following the shepherd, so we live knowing God's presence and protection.

He Comforts Me:

'your rod and your staff, they comfort me.' As the shepherd's rod defends the sheep, and the staff enables him to control the sheep, so God comforts us through His Word and discipline.

The final verses of the psalm (v5-6) offer the security of knowing that our lives are in His hands, even through death, as He leads us to the home we've been looking for all our lives.

Some years ago, a great actor was asked to recite Psalm 23, but asked one of the other guests to do the same. His remarkable rendition was followed by the other man, an older Christian speaking from the heart. Afterwards the actor said: *'The difference between us is that I know the psalm, but he knows the shepherd.'*



Five years ago, in November 2015, the Met office began the practice of naming storms, and the idea seems to have caught on! Apparently, you can even send suggestions to them now. Would you want one named after yourself?!

Named Storms

Deirdre, Angus, Katie, Jake

These are names which trouble make;

Gertrude, Doris, Caroline

Bring us weather less than fine!

Desmond, Erik, Imogen

Storms are named, but only when

Just like one named Abigail

They bring wind and rain and hail!

Barney, Clodagh, and Aileen

What, I wonder, does it mean

Barbara, Dylan, Eleanor

If the choice of name is poor?

Ali, Freya, Callum, Ciara

Does it make things any clearer

Jorge and Hannah, Brian too

If they name one after YOU?

By Nigel Beeton



AM FASGADH

I have worked in Skye for several years and am recently retired from Am Fasgadh, which is run by Skye and Lochalsh Mental Health Association. We are partly funded by NHS but need to apply to other organisations for additional funding. Our name which is Gaelic for “shelter” is very appropriate as this is exactly what we offer.

Due to the nature of the problems of our clientele and the unfortunate stigma still attached to mental illness and addiction issues we keep it pretty low key but anyone can either be referred to us by psychiatrists, CPN's, GP's or by simply walking through the doors and making a self-referral.

Members are helped in many ways: help with forms, telephone calls, prescriptions, or even just a listening ear.

We are open 365 days a year and with the current pandemic support workers helped in many ways as many of them were shielding. Am Fasgadh cooked and, on a daily basis, provided three course meals to any members requesting it. These meals reached as far as Ardelve and Erbusaig. We shopped for our members, rang them daily to make sure all was well with them and to keep their spirits up. Little treat boxes were also handed out to cheer people up.

This is just a reminder of the facility down the lane and if you feel someone is in need, they maybe too self-conscious to ask for help and it will do no harm to direct them to us.

Blessings to all

Heather MacRitchie

Am Fasgadh

Woodpark

Isle of Skye

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THE STORY IS STILL THE SAME!

‘Christmas may look different, but the story is still the same!’ That’s the message for Christmas in 2020. Coronavirus will make our celebrations this year look very different from usual. However, the message of the baby born in Bethlehem is still relevant!

In one nativity play, the highlight was to illuminate Jesus, with a light in the manger, when all the other lights were turned off. At the appropriate time, all the lights went out, including the manger one. The silence was broken when one of the shepherds loudly whispered: ‘Hey, you turned off Jesus.’ Of course, nobody can turn off Jesus this Christmas!

The angels announced, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord.’ (Luke 2: 10,11). The birth of this baby brings great joy and good news for everyone! As the king of the universe, He has come as our Saviour. In an uncertain world, He offers joy and hope, because He holds this pandemic in His hands. This is a real cause for joy!

‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favour rests.’ (Luke 2:14). We may feel anything but peace amid the anxieties over our current circumstances. How can a Jewish infant born to a peasant family in first century Palestine bring peace to our lives today? Jesus established peace with God through His death on the cross. Trusting the Prince of Peace for our lives brings God’s peace amid the huge uncertainties we face. As the carol says, ‘Joy to the world, the Lord has come, let earth receive her King.’

Christmas: Celebrating the Incarnation

C.S. Lewis called it the Grand Miracle and the Central Miracle. He noted that “Every other miracle prepares for this, exhibits this, or results from this...The fitness, and therefore credibility, of the particular miracles depend on their relations to the Grand Miracle.”

So if you can believe in Christmas – the incarnation of the Son of God: the Grand, the Central Miracle, you should have no problem believing the miracles in the Old Testament narratives or the miracle of the Virgin Birth, the miracles Jesus performed of feeding the multitudes, of His healing the sick, raising the dead, walking on water and calming the storms. You also need have no problem in believing in the bodily resurrection of Jesus and His ascension back into the heavenly realms, where He reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords.

In other words, to believe the essence of the Christmas story is to believe the miracle that will open the pathway to faith and eternal life, a life of following this risen Jesus as your Lord. To understand and believe the truth of the Incarnation will not only transform your idea of Christmas—it will change your life now and your everlasting destiny.

Revd Dr Roger Roberts

HYMN: The story behind ... ABIDE WITH ME

One of the most famous hymns in the world came out of Brixham, near Torbay, Devon, in 1847.

In those days it was a poor, obscure fishing village, and the vicar was the Rev Henry Francis Lyte. It was a discouraging place to be a pastor, but Henry felt that God wanted him there, and so he stayed, though it was lonely work, and he suffered constant ill health.

By the time he was 54, Henry had contracted tuberculosis and asthma, and he and his family knew he was dying. It would have been so easy for him to look back on his life and feel a complete failure. What had he ever much accomplished? And yet – and yet – Henry knew that in life it is not worldly success that matters, but how much we respond to Jesus Christ, and how much we follow Him.

In September of 1847 Henry was preparing to travel to the south of France, as was the custom for people with tuberculosis at that time. One day before he left, he read the story in the gospel of Luke about the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They were met by Jesus on the day of His resurrection, and they invited Him to stay with them because it was getting late. “Abide with us”, they said “for it is towards evening.”

“Abide with us - for it is toward evening.” These words struck a chord with Henry, who knew that it was getting ‘towards evening’ in his life. So, he sat down and wrote this hymn as a prayer to God – *(the following are just some of the verses)*

Abide with me

*Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide!
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.*

*Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.*

*I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless;
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness.
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.*

Shortly after Henry wrote that hymn, he preached his last sermon. He was so ill he practically crawled into the pulpit to do so. A few weeks later, in Nice, France, he died, and so of course he never knew that his hymn would go on to become greatly loved the world over.

X-X

Zoom Zoom Zoom!

According to a recent study by Ofcom, the Coronavirus pandemic is leaving a “lasting digital legacy”, and changing the UK’s internet habits and behaviour “indelibly”.

Since March we have broken the four-hour barrier, which means that, on average, we spend more than a quarter of our waking hours each day online. That is up from an average of three hours and 29 minutes this time last year.

Zoom has soared in popularity. Last December it was used by 498,00 people in the UK; by April this figure had soared to 13million !

TikTok, which lets users share short videos set to pop music, had 5.4 million UK users in January; by April this had risen to 12.9 million.

In February, 35 per cent of UK adults made a video call once a week. By April that had soared to 71 per cent. The largest increase has been among the over-65s, with now 61 per cent of them making weekly video calls.

Older people favour Zoom, in order to 'visit' their relatives and friends; while many teenagers have become addicted to TikTok and endless videos.

With the current Scottish Government restrictions on the size of meetings, Zoom has become the means by which our Kirk Session meets.

What have you missed most during lockdown?

It's a good question, because it is about the things that make us tick. When people examined their lists, they find obvious things - going to church, live sport events, meeting up with friends for a coffee or a beer.

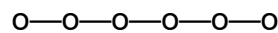
But as I thought more deeply about it, I realised that what I missed most was TOUCH. For nearly four months I have not touched another human being!

That is an astonishing deprivation. When a baby is born, its first experiences are all of touch. The strong hands of the midwife, mother's excited and loving embrace, tiny hands reaching out to feel mummy's face. We touch our way into life.

And then it goes on. Holding hands with friends, being hugged by grandparents, your first serious kiss, and perhaps a last tearful one at the end of a much-loved life.

We greet each other with a holy kiss, the Bible says. And why not?

Sight, smell, hearing and touch. Four senses. And I think lockdown has taught me that the greatest of these is touch !



ONE GRAIN OF SAND AT A TIME

Do you sometimes feel overwhelmed with all the things that you need to get done? Then think of your life as an hourglass. There are thousands of grains of sand in the top of the hourglass; and they all pass slowly and evenly through the narrow neck in the middle.

We are like that hourglass. When we start in the morning, there are hundreds of tasks which we feel that we must accomplish that day. But if we do not take them one at a time and let them pass through the day slowly and evenly, as do the grains of sand passing through the narrow neck of the hourglass, then we are bound to break our own fragile physical and mental structure.

Do not attempt more than God designed you to do.

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

The Bible is the world's best-selling book of all time. However, it isn't one book, but a library of 66 books, composed by some 44 writers over a period of 1500 years in a range of literature including history, poetry, prophecy, letters and apocalyptic (end times). Despite having a number of different writers, the Bible claims one author: God himself!

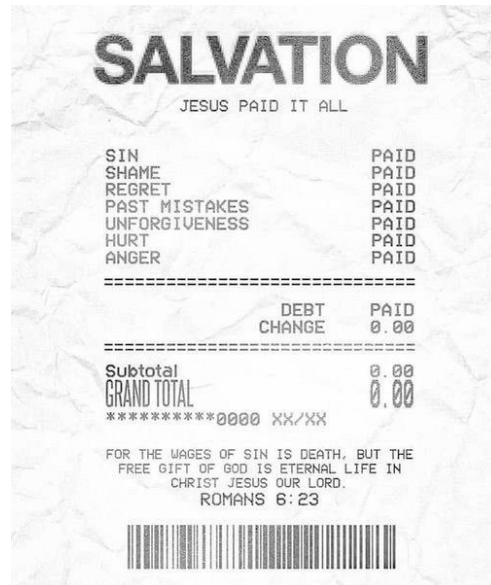
This is the basis of the unity of its message and authoritative claim to be the primary way by which God speaks to us: *'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work'* (2 Timothy 3:16). The Bible is inspired (*'the word of God in the words of men'*) and presents itself as a **manual for life**, equipping us to live for God in every aspect of our lives. We also have the promise of the Holy Spirit to guide us in applying the words to our lives: *'the Spirit will guide you into all truth'* (John 16:13).

However, the Bible could also be described as a **love letter** from God, as He uses it to deepen our relationship with him. As Jesus said: *'You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me'* (John 5:39,40). Christians follow a person not a book, and the Scriptures are intended to help us to know Jesus better.

At her coronation the Queen was given a Bible inscribed with the words ***'the most precious thing this world affords'***.

Does this reflect our own attitude to the Bible?





Submitted by M Wake

Miscellaneous observations ...

The love of God is broader than the measures of man's mind
– *Frederick Faber*

Advertising: The science of arresting the human intelligence long enough to get money from it.
– *Stephen Leacock*

Many Christians have so busied themselves with programmes and activities that they no longer know how to be silent and meditate on God's Word or recognise the mysteries that are in the Person of Christ.
– *Ravi Zacharias*

**

And finally, in the build-up to Christmas, remember:

Drive carefully. It's not only cars that can be recalled by their maker.

HOPE AMID UNCERTAINTY

'Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call Him Immanuel.' (Isaiah 7:14)

This promise to King Ahaz in 8th century Judah is fulfilled in the coming of Jesus at the first Christmas: 'God with Us' (Matthew 1:23). Ahaz faced the military threat of Syria invading Israel, but Isaiah tells him not to panic. He can trust God, who is in control of the nation.

For us, Coronavirus brings deep uncertainty as we come to another New Year. We live with the threat from the virus, economic uncertainty, separation from family and friends, the loss of loved ones and the anxiety that isolation brings. Yet the message of Immanuel brings hope, as it did for Ahaz! Christmas changes everything forever! God has declared in Christ that He is with us and for us, not absent from or against us. His love is larger than our sin, fears or guilt: 'If God is for us, who can be against us?' (Romans 8:31).

As we prepare for the most unusual Christmas ever, let's not forget :-

God with us means that He is on my side and by my side. In the uncertainties of life I am never alone.

God with us means that everything will work out according to His plan. My life isn't just a series of meaningless occasions or mistakes.

God with us means that even when others show they are not there for me, God is.

God with us means when circumstances change, He will give me the strength I need.

God is with me: He isn't far away, but has made the journey into my world. Here is the hope for the future, once we get past the trees, gifts, turkey and pudding!

BEETHOVEN: 'from the heart to the heart'

This year, 2020, is a special year for Beethoven: it marks the 250th anniversary of his birth on 16th December 1770.

And so it was very fitting that back in August, at the first Live Prom this year in the Royal Albert Hall, the BBC Symphony Orchestra played his 3rd symphony, the *Eroica*.

Beethoven composed it in 1804. A few years earlier he had noticed the first symptoms of his deafness. He wrote in a letter to his brothers that was found after his death, '*I must live like an exile.*' The deafness brought in its wake depression and thoughts of suicide, but Beethoven wrote that '*the only thing that held me back was my art.*'

He went on to compose works which expressed the tragedy this cross of deafness brought, but also conveyed the power of the human spirit which proved indomitable in the face of that struggle. '*Music,*' he wrote, '*is the electric soil in which the spirit thinks, lives and invents.*'

Beethoven was to compose six more symphonies after the *Eroica* and a wealth of other music up to his death in 1827. He spent most of his life in Vienna, but through his music his creative genius travelled far and wide.

Scholars divide his work into three stages. Up to 1800 he composed very much in the classical tradition. That year marked a second stage with works like the 5th Symphony, which opens with the famous eight-note motif of fate knocking at the door, and his opera *Fidelio*. Then in 1817 came a final stage when his compositions explored new territories of the human spirit altogether.

Although his deafness brought loneliness and isolation, he found in music the means to express those experiences: his struggle with Destiny, his love of Nature and that search for an inner peace and serenity. Weighed down by physical limitations, he found a freedom to express himself and his longing for transcendence and light.

It is there in the Prisoners' Chorus in his opera *Fidelio* as they emerge from the dungeon into the sunlight. And it is quintessentially present in his last great works: the late String Quartets, the 9th Symphony with its exultant hymn to Joy, and the Missa Solemnis where there is a beauty and a serenity in the Benedictus and Agnus Dei.

On the score of this work, Beethoven wrote above the Kyrie *It comes from the heart - may it go to the heart.* In this month which marks the 250th anniversary of his birth, we give thanks for his music which continues to speak to hearts in every age. It is music that tells us of the pain and struggle of life, but also the discovery of a courage and freedom that can help us to step out in his company and welcome the light and the joy, the peace and the beauty.

Also in the Month of December

It was:

400 years ago, on 21st December 1620 that the first landing party from the British ship Mayflower arrived at what would become Plymouth Colony (now Plymouth Massachusetts). They began building houses there two days later.

300 years ago, on 31st December 1720 that Charles Edward Stuart, commonly known as 'Bonnie Prince Charlie' was born. Stuart claimant to the British throne and leader of the unsuccessful Jacobite rebellion of 1745-46. Grandson of King James II of England and Ireland (also known as James VII of Scotland).

90 years ago, on 2nd December 1930 that in his second State of the Union address, US President Herbert Hoover announced a huge public works programme to stimulate the economy and create jobs during the Great Depression.

80 years ago, on 29th December 1940 that Germany dropped thousands of incendiary bombs on London, causing the worst fire damage since the Great Fire of London in 1666. About 200 people were killed.

75 years ago, on 27th December 1945 that the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development were formally founded.

70 years ago, on 14th December 1950 that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (also known as the UN Refugee Agency) was established.

65 years ago, on 1st December 1955 that African American civil rights activist Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white man in Montgomery, Alabama, violating the city's racial segregation laws. This incident led to the birth of the modern American civil rights movement.

60 years ago, on 9th December 1960 that the first episode of the television soap opera Coronation Street was broadcast in the UK.

40 years ago, on 8th December 1980 that John Lennon, rock musician and peace activist and a member of the Beatles, was shot dead, aged 40, outside his New York City apartment by Mark Chapman, a deranged fan.

30 years ago, on 1st December 1990 that British and French construction workers on the Channel Tunnel broke through the last wall of rock separating the two halves, and Britain and France were linked for the first time in thousands of years.

20 years ago, on 13th December 2000 that George W Bush finally claimed the US presidency, 36 days after the election was held, following a legal battle over disputed votes in Florida.

JOSEPH AND HIS AMAZING JOURNEY

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world... And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David.

Luke 2 1-4

What a year we have had! But I suppose Joseph had had a demanding year as well. Having learning that his betrothed was pregnant due to divine intervention, he then learned of the Roman government's demand for a census.

These Bible verses show Joseph being a good citizen. Leaving home for a long journey in order to please the government would not have been welcome, but Joseph complied and obeyed the law.

This year the situation is reversed. Millions of us *want* to make a long journey, to visit our loved ones across the UK. But this year, because of coronavirus, the Government is asking us to stay at home.

The Romans had censuses for a good reason: to help them run the business of the empire. This Government has restrictions in place for a good reason: to help the slow the spread of a deadly virus.

Following government rules and laws it not always easy or pleasant but as Christians we should be good citizens. As always this is a light-hearted guide to a complicated subject. If you are going home for Christmas, get proper advice - and have a Merry one.



PHOTOGRAPHS

Normally our magazines feature a number of photographs of church activities throughout the year—especially the contributions to Family Services by our younger members.

However, as we are all painfully aware, 2020 has not been a *normal* year. From mid-March to the start of October our church, like most others in Scotland, lay empty - no services, no children, no fellowship, no family services, no Communion.

At the start of October, after very careful consideration and implementation of all the Corona-virus regulations the Kirk Session agreed unanimously that we were ready for the church to reopen.

This was still not *normal church* - Socially distanced entry to the building, hand sanitising, face coverings, offering collection on entry (no plates to be handed from person to person) socially distanced seating arrangements, no singing, bring your own bread for Communion, individual sealed cups of Communion wine on the pews

As a consequence our photograph gallery this year—all courtesy of Ronald MacDonald—show the new, but hopefully not permanent, arrangements in the church.



Hand Sanitiser for use on entry to and exit from the church



Contact details are taken for “Trace and Protect” procedures



The new Intimation Sheet



The socially distanced seating arrangements



The congregation (maximum of 50 worshippers) in place

While Health & Safety considerations have been vitally important this year in terms of the reopening of our church, a more humorous view on such regulations is given below.

Thanks to Catherine Stewart for this contribution :-

These days we can hardly take part in any event without being bombarded with legislation from Environmental Health or Health and Safety organisations. Just imagine the nightmare of trying to organise the Christmas story today with all the restrictions needed to be put in place. Perhaps it would read something like this:

PLEASE NOTE!

Please be advised that all members planning to dash through the snow in a one-horse open sleigh, going over the fields and laughing all the way are required to undergo a Risk Assessment addressing the safety of open sleighs. This assessment must also consider whether it is appropriate to use only one horse for such a venture, particularly where there are multiple passengers. Please note that permission must also be obtained in writing from landowners before their fields may be entered and to avoid offending those not participating in celebrations, we request that laughter is moderate only and not loud enough to be considered a noise nuisance.

Benches, stools and orthopaedic chairs are now available for collection by any shepherds planning or required to watch their flocks at night. Provision has also been made for remote monitoring of flocks by CCTV camera from a centrally heated shepherd observation hut. All facility users are reminded that an emergency response plan must be submitted to account for known risks to the flocks. The angel of the Lord is additionally reminded that prior to shining his/her glory all around s/he must confirm that all shepherds are wearing appropriate Personal Protective Equipment to account for the harmful effects of UVA, UVB and the overwhelming effects of Glory.

Following last year's well publicised case, everyone is advised that EC legislation prohibits any comment with regard to the redness of any part of Mr. R. Reindeer. Further to this, exclusion of Mr. R Reindeer from reindeer games will be considered discriminatory and disciplinary action will be taken against those found guilty of this offence.

While it is acknowledged that gift-bearing is commonly practised in various parts of the world, everyone is reminded that the bearing of gifts is subject to Hospitality Guidelines and all gifts must be registered. This applies regardless of the individual, even royal personages; it is particularly noted that direct gifts of currency or gold are specifically precluded under provisions of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. Further caution is advised regarding other common gifts, such as aromatic resins that may initiate allergic reactions.

Finally, in the recent case of the infant found tucked up in a manger without any crib for a bed, Social Services have been advised and will be arriving shortly.

Compliance of these guidelines is advised in order for you to fully participate with the festive spirit.

Admin Risk Management Team

CHRISTMAS FORETOLD

From untold glory to a manger of straw
Who could imagine such a thing?
From Eternity stepping down into Time
With very few to welcome Him in.

Mary and Joseph, shepherds and wise men,
In His mother's arms the Baby lies,
Scripture describes these amazing events
As prophecy unravels before our eyes

The Books of the Bible all tell of His coming
His life, His death, redemption's plan,
The King of glory revealed in God's Word
Touching our earth in the form of a Man.



By Megan Carter

A Prayer for Putting on a Face Mask

Creator God, as I prepare to go into the world, help me to see the sacramental nature of the wearing of this cloth. Let it be a tangible and visible way of living love for my neighbours, as I love myself.

Christ Jesus, since my lips will be covered, uncover my heart, that people would see my smile in the crinkles around my eyes. Since my voice may be muffled, help me to speak clearly, not only with my words, but with my actions.

Holy Spirit, as the elastic touches my ears, remind me to listen carefully and caringly to all those I meet. May this simple piece of cloth be shield and banner, and may each breath that it holds be filled with Your love. In Your name and in that love, I pray.

Amen

**Rev. Richard Bott, Moderator
Presbyterian Church of Canada**

SMILE LINES

Picture

The teacher asked her Sunday School class to draw a picture of a Bible story with a Christmas theme. She was puzzled by Kate's picture, which showed four people on an airplane. She asked her which story it was meant to represent. 'The Flight to Egypt,' was the reply.

Pointing at each figure, the teacher ventured: 'That must be Mary, Joseph, and Baby Jesus. But who's the fourth person?'"

'Oh,' explained Kate happily, 'that's Pontius – the pilot!'

**

Next Christmas

The grandson had just taken a photograph of his grandmother who'd come to stay for Christmas and her 89th birthday. 'Grannie, I sure hope I'm around next year to photograph you on your 90th birthday,' he said tactfully.

'Why not?' his grandmother shrugged. 'You look healthy enough.'

**

Present

First man: 'My wife doesn't know what she wants for Christmas.'

Second man: 'You're lucky. Mine does.'

**

Christmas cake

Every Christmas, composer Giacomo Puccini would have a cake baked for each of his friends. One year, having quarrelled with Arturo Toscanini just before Christmas, he tried to cancel the order for the conductor's cake. But it was too late, as the cake had already been dispatched.

The following day, Toscanini received a telegram from Puccini: "Cake sent by mistake."

He replied by return: "Cake eaten by mistake."

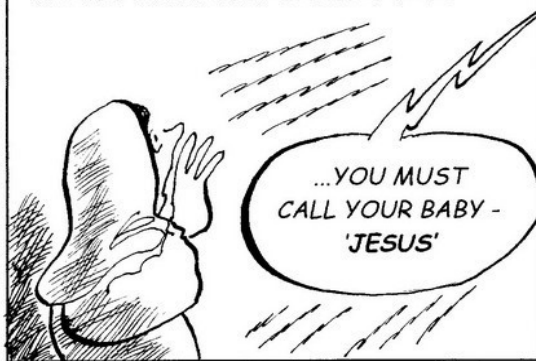
The First Christmas



JESUS WAS BORN ABOUT 2,000 YEARS AGO IN THE SMALL TOWN OF BETHLEHEM, NEAR JERUSALEM.



AN ANGEL HAD TOLD MARY SHE WOULD HAVE VERY SPECIAL BABY



MARY AND JOSEPH MADE THE LONG JOURNEY FROM NAZARETH TO BETHLEHEM. THEY HAD BEEN ORDERED THERE BY THE CENSUS.



BUT THE TOWN WAS FULL... THE ONLY SHELTER THEY COULD FIND WAS A STABLE...



...WHICH IS WHERE THE BABY JESUS WAS BORN.

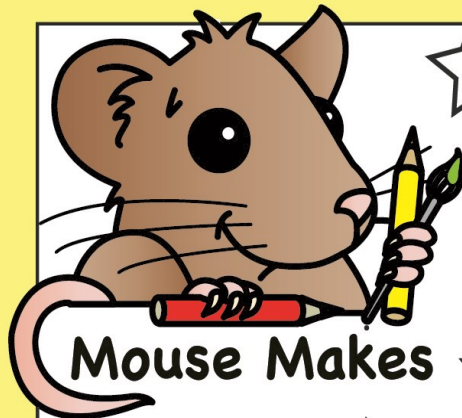


SHEPHERDS IN FIELDS NEARBY RACED TO SEE THE BABY. AN ANGEL HAD TOLD THEM WHERE JESUS HAS BEEN BORN.



THEY WERE THRILLED TO SEE THE MOST WONDERFUL GIFT IN THE WORLD!

You can colour in this story once you have read it.



"I bring you **good news** that will bring great **joy** to all people. The **Saviour** has been born today! ...

*Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and peace on earth to those with whom
God is pleased".*

from Luke 2 vs. 10,11,14

HAPPY
CHRISTMAS!

Read the Christmas
story in Luke
1:1 - 2:21



A picture to colour
for Christmas. Colour in
one star each day as you
count down to Christmas!

WORDSEARCH

Silent Night

This much-loved carol comes from Austria, where it was first sung as *Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht* on Christmas Eve, 1818. It was written by Father Joseph Mohr, a young priest at St Nicholas parish church, in the village of Oberndorf bei Salzburg. As Christmas 1818 approached, he asked the local schoolmaster, Franz Xaver Gruber, to compose a melody for his carol. Gruber was organist in the nearby village of Arnsdorf, and so was happy to oblige. On Christmas Eve they presented the carol to the church during the midnight mass. The carol went on to become loved world-wide; and the version sung by Bing Crosby is the third best-selling single of all time.

Silent Night Loved Carol Austria First Sung Stille Nacht

Heilige Christmas Eve Father Joseph Mohr Young Priest

Organist Midnight Mass Melody Single Bing Version Third

Can you find each of the above words in the following grid ?



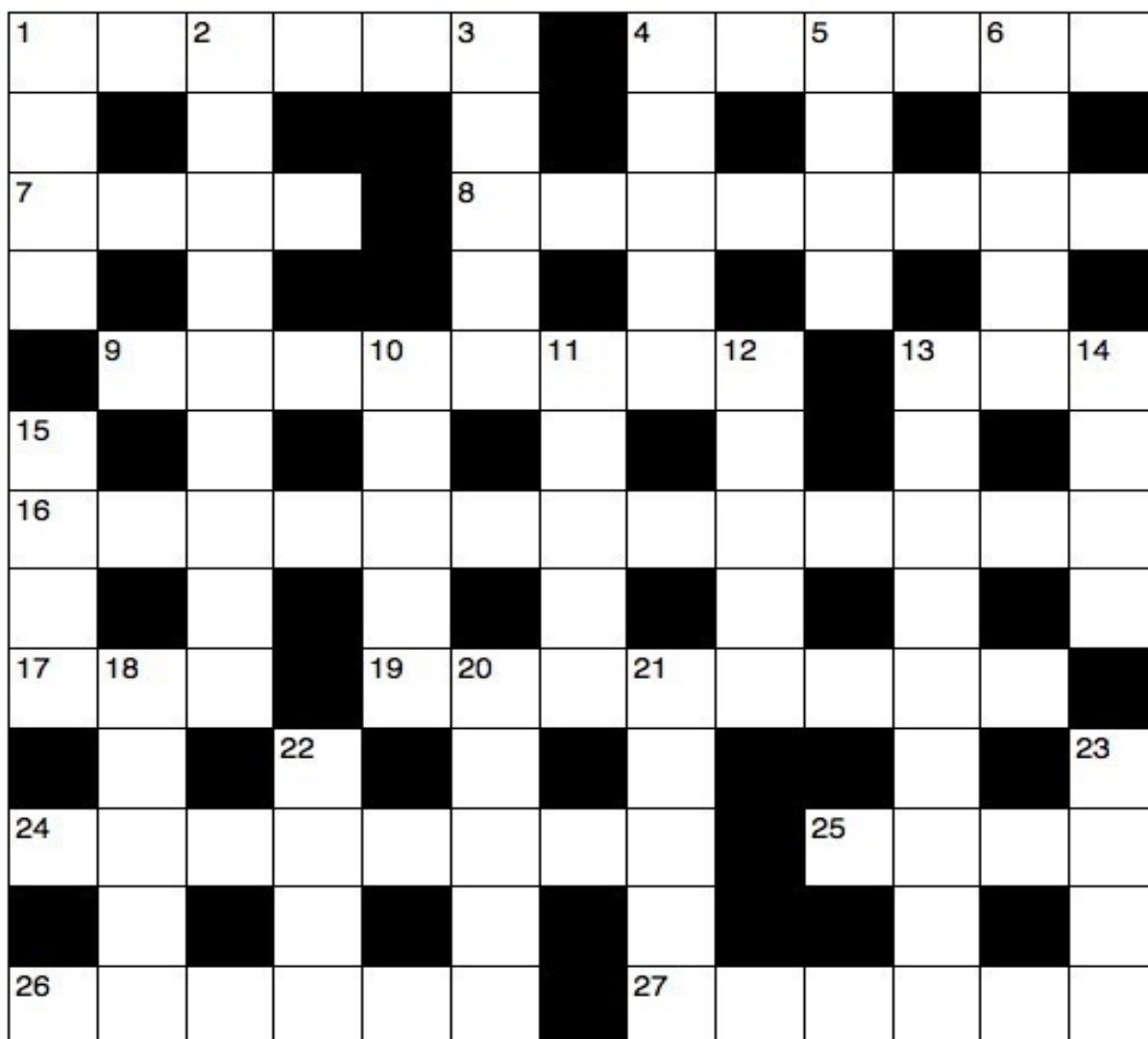
Crossword Clues

Across

- 1 Rely (Psalm 62:7) (6)
- 4 'He stretches out the heavens like a — , and spreads them out like a tent to live in' (Isaiah 40:22) (6)
- 7 What the dove carried the olive leaf in, when it returned to Noah's ark (Genesis 8:11) (4)
- 8 Annoy (1 Samuel 1:6) (8)
- 9 Judah's last king, who ended his days as a blind prisoner in Babylon (Jeremiah 52:11) (8)
- 13 'They all — and were satisfied' (Luke 9:17) (3)
- 16 Eliphaz the Temanite was one; so was Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite (Job 2:11; 16:2) (4,9)
- 17 National Association of Evangelicals (of the USA) (1,1,1)
- 19 Popular song for New Year's Eve, Auld — — (4,4)
- 24 Able dock (anag.) (8)
- 25 The number of stones David chose for his confrontation with Goliath (1 Samuel 17:40) (4)
- 26 Elgar's best-known 'Variations' (6)
- 27 Soak (Isaiah 16:9) (6)

Down

- 1 Money owing (Deuteronomy 15:3) (4)
- 2 Conciliatory (Titus 3:2) (9)
- 3 'Do this, whenever you — it, in remembrance of me' (1 Corinthians 11:25) (5)
- 4 A group assisting in the governance of the Roman Catholic Church (5)
- 5 One of the gifts Joseph's brothers took with them on their second journey to Egypt (Genesis 43:11) (4)
- 6 'Reach out your hand and — — into my side. Stop doubting and believe' (John 20:27) (3,2)
- 10 Be outstandingly good (2 Corinthians 8:7) (5)
- 11 'What — — that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?' (Psalm 8:4) (2,3)
- 12 Horse's feet (Judges 5:22) (5)
- 13 Notice (Deuteronomy 17:4) (9)
- 14 Comes between 2 Chronicles and Nehemiah (4)
- 15 One of Israel's northern towns conquered by Ben-Hadad (1 Kings 15:20) (4)
- 18 Narnia's Lion (5)
- 20 One of the two rivers in which Naaman would have preferred to wash (2 Kings 5:12) (5)
- 21 Avarice—one of the evils that come from inside people (Mark 7:22) (5)
- 22 Knight Grand Cross of St Michael and St George (1,1,1,1)
- 23 Jacob's first wife (Genesis 29:23) (4)



Solution can be found on Page 34

With Christmas in Mind

We are better givers than getters... The Christmas story – the one according to Luke, not Dickens – is not about how blessed it is to be givers, but about how essential it is to see ourselves as receivers. – *William Willimon*

The Word of God, Jesus Christ, on account of His great love for mankind, became what we are in order to make us what He is Himself. – *Irenaeus*

Thankfully our Saviour is not Father Christmas. He gave His best to us because we were **not** good. – *Moe Bergeron*

He who has no Christmas in his heart will never find Christmas under a tree. – *Roy Smith*
Christ became what we are that He might make us what He is. – *Athanasius*

God became man to turn creatures into sons; not simply to produce better men of the old kind but to produce a new kind of man. – *C S Lewis*

In Jesus Christ heaven meets earth and earth ascends to heaven. – *Anon*

The hinge of history is on the door of a Bethlehem stable. – *R Sockman*

Love is what is in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents for a minute and look around. – *Anon*.



Solution to Crossword on Pages 32 & 33

ACROSS: 1, Depend. 4, Canopy. 7, Beak. 8, Irritate. 9, Zedekiah. 13, Ate. 16, Job's comforter. 17, NAE. 19, Lang Syne. 24, Blockade. 25, Five. 26, Enigma. 27, Drench.

DOWN: 1, Debt. 2, Peaceable. 3, Drink. 4, Curia. 5, Nuts. 6, Put it. 10, Excel. 11, Is man. 12, Hoofs. 13, Attention. 14, Ezra. 15, Ijon. 18, Aslan. 20, Abana. 21, Greed. 22, GCMG. 23, Leah.

Everyday Christmas *(Mal 4:2, Mt 1:23)*

Light a candle,
Look into the light,
Pray.

*Light and life to all He brings,
Risen with healing in His wings*

As the flame rises,
Smooth, bright,
Know the comfort of Christ
In the carol speaking
Afresh.
Bringing Jesus
Into heart and prayer.

Emmanuel, God with us.
Light of the world,
Out of the stable
Into our situations.

Because of Jesus
Christmas is everyday.

The Lord is here.
Hallelujah.

By Daphne Kitching



As the year draws to a close:

Lines from Invocation of Peace

Deep peace, pure white of the moon to you;
Deep peace, pure green of the grass to you;
Deep peace, pure brown of the earth to you;
Deep peace, pure grey of the dew to you,
Deep peace, pure blue of the sky to you!
Deep peace of the running wave to you,
Deep peace of the flowing air to you,
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.

By Fiona Macleod (19th century Celtic visionary and romantic)



Portree Parish Church of Scotland is a Charity Registered in Scotland. SC 000416