



**PORTREE PARISH
CHURCH OF SCOTLAND**

*Come
and
worship*

CHRISTMAS 2021

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DO NOT BE AFRAID !

As Christmas draws nearer, I find myself more often meditating on those lonely and fearful shepherds, long ago, from Bethlehem, as ... ***the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”*** (Luke 2: 10 – 12)

Right now, there are people all over in the world who are just like you. They are either lonely, they are missing somebody, they are depressed, they are hurt, they are scarred from the past, they are having personal issues no one knows about, they have secrets you won't believe. They wish, they dream, and they hope. And right now, they wait for a Word that there is salvation for them from all fears. For those shepherds that Word of *Good News* came in an awesome, fearful moment, they would never forget. The Message of the first Christmas would always echo in every heart. That blazing light was captured forever in their minds that they rushed from the glowing skies and searched until they found the Lord as *a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger*, according to the Gospel. And all because they gave up fear.

People deal with worries and fears in different ways – some people want to share and verbalize them with anyone who will listen. Others deal with them more privately – and there are those who go on a journey to find Him who takes away all fears, and can give peace to the souls and goodwill towards all men in a *Christ-like* way.

All the key characters of the Christmas-story faced *fear* and received the same message, *Do not be afraid !* Zechariah when approached in the Temple ; Mary, as she was troubled with her pregnancy ; Joseph when asked to not be afraid to take Mary as his wife, and indeed, the terrified shepherds out in the night, on the fields of Bethlehem were challenged to give up fear and go to visit Christ.

Karl Bart, a German theologian during World War II. warned, “*Christmas without fear carries with it fear without Christmas.*” There is no real sense of the *Peace of God* without the fear of God. We, like those shepherds long ago have plenty to be afraid of. Even a tiny, invisible virus was able to teach the whole world to fear, as, according to the official figures, the COVID-19 death-toll is above five million now. There is nowhere in the Bible that says, *Do not be afraid of cancer, stroke, death, or... Coronavirus*. Instead, it teaches us to fight against the fear of these, and approach God with trust; ask for His love in Jesus Christ, and strongly believe that through Him *all will be well*.

Christmas is not a sentimental fairy-tale. Hope is born, as Christ came and comes in the midst of real fear. This is what gives *Christian Hope* its power to redeem and reconcile the most difficult of situations and the broken lives, bringing ***good news and great joy that will be for all people***: God was born into our world of fear and death, yet overcame with His love forever.

The message of Christmas has an eternal relevance: *In a world of fear only the Love of God can Win !*

Merry Christmas and a Blessed, Happy New Year to you all,

Your Minister.

SESSION CLERK'S REPORT

In ancient Roman religion and mythology, Janus was the god of gates and doors who held the key, so to speak, to the metaphorical doors or gateways between what was and what is to come. It is thought that the month of January is named after him and he is traditionally pictured as having two heads—one looking backwards and the other forwards.



We are rapidly approaching the end of yet another year and will soon welcome in another January - The time of year when we look back and consider the memorable events of the previous year and look forward with our hopes for the coming twelve months.

With the changes to our lives brought about by the continuing presence of Covid, we might want to forget all about 2021, but there were many positives we should remember.

After the second period of enforced closure, our beloved church reopened for worship on Sunday 28 March.. Understandably, the numbers attending initially were much reduced, but as confidence in the cleaning and sanitising arrangements grew, and the socially distanced seating added to the feeling of security, the number attending has grown significantly.

Members of our Kirk Session are all well known individually to the congregation but previously the only time they were seen together was at Communion when, in silence they distributed the Elements to the congregation. Now they can be seen each Sunday working closely as a team, greeting the congregation as they come to church, directing them to pews and ensuring safe exit from the church at the end of the service.

While Covid has prevented the use of Pew Bibles or Intimation Sheets we are able to project on the wall the Bible readings and the lyrics for the hymns. It has been noted and commented upon that with members of the congregation looking up to read the hymn lyrics, rather than looking down at a hymn book, the quality of singing is much improved.

Looking forward, we appreciate that people are missing the opportunity for tea / coffee and fellowship after the service, and special events like congregational meals, but we hope that in the coming year these may be possible once more

Similarly we hope that conditions will allow for our young people to be able to return to continue the wonderful Christian education provided by the Sunday School leaders.

When thinking about what to put in this report the words of that wonderful hymn *Great is thy faithfulness* kept going through my mind - especially the line -

Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow

We hope and pray that, as we enter into 2022, the darkness of Covid might disappear and God's light may shine through on each and every one of us to brighten our lives.

God bless you all

Bill

TREASURER'S REPORT

I should not really admit it, but a Treasurer's job is not that difficult. Certainly, it is time consuming with the need for a good recording system, the accurate recording of all transactions and regular checking of the figures.

I find the hardest part to be the preparation of a financial report – normally five or six times per year for the Congregational Board and then the Annual Accounts. My difficulty is how to make the report readable and meaningful to people who are not that interested in figures.

Normal practice is to compare the income and expenditure of the current year with the same period in the previous year. That was all right in the days before Covid !

The last full year for accounting purposes was 2019 , in 2020 the church was closed for approximately 7½ months with a further closure of 3 months in 2021. Also to be considered are the facts that prices have risen (sometimes significantly) in that period and we have, for a variety of reasons, lost a number of our members.

So, for this report I feel that the most sensible approach is to highlight the main points (positive and negative) affecting our financial situation. The figures compare the first 9 months of 2019 and 2021

Negative

- Our Open Plate offerings (cash put into the plate) are down by 59%
- The closure of the Church Hall to groups has resulted in a loss to the church of £4,750 (£8,200 if we include 2020)
- The total funds held by the church are £12,100 down on that for 2019

Positive

- The number of members of the congregation who have put aside their weekly offerings and handed these in when they returned to the church
- Our Ministry & Mission contributions to the Church of Scotland were reduced to take into account the periods of church closure
- In spring of this year I signed a new contract with Calor Gas for the LPG used for heating the Church and Church Hall. This fixed our prices for the next three-year period meaning we will be unaffected by the spiralling gas prices
- More people are gradually returning to church.
- Compared with many other churches we are in the fortunate position of still being able to meet all our financial commitments and be able to carry out any necessary maintenance work to our properties

While the positive list has more entries than that for the negative our financial reserves are considerably reduced and we hope that with the continuing generosity of the congregation we will continue to meet all our obligations and finance our plans for the future of Portree Parish Church.

God bless

Bill

ADVENT

Waiting is not popular in our culture, when so much can be obtained simply at the press of a button! Advent, when we wait for the coming of Christmas, is also an opportunity to learn what it means to be waiting for the promised return of Jesus. He says: *'It's like a man going away: he leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch. Therefore, keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back'* (Mark 13:34-35).

We live between Jesus' first and second comings and this parable reminds us of the need to watch and wait, as disciples living faithfully for Him. It reminds us of two kinds of waiting: *passive* and *active*. Imagine you're at the railway station, awaiting the arrival of a train. On the platform a man is asleep, as he thinks there is plenty of time before the train arrives. He is *passively waiting*. There is also a small boy on the platform who is excited about the train coming. He can't sit still and constantly looks down the track to see if the train is coming. He is *actively waiting*, for he expects the train to arrive at any moment.

Advent gives us a choice: *how will we wait for Jesus' coming?* Passive waiting doesn't require much attention on our part. We can live our Christian life pre-occupied with our own concerns, rather than looking to God. However, active waiting involves an eager expectation, as we await Jesus' return or simply look to him coming to us today. All we want is to be found faithful as His disciples. There is nothing more important than being ready to meet our Master!

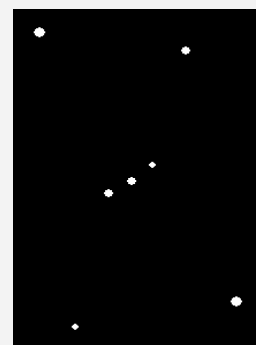


With winter now firmly upon us, the loss of sunshine and warm days is more than compensated for by the glories of the winter night sky. Of all the winter constellations, the most wonderful, surely, is Orion:

Orion

Orion soars above
His stars, like diamonds, glitter
Celestial wonder!

His wondrous belt
And sword of nascent starforms
Winter Glory !



By Nigel Beaton

THE MAN WHO MARRIED MARY

The traditional Nativity scene on our Christmas cards has Mary with the Holy Babe. Around her are the shepherds and Magi. We may also see stable animals, angels and a star! While Joseph is often included, his presence seems to be of minor importance.

After all, we praise God for Jesus with our familiar Christmas carols, mentioning angels, shepherds, Wise Men and Mary but the name of Joseph is absent! Why is Joseph given a low profile? For he is a man to be remembered.

Joseph was a resident of Nazareth. He worked as a carpenter and his skills would have included making furniture, repairing buildings and crafting agricultural tools. Although Joseph had an honourable profession, he would not have been a man of great wealth.

The gospel writers Matthew and Luke give Joseph a few brief mentions. After the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary go to the temple in Jerusalem to dedicate the Baby to God. Afterwards, they flee into Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod and much later return to Nazareth. 12 years later, Mary and Joseph go with Jesus to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. Here they lose Jesus, only to find Him in the Temple talking with religious leaders!

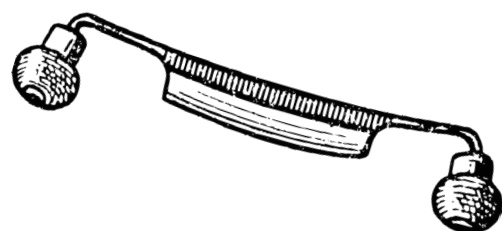
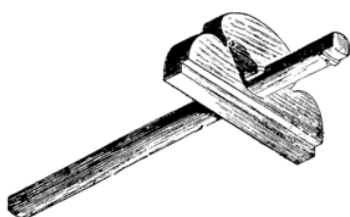
Apart from these verses, the New Testament is silent about the rest of Joseph's life. However, we do know that Joseph was father to other children by Mary. His four sons are named, and they had at least two daughters. (See Matthew 13:55)

And we also know that Joseph was someone who quietly and humbly took on the awesome role in caring for the early life of the Son of God. Joseph would have taught Jesus many things – not just the skills of a labourer, but the lore of the countryside which was evident in our Lord's teaching. Jesus grew up within a loving family and described God as 'Father', knowing also the good fatherly qualities of Joseph.

In the Christmas story, Joseph is placed into a situation that brought him misunderstanding and suspicion. But Joseph remained faithful in the knowledge that as long as God had spoken, the opinion of others mattered little. Before Jesus began His ministry, it is believed that Joseph died. It is likely Jesus took on many of His father's responsibilities before He left home.

In the eyes of the world, Joseph was a nobody. He was not a man of valour, fame and fortune. But he was the one who had parental responsibility for the greatest person who has ever lived!

It is sad that we often equate ordinariness with ineffectiveness. Down the ages, God has used many ordinary people to accomplish great things. God continues to use ordinary people. Like Joseph, we need to know that doing God's will is the most important thing in life. May we, this Christmas, respond to God's call to us and please Him in all that we do.





THE HISTORY OF CHRISTINGLES



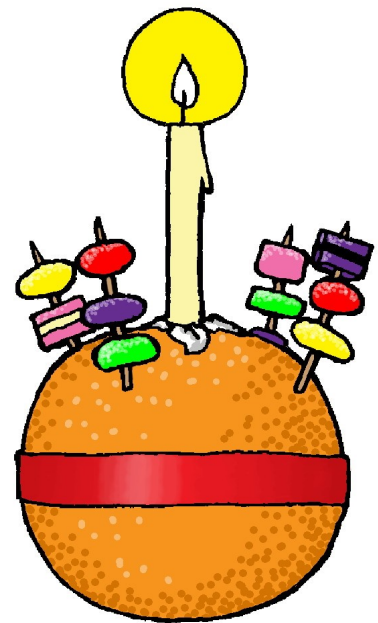
The idea of Christingles came from a Moravian Church in Germany in 1747. The minister, John de Watteville, gave children at the service a lighted candle with a red ribbon around it. This represented Jesus being the light of the world and the final prayer of that first service was "Lord Jesus, kindle a flame in these children's hearts, that theirs like Thine become".

The custom went around the world with the church. Missionaries brought the Moravian Church to Britain in the late 1700s. In Moravian churches, the Christingle Service is usually held on the Sunday before Christmas or on Christmas Eve.

Over the years the symbolism of the Christingle grew into what's known as a Christingle today.

Here's what the different parts of the Christingle represent:

- The orange is round like the world.
- The candle stands tall and straight and gives light in the dark like the love of God.
- The red ribbon goes all around the 'world' and is a symbol of the blood Jesus shed when he died for us. (Sometimes in Moravian Churches a white ribbon is used, to represent the purity of Jesus.)
- The four sticks point in all directions and symbolise North, South, East and West - they also represent the four seasons.



The fruit and nuts (or sometimes sweets!) represent the fruits of the earth, nurtured by the sunshine and the rain.

The word Christingle could have come from several sources. It might be an 'English' version of 'Christkindl' (meaning little Christ child), the present bringer in some parts of Germany and other European countries, who represents the baby Jesus. It could be the putting together of the words 'Christmas' and 'ingle'. Ingle is an old Scots word for fire and so that would make it mean the 'Christ Light'. As Christingles originally came from Germany, the first theory is more likely.



MUSIC FOR THE MESSIAH

Have you noticed that, in the Christmas story, singing is featured on three occasions?

Firstly, after Mary was given a message from the angel Gabriel, and was visiting her elderly and pregnant relative, Elizabeth. Mary was so overwhelmed with happiness at the forthcoming miraculous births, she started to sing.

Over the years, her words, known as *The Magnificat*, have been set to music by various composers. The hymn *Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord* is one example of it. Of course, we don't know Mary's melody line, but her words express God's promise that He would rescue His people and through them save the world. Mary sings of God's mercy and benevolence on the helpless, the humble and the hungry.

Months later, in the fields of Bethlehem, shepherds were confronted with an angel and given an incredible message: the Saviour, the Messiah had been born. This was followed by a host of angels who could not help but sing glory to God. Later, the shepherds saw the baby Jesus. They then returned home: not in silence and awe, but in song. They were overwhelmed with an encounter with Almighty God! Heaven and earth had been brought together. They simply couldn't stop themselves from praising and glorifying God.

For Mary, the Shepherds and the Eastern Men too, that first Christmas brought in a time of hope: hope for the helpless, pardon for the guilty, and forgiveness for the conscious stricken. Good news for those who had had nothing but bad news!

From that time on, people have tried to express their gratitude, thanks and wonder at God's love and mercy. Over the centuries, countless poets and musicians have composed music for us to sing. At no other time in the year, is so much music used to describe and express one moment in history.

Traditionally, December is a time for concerts and services of Christmas music. We come together to sing carols and other songs that express the wonder of God's Gift to us. Unfortunately, last year, the coronavirus restricted or even cancelled our musical festivities. This month, we hope to be in a better position to worship together.

Jesus has given us hope; forgiven our sin; and continues to impart faith and heal our spiritual wounds. Isn't that something to always sing about?

O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!

CHRISTMAS CAROLS

There can't be anyone who doesn't look forward to December and the chance to sing Christmas carols in the church. Just as the lighting of the first Advent candle confirms that Christmas is coming so too does the change in hymns to those well-loved songs that are only ever sung at this time of year. Quite simply Christmas without carols isn't Christmas though sometimes by Boxing Day some of us have had more than enough renditions of "Hark the Herald Angels Sing"!

Every year on Christmas Eve I always think back to my childhood when, as a member of the youth fellowship, we used to go round the streets near our church entertaining(!) the good folk of Leith with our singing. Carol sheet in one hand, torch in the other, we would find a street corner to stand at and sing a few songs whilst some of us knocked on doors and asked for a few pennies for that year's charity before moving on to the next street corner. A quick discussion about which carol to sing next and then off we went again our youthful and, to be truthful, not always tuneful voices rising into the clear black sky our hats, scarves and gloves keeping us cosy and warm. Nostalgia probably makes me remember that it never rained, and it never really felt cold but what I am sure of is that we were always well received by those households and that there were few Scrooges with their "Bah humbug" attitude to Christmas. We always made sure that the manse was one of the last houses to be visited. Then it was back to the church hall for mince pies and hot chocolate before it was time for the Midnight service where there were more carols to be sung! It's such a pity that society being what it is children nowadays can't experience the joy that going carol singing round the local community gave us when we were young. I would recommend reading the chapter in Laurie Lee's "Cider with Rosie" which tells of the annual tour he and his friends made round their village in rural Gloucestershire on Christmas Eve and all the characters he encountered to remind you of this great tradition.

Last year "Songs of Praise" had a survey to see which was Britain's favourite carol. See if your favourite made it into the top 10!

10. O Come O Come Emmanuel
9. Joy to The World
8. Away in A Manger
7. Once in Royal David's City
6. O Little Town of Bethlehem
5. O Come All Ye Faithful
4. Hark The Herald Angels Sing
3. In the Bleak Mid-Winter
2. Silent Night

and at No 1 - Joy to the World

A blessed and joyful Christmas to everyone

Joy to the World, the Lord is come,

Let earth receive her King



Heather Quaye

Won by Love.

The beggar on the street, sitting all alone
Seeing his hungry look, she buys hot tea and scone.
She gives it to the man, who hadn't eaten in a while.
He was **won by love**, and she knew it by his smile.

The restless child in school, who know for bad behaviour
The teacher seeing potential, asks him to do a favour
To push the wheelchair of another, who won't have long to live.
They were **won by love**, as each to the other could give.

The addict sat on a park bench, hungry, broke and shaking
Sick of what he has become and at the edge of breaking
"Come with me, I'll take you home, and help to get your clean."
He was **won by love**, by one who'd walked where he had been.

The refugee fled from war, with hope to save his family
Dismayed by all he's seen, mistrusting even the friendly
Daily fed from foreign hands, telling of One who died for all
They are **won by love**, as they surrender to his Call.

The baby born in Bethlehem, was God's one and only Son
Given to pay the price of all the sin we folk had done.
Grew up to give His life's blood upon that cruel cross
That we, **won by love**, should live and not be lost.

As Christians, saved by grace alone, Jesus has for us a task
To share the truth with everyone who should cross our path
That they will have a chance to know His great love for them,
And **won by love**, they too, will go out and praise His Name.

Submitted by A Bethune

I think that I would need to name this one “A Watery Safari.” It is amazing how often I have to stop myself complaining about the rain. On this island of Skye, we have so very many days of rain, rain, and more rain. Many people who live here, me included, are afflicted with different forms and degrees of rheumatism, which complicates life somewhat.

Our Orthopedic Surgeons are absolute experts at hip and knee transplants. The waiting lists to have such procedures carried out is endless. People who are the successful recipients walk around enjoying their pain-free plastic hips and knees.

In Kenya people are so happy when it rains and gratefully remind themselves and each other, that rain brings blessings. It signifies a good harvest and no famine. They see their crops grow and mature. The main worry is the possibility of a plague of locusts. When they pass through, they eat every growing green thing. Gardens and fields are left bare. Their voracious appetites are never satisfied. All people can do is stand by helplessly and watch their promising harvest disappear down their greedy throats. Wherever we live there is always some little thing over which we would like to have more control and a huge number of things for which to thank God with enormous gratitude for His provision.

Trying to run a baby Home with no running water is a hazard better thought about than experienced. The Water Board in Kitui, one of the places where I lived, either had a sick sense of humour, or were utterly devoid of common sense. I would telephone their office with monotonous regularity with the same request and get the same answer. “Sir, would you please help me. We have sixty babies in the house and no water.” I knew the answer by heart.

“You know madam the water is very scarce just now but certainly as soon as we have some, we will let you have it. Just be patient and we will help you soon.”

I hang up the receiver. I have long since stopped trying to define the meaning of “soon.” Nothing for it but to collect my eighteen five-gallon containers and get ready to go and dig in the riverbed for enough water to fill all these containers. There will be at least one or two more safaris to the riverbed today. Each such safari takes at least one hour. I take one of the girls with me whom I hope has looked after the shovel for digging. We arrive at what we hope will be a good place to dig, get the containers out and the half gourds which we use for transferring the water into the containers. Shovel?? A brilliant smile lights up her face “it seems we have not got it.” I make an unsuccessful attempt to keep the exasperation off my face and out of my voice as I agree with her in a sort of strangled voice. Thankfully, I am wearing Scholes leather clogs with wooden soles. I take them off, hand one to her and use the other one myself as we proceed to dig in the sand until we get to water. It is a slow job, but it must be done. The water is brown. We fill the containers, load them all into the car and slowly make our way home praying that the springs will hold up and no bits will fall out of the car. The next procedure is to strain the water. To my exasperation the strainer has a huge hole in it which NOBODY knows anything about. “It just must have happened.” I drag out an old pair of tights which were thankfully clean, stretch them over a container, anchor them to the sides with clothes pegs and proceed to strain the water through that. The water then has to be boiled. For making up the babies bottles and for drinking it then has to be further strained this time in a commercial water strainer.

On the occasions when the Catholic Bishop who lived in town, or one of the priests who lived in town had water coming from their taps, they would let me fill my containers from their water, which was truly kind of them, and I thanked God for their generosity. It was all so much easier than digging in the river.

Over the twelve years which I spent in Kitui I could not even hazard a guess as to the number of times I had to go through the dig-in-the river procedure.

We had enormous water tanks which fitted into deep round holes in the ground. They were constructed from cement. The roofs of all our buildings were drained into these tanks and when it rained which was not often, we had a wonderful supply of good water. No matter how

tired I was the problem of keeping the Home supplied with water was my problem and it could **NEVER** be neglected.

One day I got up and had clearly fallen out of bed on the wrong side. The sheer tediousness of this lengthy but necessary procedure got the better of me. I was so grumpy, and the water Board were interfering with my sanity BIG time.... NOTICEABLY big time. They were housed in a corrugated iron office just up the hill from the Baby Home. On this day which THEY will never forget, I filled a large metal tub with dirty soiled nappies. I filled it to the brim and put it in the back of my car. I went up to their office. First, I consulted the person in charge and asked for water. I got the standard reply "Madam will get water as soon as we have some. Please be patient Madam." Well patience, this particular Madam does not possess, except for the babies, I have oodles of patience for them, but **definitely not for the water Board**. I went back out to the car and collected the tub of nappies, a cloth to sit on and my book. All their offices opened on to one hallway, and this was where I was going to be sitting for as long as necessary. Their wall made an excellent backrest. I sat down, leaned back, and proceeded to read my book. The sun was getting hotter and hotter, and the nappies began to smell in a most satisfactory manner. After half an hour or so the stench could almost be physically FELT. First one door opened into the corridor and then another until at last the authority in the building opened his door to find out what in the world was going on.

"Excuse me, excuse me, Madam would you please take that ...*thing* out of here." "Yes, certainly sir, as soon as we get water down to the Baby Home." Unintelligible muttering to someone behind him. "Madam we have started the water down to the Baby Home so you can go down there now." "Thank-you so much sir. I am incredibly grateful to you, but I will wait here until a girl from the Baby Home comes up to tell me that one of our large water tanks is three quarters full. If I go now someone might forget to keep the water running. In the Baby Home we are all totally used to this smell. It is there all day every day because you refuse to give us water." "Madam I can ASSURE you that we will not forget to keep the water flowing." I smiled nicely at him and picked up my book again. Sometime later one of the girls came up to say that the tank was filling up **extremely fast** and was now almost at the top. I picked up my things and went to the man's door with my tub in my hands to thank him and make sure the fragrance filled his office. "OK, OK you are very welcome but in future phone instead of coming up here." I thanked him again and assured him that if we were deprived of water again, I would be back with my "reminder." For the next number of years all that was needed was a phone call if they forgot to turn on the water and behold it flowed with gusto, or if there really was a shortage, they would send down a big lorry, the back of which was a huge water tank. They would pump this straight into one of our water tanks. That saved the water-board from having an unwelcome visit from me!!

I had a car, provided by "Stichten red een kind," (Help a Child) a Dutch organisation which financially supported us for many years. The car made it possible to carry all these containers at one time. The problem was that we needed so *much* water. There were usually 60 - 80 children aged between day of birth and five years old. There were fifteen girls and me in residence there and two laundry ladies and two grounds men who came on a daily basis. We also had a night watchman. No matter how careful we were the need for water was enormous.

The local ladies had to walk many miles to a water source. I would see them with one of those heavy containers on their head, their baby tied to their back and weaving a basket as they walked along chatting to each other. My admiration for them knows no bounds.

Clean, clear, fresh, flowing water is one of the benefits of living in Scotland.

Every day after I get up, I can have a wonderful relaxing hot shower. I come through to the kitchen, turn on the tap and there is plenty more clean, clear water with which to make my tea. There is still plenty clean clear water for washing the clothes. Plenty more for cleaning the house and for making tea for all my friends when they come to visit.

What a gigantic blessing. I pray that I will never, even one day, forget to thank God for the gift of water.

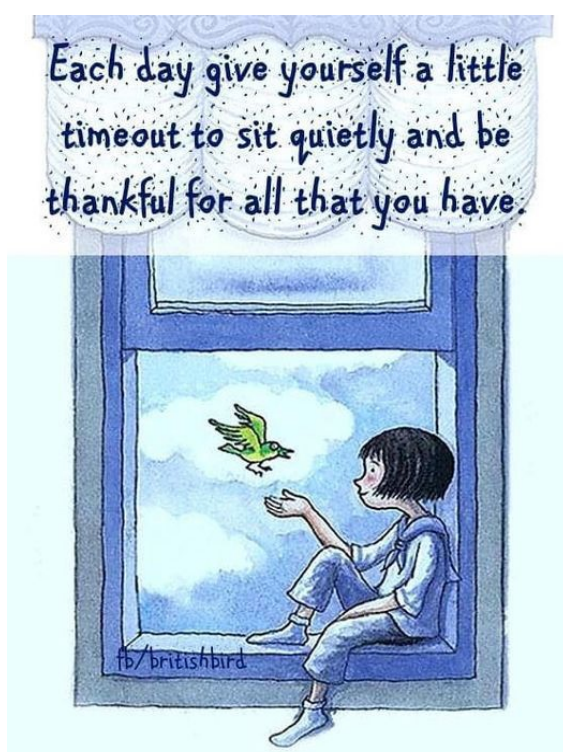
THOSE NEWSLETTERS INSIDE THEIR CHRISTMAS CARD...

Brace yourself – this is the month when many of your distant friends and relatives will be sending you their Christmas card with the Christmas Newsletter tucked inside.

You will read all about Grannie's arthritis and treatment, how Rupert's progress on the violin is amazing, how their summer holiday cruise of the Med was stupendous, exactly where the dog got lost for a day in Wales, how the kitchen has been re-furbished, and how extraordinarily well Helen is doing at university.

You may groan, but don't dismiss all those little bits of 'wonderful everyday' news. For of such minor triumphs and tragedies most of daily life is made. And don't blame your relatives/friends if they have somewhat 'enhanced' their yearly news roundup – this may be their one chance to star in a drama.

Just remember – there is nothing to stop you from sending a Christmas Newsletter back to them... and you can also write what you like !



Submitted by Mary Wake

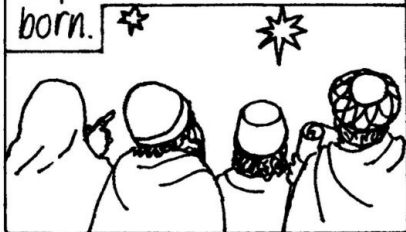
Bible Bite

A short story from the Bible

It can be read in the Bible in
Matthew 2: 1-10

Around the time of Jesus' birth, in a land far to the east of Israel, there were men who studied the stars...

When they saw a new star they believed it showed a special King had been born.



They set off to see that King.



They reached Jerusalem, the home of King Herod.



Where is the new king whose star we saw?

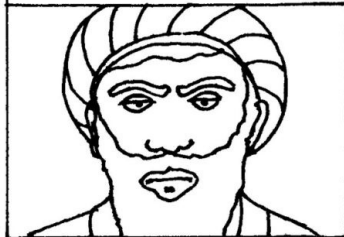
The Romans had made Herod king of the Jews about 30 years earlier. He was ruthless.



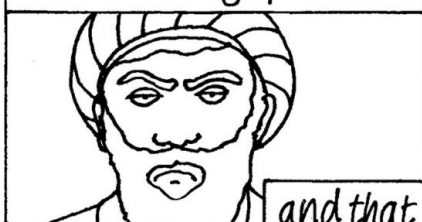
The Jews hated him and he was always worried that people were plotting against him.



He had them killed even if they were his wife or children...



So what the wise men said about a new king upset Herod



and that made everyone else afraid.

Herod got the teachers and priests together and asked about the king's birthplace.



That would be Little Bethlehem*



* Micah 5:2

Herod secretly met the wise men and asked when they had first seen the star.



Go to Bethlehem and look for the child. When you find him let me know so I can come and worship him.



As they left Jerusalem the wise men were elated to see the guiding star again.



TWO KINGS WORDSEARCH

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Jerusalem

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little

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Bethlehem

elated

birthplace

worship

Herod

secretly

Jesus

child

wise

afraid

Solution on Page 40

A COLOURING IN OPPORTUNITY



LADDER OF FAITH

Brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ I write to you once again with a message of hope. And what better a time to write such a message than the month of celebration of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. A day that signified a dramatic and sudden change in the human story. No longer was all hope lost but a saviour was sent to save the world.

Trusting God and hope go hand in hand. For it is when all seems lost, when we have tried everything through all effort but seem to have failed - that God steps in. To test faith, we must on occasion be tested to the absolute limit. What this limit is we know not of ourselves however the Lord knows what our potential is and how far we can reach and be tested.

Trusting when all seems lost is one of the most difficult things I have tried to learn as a Christian. And it is of this trust that I wish to write to you about this Christmas. It revolves around my training for the Scottish Half Marathon in 2019. Based on previous results and my personal best I was in contention for potentially winning the race. However, training had not gone well.

I had been battling a hamstring issue throughout my training. Essentially the muscle was not strong enough so every time I tried to do my key weekly session it would collapse on me and make me pull up and stop. The key session involved running continuously at half marathon pace for around 8 – 10 miles. Every time I tried this session my hamstring would collapse on me. If this happened in the race it would be disastrous and would result in much lost time and potentially even not completing the event.

I had seen many physiotherapists, tried strength training, new trainers, stretching and of course I prayed but the issue would not resolve itself.

The week before the race I decided to do something I had never done before – I would ask if our minister would pray for me. After one of the Churches evening services, I stayed behind and asked Sandor if he would pray for the Lord to Strengthen me. The moment the prayer was completed we both turned around and observed that a rainbow had filled the upper back windows of the church. Sandor then explained to me what this sign meant.

“And God said, this is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations. I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.” – GENESIS 9:12 - 9:13

I knew when I saw this stunning sight that the prayer had been heard and received. There are occasions in life when you see such sights of beauty that you stand in awe. The sight that day of the curvature of the rainbow crossing across the tall back windows of the church is something I will never forget.

I stayed the weekend with family in Edinburgh who were kind enough to let me lodge with them. It was nice to catch up with them all and we enjoyed an evening meal together before the race.

The race start was very busy, and several thousand athletes would be participating. I stood at the start line with the other lead athletes, all sharing a sense of nervous excitement. The race started and after a confined start I soon found myself at the front running behind the

lead vehicle. The race wound its way around the streets from the start at Meadowbank stadium and many supporters lined the route cheering the runners on.

I could tell from the distant sound of the other athlete's feet hitting the ground behind me that I had established a good lead. To my surprise, I was able to keep this lead to the 3-mile mark. Still going strong I had to take a moment to realise just how far I had come since I had first started running. I was now leading a national sized race and running well.

However, the problems I had endured in training soon started to become apparent. My hamstring issue had interfered with my longer training run too much. I did not have enough speed endurance and my pace began to slow at mile 4 and I dropped to second, third and eventually fourth. Disappointed, I kept going. I was still running steady and on course to break 70 minutes for only the second time if only my hamstring would hold.

In training it was usually after 8 or 9 miles of hard running that my hamstring would collapse. At mile 9 the moment of truth would occur. Trust, hope and faith had got me to keep moving forwards despite my hamstring problem. It had got me to push my faith to a new level where I asked our minister to pray for me. And despite my problems it had driven me to run to try and win the race and run with courage. At mile 9 the hamstring began to feel like it was about to collapse – just as it had done what seemed like countless times before in training.

Just as I was preparing myself for the worst – something remarkable happened – the hamstring held. My leg seemed to correct itself and I was able to maintain my pace to the finish. In the end I was fourth in 69 minutes – only the second time I have ever run under 70 minutes in my running career.

I thanked the Lord when I finished that he had strengthened me and allowed me to finish the race.

The lesson I have learned from this experience is this – had things gone completely to plan I think it is genuinely possible I could have potentially won the race and certainly I would have attained a podium finish. It would also have been my biggest ever race success. But I was not disappointed. I had been gifted with something far greater than the glory of winning a race – I had pushed my faith through to a new boundary and learned that even when all seems lost the Lord will never abandon us.

“But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” - Isaiah 40:31

Running has been my ladder of faith. It has been the means by which the Lord has led me to grow in spirit and reject the ways of my old life. Each step more challenging than the last but each bringing its own incredible spiritual rewards. How long is this ladder of which I climb by faith only the Lord knows. But I will not fear for I know the Lord is with me. For once I was lost but now I am found.

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” – Timothy 4:7

- Written by Hugh Campbell.

HOW FATHER CHRISTMAS GOT WHERE HE IS TODAY

One person you are bound to run into this Christmas season is Father Christmas. These days he seems to frequent shopping malls and garden centres. If he looks tired, just remember that he has been around a long time and gone through a lot of transformations.

Father Christmas wasn't always the red-suited, white-bearded star of the retail trade that he is today. He began life as Nicholas, born way back about AD260 in Patara, an important port on the southern coast of what is now Turkey. When his parents died and left him a fortune, Nicholas gave it away to the poor. He became a bishop of the nearby city of Myra, where he almost certainly suffered persecution and imprisonment at the hand of the Roman Emperor Diocletian.

Nicholas was a serious theologian: he was a participant at the First Council of Nicaea, which formulated the Creed which we still say today. He even, reportedly, slapped another bishop in a squabble over the exact nature of the Trinity.

Nicholas died in Myra about AD343, but the stories of his generosity and kindness were just beginning. One enduring tale tells of the three girls whom he rescued from certain prostitution by giving them gold for their dowries. When the father confronted him to thank him, Nicholas said he should thank God alone.

In the UK, Nicholas became the basis for Father Christmas, who emerged in Victorian times as a jolly-faced bearded character. Meanwhile, Dutch and German settlers had taken him to America with them as Sinter Klaas and Sankt Nicklas.

It was in America that Nicholas received his final two great breaks into real stardom. The first was when the Rev Clement C Moore, a New York Episcopal minister, turned from his life-work of writing a Hebrew/English lexicon, to write a fun poem for his children one Christmas. His 'The Visit of St Nicholas' is now universally known by its first line: 'T'was the Night Before Christmas'.

From Clement Moore we discovered that St Nicholas is round and pink-cheeked and white-bearded, and that he travels at night with sleigh, reindeer and a sack of toys on his back. It was Clement Moore who also revealed that St Nicholas enters houses down chimneys and fills children's stockings with toys and sweets.

So how did we find out that Father Christmas wears red? That was the US Coca-Cola advertising campaign of 1931, who finally released the latest, up-to-date pictures of Father Christmas: wearing a bright red, fur-trimmed coat and a large belt.

These days, it is good that Father Christmas uses reindeer and doesn't have to pay for petrol. In order to get round all the children in the world on Christmas Eve, he will have to travel 221 million miles at an average speed of 1279 miles a second, 6,395 times the speed of sound. For all those of us who are already exhausted just rushing around getting ready for Christmas, that is a sobering thought.



GOD IN THE SCIENCES

Continuing her series of articles Dr Ruth M Bancewicz, who is Church Engagement Director at The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion in Cambridge, writes on the positive relationship between Science and Christian faith.

FOLLOW THE STAR

Jesus' welcoming committee included Eastern scholars who learned about His birth through their study of astrology. I can't help thinking that the arrival of these people at Bethlehem is a link between a very early form of science (albeit mixed in with their own form of religion) and Christian faith. What better way to discover God than to explore the world and follow the evidence wherever it leads? But what exactly was the star of Bethlehem? Scientists have investigated this question over the centuries, coming up with a variety of answers.

First, there is the idea of a supernova: the massively bright explosion caused by a dying star. On rare occasions a supernova can be seen from Earth with the naked eye, remaining visible for several months. We now know that Herod the Great died around 4BC, so the actual date of Jesus' birth must be a little earlier. The supernovae that might match this timing were one in the Andromeda galaxy between March 8BC and September 7BC, and another in the constellation of Capricorn in the Spring of 5BC.

Next, comes a planetary conjunction. The alignment most commonly associated with the star of Bethlehem was between Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation of Pisces in 7BC, but not everyone is sure whether this would be extraordinary enough to be the 'star' mentioned in the Bible.

Finally, the bright astronomical object that drew the Magi could have been a comet. This idea came from Sir Colin Humphreys, Professor of Materials Science at Cambridge University, and Oxford astronomer WG Waddington, who found that a comet was recorded by Chinese astronomers between March and May, 5BC. Humphreys then speculated that the 'no room at the inn' scenario came about because Jesus was born during Passover, and the Magi visited Jesus in May or June.

People interpret the biblical account of Jesus' birth in all sorts of ways, but there's very little argument from serious historians that Jesus of Nazareth actually existed. Whatever the true explanation for the 'star of Bethlehem' may be, there's plenty of evidence that an astronomical event could have happened at the time of His birth.

I think it makes perfect sense that if God was going to enter His own creation and take on the form of one of His own



Cuimhneachain| Memories

Tha an Nollaig a-nis a' teannadh dlùth uair eile agus gu nàdarra bidh sinn a' cuimhneachadh air laoidhean Nollaig.

Aon dhiubh sin, 'Leanabh an Àigh'. Chaidh an laoidh seo a chuir ri chèile le Màiri NicDhòmhnaill à Bunesan, air Eilean Mhuile. Tha càrn-cuimhne do Mhàiri ri lorg am Muile. Chaidh an laoidh eadar-theangachadh le fear Lachlainn MacBean bhon iris naidheachd, the Fifeshire Advertiser.

Tha sinn cho eòlach air an laoidh sa Bheurla gur dòcha nach eil cuimhne neo guth gur ann sa Ghàidhlig a thàinig i thugainn an toiseach.

'Si seo tè de na laoidhean is fìor thoil leam fhìn agus bi i toirt cuimhneachain làithean na Sgoil Shàbaid thugam, agus cha b'ann an dè bha sin!

Seo a chiad rann den laoidh.

Leanabh an Àigh

An leanabh bh'aig Màiri

Rugadh san stàbull

Rìgh nan dùl:

Thàinig don fhàsach

Dh'fhulang 'nar n-àite

Son iad an àireamh

Bhitheas dha dlùth!

As we draw closer to Christmas thoughts turn to favourite hymns and carols. One of those being Leanabh an Àigh/ Child in the Manger, composed by Mary MacDonald of Bunesan on Mull. A memorial cairn for Mary is located in Bunesan. The hymn, originally in Gàidhlig, was translated into English by Lachlan MacBean, of the Fifeshire Advertiser.

Some may have forgotten or perhaps were not aware that this was originally a Gàidhlig hymn.

This is a favourite Christmas hymn of mine, bringing back memories of Sunday School days, and they are not recent!

The first verse of Child in the Manger follows:

Child in the Manger

Infant of Mary

Outcast and stranger

Lord of all!

Child who inherits

All our transgressions,

All our demerits

On him fall

Mairead NicNeacail/ Margaret Nicolson



CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

Away in a manger the baby lay,
No blankets or pillows – just some hay.
Shepherds watching their flocks by night
Angels appear midst blinding light.

Wise men travelling from afar
Following a guiding star,
Herod filled with rage within
Planning to kill this new born king.

What can this mean for us today?
Just a story some would say,
Perhaps we need to think it through,
A Saviour born – for me, for you?

By Megan Carter

WHAT IF...?

What if... Mary had refused to carry the baby Jesus?

She knew she'd be shamed and scorned for such a thing.

Her life would never be the same and maybe even Joseph wouldn't want her now, he'd think she sinned

But... despite her youth, she understood the need

To obey the Holy Spirit, the Son of God to birth

She didn't fear for herself, nor for mercy plead

But saw the honour of bringing her Saviour to this earth.

What if... Joseph hadn't accepted Mary's explanation?

Imagine what is happening inside this young man's head!

Mary – gone three months and back in such a situation.

He could have had her stoned, or divorced her instead!

But... when in a dream, Joseph heard the angel's voice,

Telling him Mary was faithfully carrying God's son.

He believed, and knew he had made the right choice.

Took Mary as his wife, awaiting his Saviour to be born



What if... The wise men had not followed after the star?

Which led them to see the Holy Child with their own eyes.

They could have decided that distance was too far to go .

Too long away from home, their dreams might not be realised.

But... they chose to go the way that God set before them.

To see the child they knew would one day be their King

Herod couldn't kill the child because they took the long way home

And knew that what they'd done, would joy to many bring.

What if... the Apostles hadn't answered Heaven's call?

To bring the Gospel message to the nations far and wide.

The missionaries and teacher would've never heard at all

And we wouldn't even know we could ever with Him abide.

But... many have gone to other lands, to His story further.

Or taught each week in Sunday school that we could know.

There are two ways of living life; we choose one or the other
To trust in Christ and follow Him, is the Way we should go.

What if... this Christmas we don't see the reason Jesus came
God loved each one so much; He sent Him to pay the price.
He came through the manger, to die on a cross of shame
No other could pay the debt, no sacrifice would suffice.
But...He rose again to give the chance of life to everyone
If we ask Him to forgive, He'll cleanse and renew each heart.
He'll guide along life's journey, till our time on earth is done
It's His gift to you this Christmas, to give a fresh new start!

Submitted by A Bethune

WHEN GOD WAS BORN

God appeared one night; the world slept on.
Infant flesh disguised the Holy One,
announced by angels singing in the sky,
'Peace on earth and praise to God on high'
but who turned up?

Shepherds came, star-gazers from the east,
outcasts, prophets, sinners, lost and least.
Kings and lawyers saw Him as a threat,
Creator, Saviour, Prince of Peace and yet
persecuted, made a refugee,
condemned to death from birth and forced to flee.

Wonder at the welcome Christ extends:
He heals, forgives, restores, makes us His friends.
As we recall and celebrate His birth
how are we to live His life on earth?

By Helen Brocklehurst



GOD IN THE ARTS

The Revd Michael Burgess continues his series on God in the Arts with 'The Annunciation to the Shepherds' by Sano di Pietro.

'In that region there were shepherds keeping watch over their flock'

In the Old Testament shepherds were greatly valued and treated with respect. Patriarchs, prophets and kings had all tended sheep. Job, a rich man, owned 14,000 sheep. David was tending sheep when he was called by God and anointed by Samuel.

But as the Israelites settled in towns and cities and turned to farming, attitudes towards the shepherds changed. As the New Testament opens, shepherding had become a dirty, lonely life, away from civilisation. Shepherds could not observe the daily rituals of their faith, and so they had a low status in society, looked down upon by orthodox Jews.

But out in the countryside with just the hills and the plains and the open air, St Luke tells us that it was there that God's message was proclaimed and heard. Cities and towns had walls and barriers, as Bethlehem has today. But in the fields at night, there were shepherds, watching and alert, ready for any eventuality. And so, they were the first to hear of the birth of a Saviour.

'The Annunciation to the Shepherds' is this month's painting by Sano di Pietro. We know little about this Italian artist apart from some dates. He was born in Siena in 1406 and died there in 1481. But he has left us a legacy of beautiful and sensitive paintings. As we look at this scene, we see the human details: two shepherds huddled by the fireside with their dog, all three looking up to see the angel, and a spear by the side to ward off thieves and predators. The sheep are safely in their pen, black and white fleeces

huddled together for warmth. In the sky the angel appears, bearing an olive branch in one hand and with the other pointing to Bethlehem in the distance.

Luke has already told us of another annunciation, with Gabriel visiting Mary. Artists loved to portray this scene and often showed a lily, the symbol of purity, in their paintings. Here there is the olive sprig, a symbol of peace to reinforce the angelic message of peace in the birth of the Saviour. Luke goes on to tell us how Jesus brought new meaning and peace to all those like the shepherds who were nobody in the eyes of people, but everything to the eyes and heart of God.

Jesus in His teaching often turned to the theme of sheep and shepherds, with parables about lost sheep, gates to the fold, and hireling shepherds. Just as the faithful shepherds were prepared to give their lives to protect the flock, so Jesus the Good Shepherd gave His life for the world – a death that would bring the peace and reconciliation shown in that olive branch held by the angel. At this Christmas time we rejoice with the heavenly host to proclaim the birth of this Prince of Peace and we commit ourselves to that work of peace and shepherding.

Howard Thurman wrote these words:

'When the song of the angels is stilled...
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,
the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost, to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry, to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations, to bring peace among the people,
to make music in the heart.'

* * * * *

A CHRISTMAS PRAYER

Lord, as I enter into the fast-paced season ahead, help me walk slowly and quietly. Let me stop and listen to the angels sing of the greatest news ever told. Let my heart, mind and soul join the chorus. "Glory in the Highest!! The Messiah has been born!"

Among all the bright sparkling lights and cheery holiday tunes, let my spirit travel once again toward Bethlehem to honour and worship Jesus, my King, The Prince of Peace, the Lord of Hosts, Mighty Counsellor, Son of God, the Lamb. All Your love, mercy and power somehow made flesh in the tiny form of a humble baby born in a manger.

Let me worship the only one who is worthy to take our sin away and open the gates of all eternity!

by Daphne Kitching

KNOW GOD, KNOW LOVE - 1 John 4:6

As I am sure you are all aware my dad died 24th August. As a family we are going through the grieving process but knowing God's love and having the love of my family and friends helps.

God is the ultimate example of love. Through the Word of God and the life and death of Jesus Christ, we are shown what it means to love others. Because of the love that God has shown to us, we are called to show one another love.

Lots of mentions of love are to be found in the Bible

1 Corinthians 13 : 4-5

Love is patient,

Love is kind

Romans 12 : 10

Be devoted to one another in love

2 Thessalonians 3:5

May the Lord direct your hearts in God's love and Christ's perseverance

1 Corinthians 16 : 14

Do everything in love

1 John 3 : 1

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God.

And in a Christmas poem which is now a beautiful hymn

Love came down at Christmas

Love all lovely

Love Divine

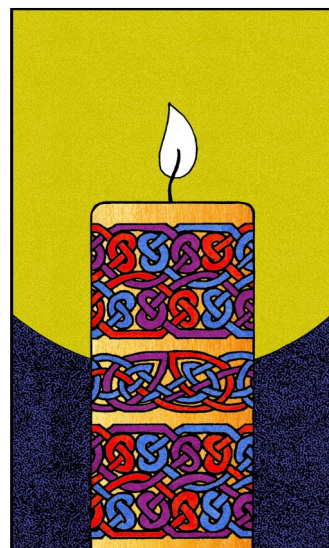
Love was born at Christmas

Written by Christina Georgina Rossetti 1885

Gifts of time and love are the basic ingredients of a truly Merry Christmas.

Love & Merry Christmas xx

Kay MacKinnon



Shortly after coming back from Kenya, I took my rapidly shrinking courage in both hands and visited the supermarket. Within seconds of entering the place I could not for the life of me remember why I was there. In front of me was massive stand that contained a huge display of different varieties of cereal.... How does anyone ever choose anything in this vast array of stuff? Another large space was dedicated to baked beans. Was everyone in the city on a baked bean diet or what? Another enormous stand contained every variety imaginable of biscuits. This was serious! What exactly did I need and how was I going to choose anything when there was such a selection of every kind of everything?

I had no intention of standing there with a bovine expression spread over my face trying to work out what I liked. My head was spinning so I was on the point of going back home when thankfully George and Jean walked round the corner of one of the stands. They helped me to figure out what I would like and just as importantly how **much** to buy. I was still very much in the Kenya mindset of buying plenty of what you need when you see it. Next time it might not be there, in fact it may not be there for the foreseeable future. I do not know how long it took Jean to get it into my head that in this country whatever we needed was **always** available. It was totally unnecessary to buy ten bottles of dish-washing liquid at one time, not to mention ten bottles of bleach crowding out the cupboard. At least I did not need to buy any more of that for the next couple of years.

In rural areas of Kenya at that time, there were wee shops known as Dukas, where I did my day-to-day shopping. The system there was friendly and more of a social occasion. I could chat to my friends as we all shopped together.

The Dukas sold margarine in a tin (i.e., Blue-band, the colour of the tin therefore the name of the product) and maybe a few tomatoes, a few onions, and a cabbage or two. Potatoes when they were available and tea because tea grew in abundance in Kenya. Enormous fields of it could be seen growing up in the western areas. Tons of it went to the international markets every day. Coffee was the same, although it was not nearly so popular as tea. Kenyans loved their tea and so did I. The people there made it differently; you put milk and water, half and half into a big pot and when it boiled you dropped the tea leaves and a little sugar into the pot and let it simmer until it was a nice brown colour. You then sieved it and drank it. Definitely my favourite beverage.... we always had the same choice, take it or leave it.

There were times when the local shops ran out of essentials like sacks of sugar, or dried vegetables (which we needed during times of famine). On such occasions, I had to go into Nairobi and scout round the places which were supposed to have famine food. Very seldom did I ever strike the jackpot. While I was in Nairobi anyway, and if there was still a little money left, I would have a look round the Supermarket and maybe buy the occasional treat. There were so many of us that “the wee treats” became industrial shopping. Everyone worked hard therefore everyone was entitled to a wee treat. I was incredibly popular on those rare occasions!!!

A separate visit to town was necessary when I had to buy medicines. They all came in liquid form, the antibiotics as well as cough medicine and analgesics. Vaseline came in a big square tin. We used it for the babies’ skin. It was much cheaper than the more upmarket lotions and it worked just as well. All these things came in large containers and were heavy, so I did not attempt to carry them with other heavy loads.

On one occasion during a long famine, we were all so exhausted. There was an endless number of mothers dying after giving birth, due most times to the fact that they were starving during their pregnancy. Their wee starving babies came to us. It was difficult getting them used to eating. They hurt so much when their bodies had to learn to cope with food. We had to be so careful that such vulnerable wee people did not get an infection, which necessitated them having an antibiotic, which would be followed by thrush in their mouths and down their

alimentary tract. Day and daily we brought them before the Throne of Grace to seek the services of the Great Physician Himself. I could not leave the house when we had those very needy wee ones because it needed all of us to work hard to keep up to date with the other work which had to be done in addition to giving total attention to the vulnerable sick ones.

During one nightmarish day two babies died within hours of coming into the house. I went to my room and sobbed my heart out for the precious wee people that we had lost. The Pastor who was in charge of our district came up to see me about something and heard this weeping coming from my room. He went for one of the girls and she came with him to my room after explaining the cause to him. He was so comforting and kind. I bubbled out my problem about the two babies who died that day, plus another five who had died from the beginning of the famine. I explained that I was now so endlessly tired that when I read my Bible nothing was sinking into my head, and I could no longer pray. He was an absolute saint. He said "Katie, what do you think the Pastors are here for? It is my job and also that of the rest of the Pastors to come and read God's Word here and to pray for all of you.

God has given us each a different job." You are crying because you lost seven of the many babies who came in here, but the two Hospitals in this very District lost **all** of the babies who came into them.

The famine raged on and on and everyday Rev. Konzi and any Pastors who happened to come into his office, came up to the Baby Home and read to us and prayed for us as we all sat around them feeding the babies as they interceded for us before the Throne of Grace. The famine raged on, the mother's kept dying and their wee sick babies continued to come into us. We all worked extremely hard, but I don't think we ever again felt so unbelievably tired as I was that day.

The famine was followed by measles, and then typhoid. It was a dreadful time. Some families lost all their children. There was grief and mourning everywhere. People here in Scotland were absolutely wonderful. They did their absolute best to keep us supplied with money so that we could buy any food that came on the market. One lovely friend made it her business to keep an eye out for any unusual milk, e.g., soya bean milk, or fortified feeds for the babies. She posted them out to me and of all the things which I lost in transit those special drinks were never lost because God knew we needed them and they always arrived just when they were most needed.

I had to go to Town for medicine and food if I could find any. I arrived there early. I could only buy sugar in two- pound packs and the number which I was allowed was not nearly enough for us, so it involved going to many shops. Baby milk was also rationed. Finally, I bought as much as I could find then I went to the Chemist for the medicines which we needed. I was so very tired, one of the young men from the Chemist was helping me to carry the medicines out to the car. All of a sudden everything went completely blank in my mind. I had no idea where I was or how I got there. There was nothing at all happening in my head. The young man took one look at me and asked if I was OK. I said that I thought so but I did not know where I was or why I was there. I will never forget that young man although I never knew his name. He said "well you are in Nairobi, and you have bought a lot of medicine for children. You must have a car because there are keys in your hand and there is no way that you could carry all this stuff anywhere." He then looked around. There was a Subaru station wagon parked at the roadside. It looked hopeful, and the keys I was carrying were for a Subaru. It was extremely dusty so he decided that I must have driven in from a rural area. He read off the number plate and asked if I recognised it. I thankfully did indeed recognise it. He took the keys from me, loaded everything into the car, locked it, and took me by the arm and steered me back into the Chemist. He told the Asian owner what had happened.

He then went back out to guard the car which was so full of shopping. They were all so amazingly kind to me. I was sitting on a chair with a fan blowing on me. They gave me a drink of water and waited for a while until my memory started coming back in bits.

They assumed from the way I was dressed that I was a missionary!!!! I agreed that I was but could not remember which Missionary Society I was with for another wee while. I eventually remembered it, but I could not remember the telephone number at all. I had decided by now that I would just go home. They were not the least bit sure that I could remember where home was, and they had not the remotest intention of letting me out of that shop until they could locate someone to come and help me. They tried looking up past receipts in the hope that I had shopped there before. By now I remembered my name but no telephone number. They found receipts for large amounts of medicine in syrup form for Kitui Baby Home. Success. I knew that was where I was supposed to be and suddenly the Africa Inland Church popped into my head. The kind Asian gentleman raked his way through the telephone directory and found the number of the AIC office in Nairobi. Then he got through and told the story to Fred Beam, our Director at the time. Fred wasted no time coming with Norma to rescue me. Norma drove my car, and Fred his own once he had discovered from the Asian gentleman what had happened. We all drove back to the office where Jan, Fred's wife, made me something to eat and packed me off to bed and an awfully long sleep. I had to stay there for two nights until I caught up on some sleep.

God looked after the Baby Home with no help whatsoever from me. He can do all these things without us, but He allows us the huge privilege of being His hands, His feet, and His heart, in order to do His work here on earth.

God was so much bigger and clearer and real in Kenya, and indeed in all the African countries, than He is here in Britain where so many people think that they can manage without Him. What a gigantic mistake to make.

I was glad to get back to the Baby Home again. When the famine was over and things were back to normal again and all the girls had caught up with their sleep, I was sent back to Scotland for one year. I was still having episodes of forgetfulness and bursting into tears for no apparent reason. I was also having difficulty hearing and could hardly retain what I was hearing.

There were times when I was afraid that I would never get back to Kenya again which made me miserable. I had to attend a missionary counselling service until I got back to some sort of normality. It was a difficult time for the entire year. God in His mercy healed me, and I was able to go back to what I loved, being with the most adorable babies in the world.

One of the men on the Mission Board tried his best to impress upon me that I had to factor REST into my programme. He made it clear that if I did not, the same thing would happen again, and more quickly. The next time it would be more difficult to heal.

The problem was that there were no extra nurses on our staff. Each and every one of the missionary nurses were run off their feet at their own mission stations. The Kenyan nurses were just as busy. The nursing training programmes were still being rolled out so the advice while it was definitely sound, I could not put into practice.

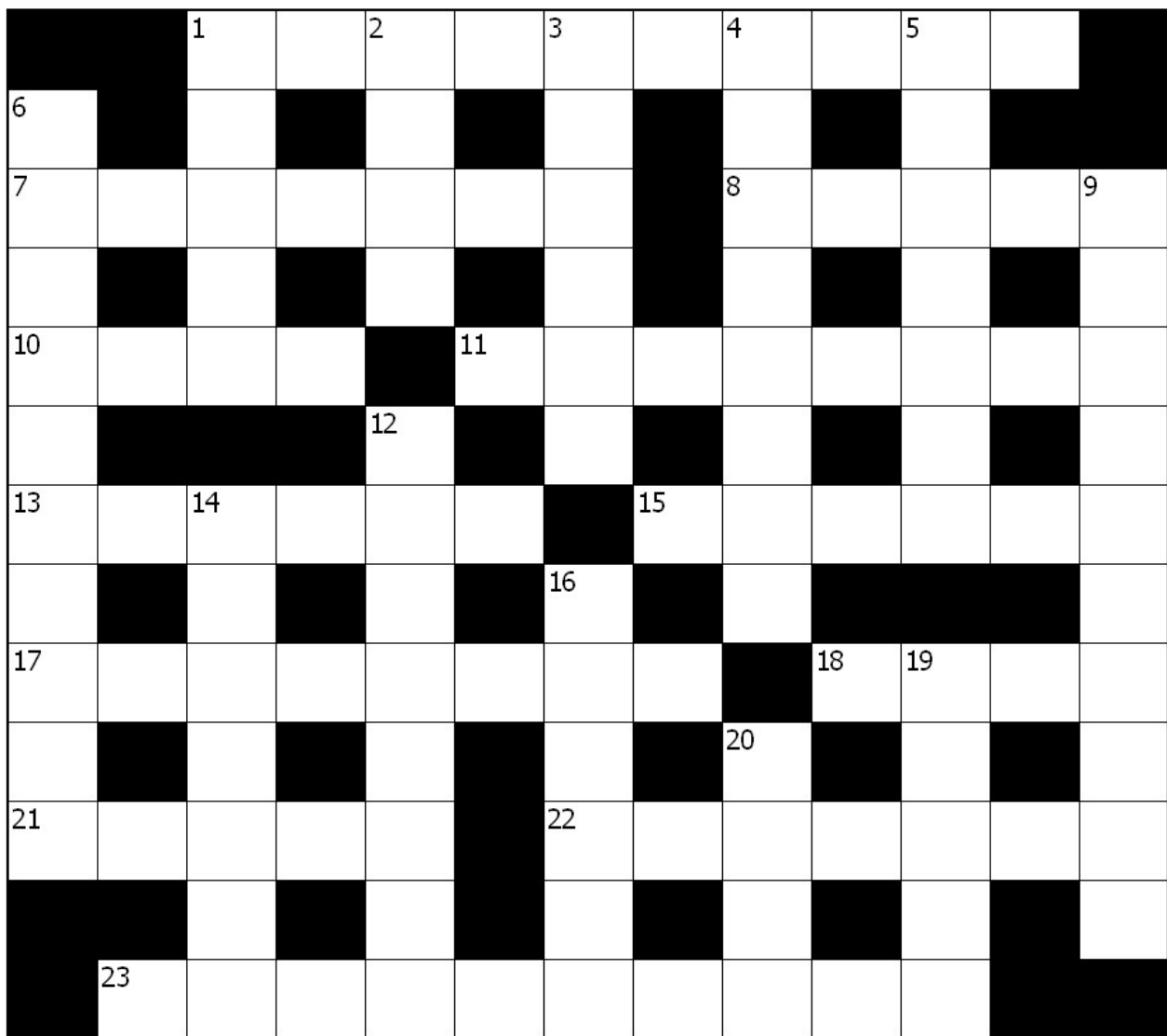
CROSSWORD

Across

- 1 Provisional meeting place of God and the Jews (Exodus 25:9) (10)
- 7 David's third son, killed when his head got caught in a tree during a battle with his father (2 Samuel 18:14-15) (7)
- 8 They ruled much of the west coast of South America in the 15th and early 16th centuries (5)
- 10 Small deer of European and Asian extraction (4)
- 11 Seized control of (Numbers 21:25) (8)
- 13 Terror (Luke 24:5) (6)
- 15 First World War heroine shot by the Germans in Brussels, Nurse Edith ____ (6)
- 17 Stormy (8)
- 18 A bitter variety of this, together with lamb and unleavened bread, was the Passover menu for anyone 'unclean' (Numbers 9:11) (4)
- 21 Arson (anag.) (5)
- 22 How John Newton described God's grace in his well-known hymn (7)
- 23 Habitation (Isaiah 27:10) (10)

Down

- 1 '____ and see that the Lord is good' (Psalm 34:8) (5)
- 2 'The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as ____ as a lion' (Proverbs 28:1) (4)
- 3 One of the exiles, a descendant of Parosh, who married a foreign woman (Ezra 10:25) (6)
- 4 He escaped from Nob when Saul killed the rest of his family and joined David (1 Samuel 22: 20) (8)
- 5 City and lake in Central Switzerland (7)
- 6 'Offer your bodies as living _____, holy and pleasing to God' (Romans 12:1) (10)
- 9 Pouches carried by horses (Genesis 49:14) (10)
- 12 One who accepts government by God (8)
- 14 Aromatic substance commonly used in Jewish ritual (Exodus 30:1) (7)
- 16 He asked Jesus, 'What is truth?' (John 18:38) (6)
- 19 Are (Romans 13:1) (5)
- 20 'You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will ____ his people from their sins' (Matthew 1:21) (4)



SOLUTION ON PAGE 40



Psalm 23
The Passion Translation

The Good Shepherd
David's poetic praise to God

Yahweh is my best friend and my shepherd.
I always have more than enough.
He offers a resting place for me in his luxurious love.
His tracks take me to an oasis of peace near the
quiet brook of bliss.
That's where he restores and revives my life.
He opens before me the right path
and leads me along in his footsteps of righteousness
so that I can bring honor to his name.
Even when your path takes me through
the valley of deepest darkness,
fear will never conquer me, for you already have!
Your authority is my strength and my peace.
The comfort of your love takes away my fear.
I'll never be lonely, for you are near.
You become my delicious feast
even when my enemies dare to fight.
You anoint me with the fragrance of your Holy Spirit;
you give me all I can drink of you until my cup
overflows.
So why would I fear the future?
Only goodness and tender love pursue me all the
days of my life.
Then afterward, when my life is through,
I'll return to your glorious presence to be forever with
you!

Submitted by Heather Quaye

Emmanuel – God With Us!

Ever since our Saviour was born in Bethlehem
Men could know his Presence dwelling in them
Making us his children and guiding us each day.
Always and forever, showing His Perfect Way.
Never will He ask us to walk the road alone.
Until we enter safe and whole in our Eternal home
Even there He is still with us, just as the angel said
Long ago, before the stable manger was His bed.

God with Us – the peace that comes in proving it is true
On days, when life is throwing its hardest times at you,
Days when tragedy and sickness could make us lose all hope
We feel the comfort of His Presence helping us to cope.
In good times or in bad times, He wants that we will show
To other needy folks his love, that they in turn can know
How much they too can trust Him, and He will be their guide.
Unclean hearts He wants to change and come to live inside
So many more can come to know **Emmanuel** the **God** who lives **with us!**

Submitted by A Bethune



26 DECEMBER - ON THE FEAST OF STEPHEN

Everyone knows that it was on the feast of Stephen that 'good king Wenceslas looked on'. After all, it's in a Christmas carol - but why? There's nothing about Christmas in it: a splendid young page who rustled up some flesh, wine and logs, an old man out in the snow ('deep and crisp and even') and a kindly monarch. But *Christmas*?

The clue is in 'the feast of Stephen', which falls on 26th December, or 'Boxing Day', as we know it. That, too, has nothing to do with Christmas, beyond the fact that in the past people put a contribution in tradesmen's boxes as a kind of Christmas present for their services during the year.

The Stephen whose feast day falls on the day after Christmas was the first Christian martyr.

(You can read his story in the book of Acts). He was a member of the church in Jerusalem in its very early days, and found himself involved with six others in administering the allocation of food to those in need. The apostles, who were the leaders of the church, felt that it wasn't appropriate for them to abandon preaching and 'serve tables', so they selected these seven to do the job for them. Stephen, however, quickly revealed hidden gifts as an eloquent spokesman for the Christian cause.

The Temple authorities, who had already had trouble with the apostles, were soon alerted to this new and hitherto unknown evangelist. They decided to make an example of him, thus firing a warning shot, as it were, across the bows of the apostles themselves. So they arrested Stephen and accused him of speaking against the two central elements of their religion - the 'holy place' (the Temple) and 'the customs Moses handed down to us' (the Law). It's always dangerous to criticise a monument or a custom!

Given the right to defend himself, Stephen instead launched into an eloquent and at times biting account of Jewish history, culminating in the accusation that they had committed the worst possible sin by killing the Messiah. Inflamed by his words, his hearers abandoned any pretence of legal impartiality, rushing towards him and dragging him out of the city to a place where they began to stone him to death. Stephen, the rank and file Christian, died under a hail of rocks for claiming that Mary's Son was the promised Messiah.

That is most probably the reason why the first martyr is honoured on the day after we celebrate the birth of the Saviour. It's a bit like the myrrh in the gifts of the Wise Men - a reminder, as we celebrate, that the bitter shadow of a cross is never far away from this story.



DOGS

Just over two years ago my faithful dog Jett passed away. All pet owners have either gone through this sad experience or know that one day it will happen.

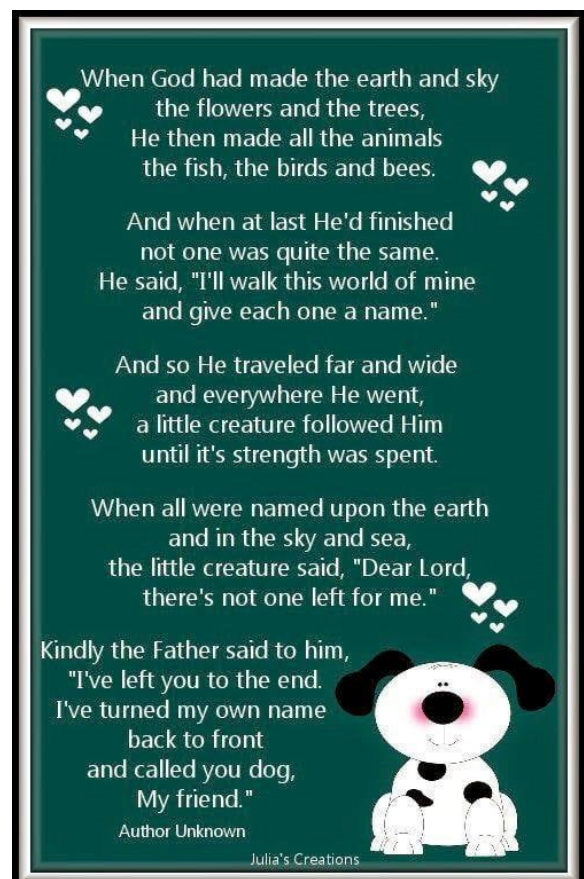
Megan Carter wrote this most moving poem which expresses the grief of all bereaved dog lovers...

MY FRIEND

Where have you gone my companion and friend?
Your bark, your look were with me each day,
But now there's such an empty space
You're no longer here; what is there to say?

Released from pain and now at peace,
Memories sweet will never depart,
Amazing how a four-legged friend
Can be so entwined within one's heart.

Of all God's creation His special touch
Is the gift of a pet coming into our care,
Loyal, loving, a constant friend
So we thank the Lord for the time that we shared.



ALL IN THE MONTH OF DECEMBER

It was:

1500 years ago, on 7th December 521 that St Columba, Irish missionary who spread Christianity in Scotland, was born. He was one of the Twelve Apostles of Ireland.

250 years ago, on 25th December 1771 that Dorothy Wordsworth, writer, poet, and diarist, was born. She was sister to the poet William Wordsworth.

175 years ago, on 21 December 1846 that the first surgical operation in Europe using anaesthesia took place. Robert Liston amputated a servant's leg at University College Hospital in London.

150 years ago, on 24th December 1871 that the world premiere of Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Aida*, was held in Cairo, Egypt.

100 years ago, on 6th Dec 1921 that the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed in London. It ended the Irish War of Independence and established the Irish Free State (with effect from December 1922.)

80 years ago, on 7th December 1941 that the Japanese made their surprise bomb attack on Pearl Harbour, Hawaii. The USA, UK, Netherlands, New Zealand, and other countries declared war on Japan the following day. The War in Europe had now become a World War.

75 years ago, on 18th December 1946, that Steve Biko, South Africa anti-apartheid activist, was born. Founder of the Black Consciousness Movement, he was beaten to death by state security officers in 1977, aged 30.

30 years ago, on 25th and 26th December 1991, that Mikhail Gorbachev resigned as President of the Soviet Union, and the next day the Soviet Union was officially dissolved. The 12 remaining Soviet republics became independent states.



SMILE LINES FOR DECEMBER

Snowmen

Two snowmen were standing next to each other. One said to the other: "Can you smell carrots?"

New bank

Mother decided that ten-year old Cathy should get something 'practical' for Christmas. "Suppose we open a savings account for you?" she suggested. Cathy was delighted. "It's your account, darling," mother said as they arrived at the bank, "so you fill out the application." Cathy was doing fine until she came to the space for 'Name of your former bank.' After a slight hesitation, she put down 'Piggy'.

Easy come, easy go

Father Christmas enters through a hole in the chimney and leaves through a hole in your pocket.

Grandfathers

I was talking to my young Sunday School class, and a four-year-old boy suddenly asked me: "Miss, do you have a grandfather?"

I replied, "I used to have two, but they both went to Heaven to be with Jesus."

He thought, shook his head sadly, and said, "One of my grandfathers hasn't gone to Heaven."

(Long pause while I tried to
decide how to proceed.)

"He's gone to Inverness"

Replace

Did you know? By replacing potato crisps with grapefruit as a snack, you can lose up to 90% of what little joy you still have left in your life.

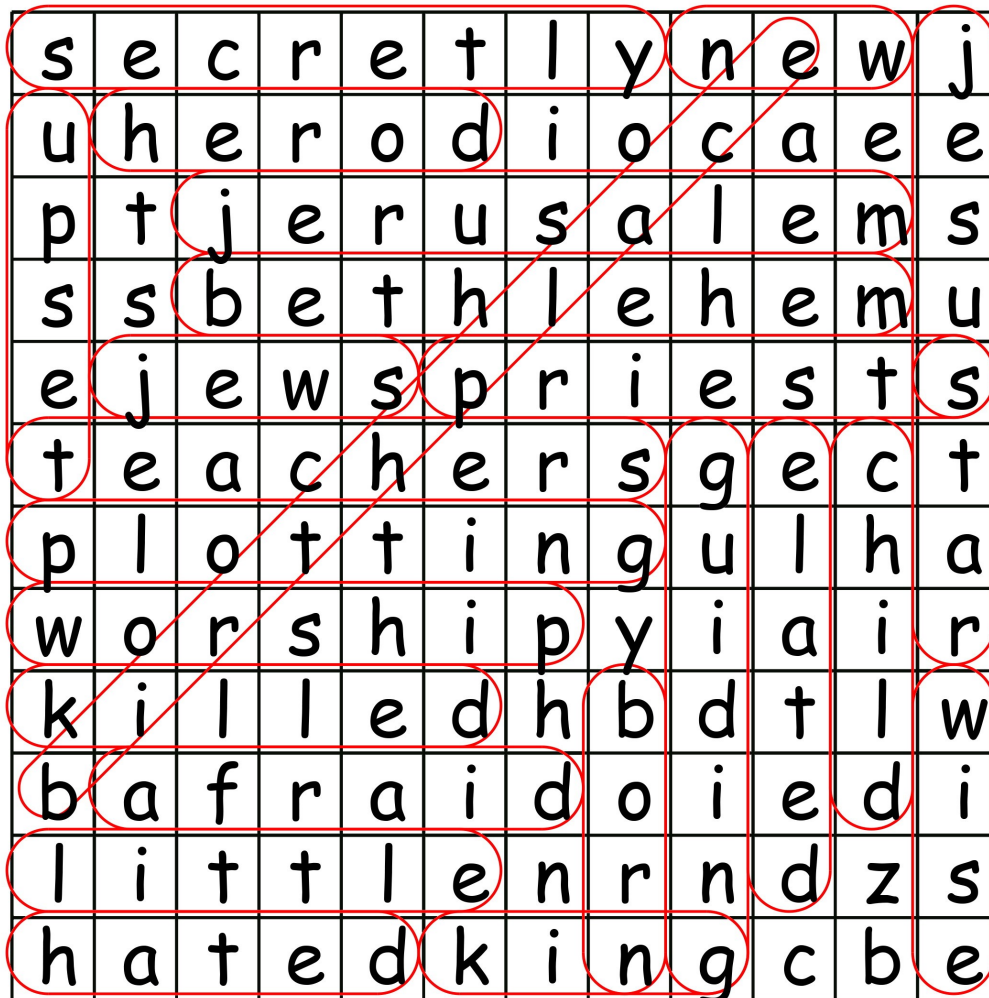
Santa

Santa's little helpers are subordinate clauses.

Peace

Blessed are the peacemakers; they will never be unemployed.

SOLUTION TO TWO KINGS WORDSEARCH ON PAGE 16



SOLUTION TO CROSSWORD ON PAGES 32-33

ACROSS: 1, Tabernacle. 7, Absalom. 8, Incas. 10, Roes. 11, Captured. 13, Fright. 15, Cavell. 17, Cyclonic. 18, Herb. 21, Sonar. 22, Amazing. 23, Settlement.

DOWN: 1, Taste. 2, Bold. 3, Ramiah. 4, Abiathar. 5, Lucerne. 6, Sacrifices. 9, Saddlebags. 12, Theocrat. 14, Incense. 16, Pilate. 19, Exist. 20, Save.

Quotes with the true meaning of Christmas in mind...

God did not send Christ to us; God came to us in Christ. - *Don Skinner*

The incarnation was a historical and unrepeatable event with permanent consequences. Reigning at God's right hand today is the man Christ Jesus, still human as well as divine, though now His humanity has been glorified. Having assumed our human nature, He has never discarded it, and He never will. - *John Stott*

Our God contracted to a span,
Incomprehensibly made man.
- *Charles Wesley*

The incarnation was a necessary means to an end, and the end was the putting away of the sin of the world by the offering of the body of Christ. - *Thomas Hewitt*

He that made man was made man. - *C H Spurgeon*

Christmas is the day that holds all time together. - *Alexander Smith*

Where there is peace, God is. - *Anon*

Peace rules the day when Christ rules the mind. - *Anon*

Peace is a free gift, and it flows from the pure mercy of God. - *John Calvin*

Bells, the music bordering nearest heaven. - *Charles Lamb*

Whatever we hold to ourselves is loss. Whatever we give to God is gain. -
Gilbert Shaw

The Almighty appeared on earth as a helpless baby, unable to do more than lie and stare and wriggle and make noises, needing to be fed and changed and taught to talk like any other child.... The more you think about it, the more staggering it gets. - *J I Packer*

Christ became what we are that He might make us what He is. - *Athanasius*

CHRISTMAS

(John 1:1-14)

Fumbling around in a frenzy,
From September stress levels rise,
Dates collide,
Imagination falters
As presents and experiences fail to satisfy
The expectations of a world that walks
In the darkness of denial and Dawkins.

Yet all the time
The light shines in that darkness,
All the time
The greatest gift shines on,
All the time
There is hope and life has purpose.

And with each turning to the light
Love switches on.
Christ comes.

by Daphne Kitching

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)

WHO KNEW ?

Who saw the man and pregnant girl
Pressing through the crowded street
Struggling through the human swirl
On tired legs and aching feet?

Who knew?

Who heard her cries, in labour's pain
Deep within a battered shed?
Who cared for their impoverished shame
Who thought about her grassy bed?

Who knew?

Who, listening to an infant's cries
Hearing a birth, they thought it strange?
Expressed an int'rest, or surprise?
Who recognised that awesome change?

Who knew?

Who saw the shepherds rush along
Through sleeping streets at dead of night?
Who heard the angels' glorious song?
Or saw the star that shone so bright?

Who knew?

Who, fighting through the Christmas throngs
Or, settling down to watch TV
Eats Christmas food, sings Christmas songs
Who can the coming Saviour see?

Who knows?

By Nigel Beeton

BETHLEHEMIAN RHAPSODY

And finally, if you enjoyed the song Bohemian Rhapsody, and would like the 'Christmas version', complete with singing puppets, do visit this on You Tube. It is from la couple of years ago but still well worth the visit! <https://youtu.be/lxvMkSKRWOA>



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