

PORTREE PARISH CHURCH OF SCOTLAND



CHRISTMAS 2025

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THE MESSAGE OF CHRISTMAS

*If the message spoken by angels was binding,
and every violation and disobedience received its
just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore
such a great salvation? (Hebrews 2: 2)*

The angels who appeared to the shepherds on the fields of Bethlehem proclaimed: **GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH PEACE, AND GOODWILL TOWARDS MEN** (Gospel of Luke 2: 14).

This declaration of God came at a time when *Peace* was desperately needed. The world was filled with political strife, social division, and personal suffering. Yet, the *Peace* announced by God was not a superficial calm: it was the *Arrival of the Messiah, the Prince of Peace*, to restore *SHALOM* – the Hebrew word for *PEACE*, - that implies *WHOLENESS, COMPLETENESS, and HARMONY*.

In the Bible, *PEACE* is not merely the absence of war or conflict. It covers every aspect of life – our relationship with God, our relationship with others, and even our relationship with the whole of God's created nature. It is the *PERFECT HARMONY* that existed in the Garden of Eden before *SIN* disrupted the world. When *SIN* entered the world, *PEACE* was shattered. Relationships were broken, and humanity's connection with God marred by disobedience. Yet, God's plan was always to *RESTORE THIS PEACE*. Jesus, as the *PRINCE OF PEACE*, came to reconcile humanity to God, heal our relationships with others, and restore the brokenness within ourselves. In John 14: 27 Jesus says: *PEACE I LEAVE WITH YOU; MY PEACE I GIVE YOU. I DO NOT GIVE TO YOU AS THE WORLD GIVES. DO NOT LET YOUR HEARTS BE TROUBLED AND DO NOT BE AFRAID.*

This *PEACE OF CHRIST* is not something we are meant to keep to ourselves. It is *A GIFT WE ARE CALLED TO SHARE WITH THE WORLD*.

In a world filled with division, strife, and unrest, *THE MESSAGE OF CHRISTMAS* is as relevant as ever. We are living in a time where polarisation and conflict seem to dominate our social and political landscapes. The Christmas Message calls us to be *peacemakers* in our world, communities, families, and relationships, seeking *Reconciliation* and *Harmony* in every interaction, through true *LOVE*. How, then, can we live out this message of *PEACE AND GOODWILL TOWARD MEN* ?

- **RECONCILIATION WITH OTHERS:** - Whether it is a family member, friend, neighbour, or colleague, consider who you may need to forgive, or be reconciled soon with. Jesus' *PEACE* heals broken relationships, and we are called to be agents of that healing.
- **EXTEND KINDNESS AND GENEROSITY:** - Acts of kindness, words of encouragement, and gestures of compassion are all ways we can share Christ's *PEACE* with others. In a world that can feel cold and uncaring, even small *ACTS OF LOVE* can make a profound difference.

- **SEEK INNER PEACE:** - Set aside time for prayer, reflection, and quietness. Allow God's *PEACE* to calm your heart, and mind, reminding you of the deeper meaning of life and season. The *PEACE* of Christ is available to us even in the midst of our business.
- **BE A PEACEMAKER IN YOUR COMMUNITY:** - There are countless ways to extend Christ's *PEACE* to the world around us, whether through volunteer work, community engagement, or even fostering love and peace in other self-isolated Christian communities.

In all these, consider always the words of the Apostle who says: - *IF IT IS POSSIBLE, AS FAR AS IT DEPENDS ON YOU, LIVE AT **PEACE** WITH EVERYONE.* (Paul's Epistle to the Romans 12: 18).

As we get ready to celebrate Christmas again this year, may we be reminded that the *PEACE OF CHRIST* is available to all who seek it, and as we are offered this wonderful gift, may we be empowered to share it with a world in desperate need of peace and goodwill. Let this be the season where the *PEACE ON EARTH AND GOODWILL TOWARDS MEN* proclaimed by the angels becomes a reality in our hearts, homes, and communities, and...God knows... maybe in our Country, and in the World...

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO YOU ALL !

Sandor, your Minister.



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

SESSION CLERK'S REPORT

Having just typed the above heading and wondering, as usual, what I could write I sat and looked at the word report. My first thought took me back to the type of reports on progress I used to make when I was teaching,

The people I shall report on are you, the congregation, and the way you answer all calls for help.

- In June, five new Elders were ordained to your Kirk Session. Since then, they have all shown their worth through their contributions to our Kirk Session meetings and becoming involved in other aspects of church life.
- Also in June, Rebecca Bartocho was inducted into the charge of Kilmuir and Staffin. Since then, she has seen the numbers attending services increase and she is getting to know the local people and, through taking school assemblies, is getting to know the children of the area. She has also been keeping in regular touch with members of Portree Church.
- The Summer opening of the church to visitors could not have taken place without the support of members of the congregation. An average of 121 visitors came into the church each day it was opened and this led to the amazing total of 5,439 visitors for the two-month period – including one who is now a regular attender at our Sunday worship. The total number of visitors was roughly 1,000 more than last year.
- The serving of tea and coffee after Morning Worship on Sundays is only possible thanks to the volunteers. The opportunities this offers for fellowship are tremendous and visitors speak most highly of the welcome they receive in our church and the encouragement they can sometimes receive when talking to others – this is exemplified by the letter from the Dutch lady whose letter is printed on Page 37
- To all who filled Shoeboxes for the Blythswood Appeal. Every shoebox delivered lets the recipient know that they are loved. See the update on Page 36
- To those Elders who give of their time and effort in preparing sermons and leading worship when Sandor is on annual leave.
- To the many unseen people who do so much work for the church behind the scenes

I have tried to avoid naming particular individuals but feel I must mention two names.

Firstly, David Meikleham for all his work on mastering the use of the new AV technology and his meticulous preparation of all the presentations for Sunday services.

And last ,but by no means least, our minister Sandor who in addition to his pastoral role and devotion to his parishioners, prepares and delivers three services each week.

Report Summary : Excellent, but must keep up the good work.

Bill

TREASURER'S REPORT

“When they saw the star, the Magi were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh” (Matthew 2 : 10 - 11)

This is the first mention in the New Testament of the act of giving to Jesus Christ and from the earliest days of the Christian church, giving has been necessary for its growth and spread. In those early days, “the more affluent” churches would send gifts of money to churches in poorer areas to help with their development.

As Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians –

“On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income. Then, when I arrive, I will give you letters of introduction to the men you approve and send them with your gifts to Jerusalem.

(1 Corinthians 16 : 2 - 3)

This practice continues today in the Church of Scotland. Based on its income, each church contributes annually a sum of money (called the *Giving to Grow* contribution) to the central church. The money raised this way pays for the stipend of each minister, along with Employers' National insurance, pension contributions, and mission at home and overseas. Basically, this means that, as with the Corinthians, the wealthier churches subsidise those with smaller incomes. In fact, Portree Church is in part subsidised by other churches.

This year our *Giving to Grow* allocation was £34,665 with this figure due to increase by 2.4% for 2026.

For Portree Church this is by far our largest item of expenditure before we consider heating and lighting costs for our Church and Church Hall, building insurances, Manse Council Tax, plus all necessary spending on the upkeep of our buildings.

We can only meet our commitments through your generosity in terms of your weekly or monthly offerings. We are greatly assisted by being able to reclaim from HMRC the Income Tax paid on Gift Aid contributions. This gives us a further £10,000 each year. I am delighted to report that a further two members of the congregation have joined the FreeWill Offering scheme and linked their givings to Gift Aid.

All I can ask is for each and every one of us to do what Paul requested of his fellow Christians :- *On the first day of every week, should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income.*

God bless you all.

Bill

MICAH'S MESSAGE – LOOK FORWARD TO THE CHILD BORN IN BETHLEHEM

Why is the news so full of depressing stories? Why can't they report some good news for a change? Indeed, our world is always full of troubles, and we may wonder if better times will ever come.

Similar comments might have been directed at many of the Old Testament prophets who nearly always said negative and gloomy things. The people of Micah's day had many problems. They were surrounded by warring nations and peace in their time was unlikely.

It was Micah's task, as God's messenger, to tell the people how it was and how it was going to be, no matter how painful the facts. Micah was deeply concerned with the social ills of his day and spoke out against false prophets who were leading the people into contrived hopes and errors.

Micah was quite forthright. He announced that God would punish the people for their sinfulness and their enemies would overcome them. Micah came with bad news and there seemed no end to his reprimands and denouncements.

But in the desert was an oasis. Amidst his descriptions of imminent pain and suffering, Micah looked forward to a time of peace with freedom from injustice, fear and war. Micah delivered God's promise that from Bethlehem there would come a ruler to free them from their oppression. Their Saviour would come. (Micah 5:2)

Of course, Micah's hearers did not understand about the Babe at Bethlehem, but they were told to stand firm in their faith no matter what troubles or disasters would befall them. They were to look forward to their deliverance, whenever that would be.

Amidst Micah's attack on the deplorable actions of leaders and the nation's wrong values and behaviour, he gave hope that God was with them in the failures and difficulties. Only God could take them through their troubles to a place of peace.

Micah's message still stands for us today. God wants us to mend our wilful ways; to correct bad attitudes and behaviour; to strive for heaven's values of justice, peace, equality, love and harmony.

As we approach a New Year, we would do well to respond to Micah's words: *What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.* (Micah 6:8)

By Lester Amann

MEGAN MACKENZIE

It goes without saying that the passing of Megan came as a great shock to us all. She was taken in the prime of her life with so much still to do and so much still to give.

Megan was a wonderful wife to Alan and mother to Alexander. Her caring nature was demonstrated when Alexander and then Alan went through serious medical situations.

Her love for her family and her unshakeable faith in the Lord kept her going through these very difficult, uncertain times. That great faith remained with Megan to the end.

Megan demonstrated her quality of determination by coming to Scotland and enrolling in Sabhal Mòr Ostaig to learn Gaelic and then go on to teach in various schools on Skye before moving to Bun-sgoil Ghàidhlig Phort Rìgh where she was highly respected by both staff and pupils. Megan loved teaching and her manner with her pupils ensured that her teacher-pupil bond encouraged her charges to learn and develop.

Her teaching qualities were transferable from school to church with Megan and Alan running the Youth Fellowship for 10 years and latterly Megan and Colin were involved for several years with the Sunday School. Through the teaching of these stalwarts, many young people came to learn more about Jesus and gain values which would serve them well throughout their lives.

Her commitment to the church was not restricted to teaching youth groups. Megan was a member of the Nominating Committee and the Interviewing Panel which led to Beckie Bartocho being selected to become the minister of Kilmuir and Staffin and then to the united charge of Portree and Kilmuir and Staffin.

Megan will be sorely missed, not only by Alan and Alexander, but by the community at large.

She will be remembered for all her involvements in Portree and beyond, and especially for her engaging smile that would literally light up any room she entered.

Our sympathy goes out to Alan and Alexander along with our pledge to offer any support required in the future.



Alexander and I would like to thank everyone within the congregation and wider community for the outpouring of love and care received in the recent weeks and months.

While this is an incredibly difficult time for us both, we get so much strength knowing that Megan loved our Lord and that she is truly at peace. We prayed so much for hope since diagnosis but know Megan no longer needs to hope. She knows the reality of being with Jesus where there is no pain but only peace.

I would like to publicly thank Sandor for a beautiful service and to David for all his work live streaming the service and the lovely music. Knowing family back in America would see the service live meant so much.

We are blessed to be part of such a loving and caring community. Thank you all for your continued support.

Alan & Alexander



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.

By Fiona Macleod

(19th century Celtic visionary and romantic)

THE HISTORY OF CHRISTMAS

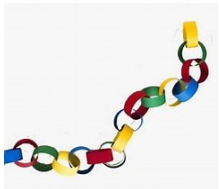
The Bible does not give a date for the birth of Jesus. In the third century it was suggested that Jesus was conceived at the Spring equinox, 25th March, popularising the belief that He was born nine months later on 25th December. John Chrysostom, the Archbishop of Constantinople, encouraged Christians worldwide to make Christmas a holy day in about 400.

In the early Middle Ages, Christians celebrated a series of midwinter holy days. Epiphany (which recalls the visit to the infant Jesus of the wise men bearing gifts) was the climax of 12 days of Christmas, beginning on 25th December. The Emperor Charlemagne chose 25th December for his coronation in 800, and the prominence of Christmas Day rose. In England, William the Conqueror also chose 25th December for his coronation in 1066, and the date became a fixture both for religious observance and feasting.

Cooking a boar was a common feature of mediaeval Christmas feasts, and singing carols accompanied it. Writers of the time lamented the fact that the true significance of Christmas was being lost because of partying. They condemned the rise of 'misrule' – drunken dancing and promiscuity. The day was a public holiday, and traditions of bringing evergreen foliage into the house and the exchange of gifts (usually on Epiphany) date from this time.

In the 17th century the rise of new Protestant denominations led to a rejection of many celebrations that were associated with Catholic Christianity. Christmas was one of them. After the execution of Charles I, England's Puritan rulers made the celebration of Christmas illegal for 14 years. The restoration of Charles II ended the ban, but religious leaders continued to discourage excess, especially in Scotland. In Western Europe (but not worldwide) the day for exchanging gifts changed from Epiphany (6th January) to Christmas Day.

By the 1820s, there was a sense that the significance of Christmas was declining. Charles Dickens was one of several writers who sought to restore it. His novel *A Christmas Carol* was significant in reviving merriment during the festival. He emphasised charity and family reunions, alongside religious observance. Christmas trees, paper chains, cards and many well-known carols date from this time. So did the tradition of Boxing Day, on 26th December, when tradesmen who had given reliable service during the year would collect 'boxes' of money or gifts from their customers.



In Europe Santa Claus is the figure associated with the bringing of gifts. Santa Claus is a shortening of the name of Saint Nicholas, who was a Christian bishop in the fourth century in present-day Turkey. He was particularly noted for his care for children and for his generosity to the poor. By the Middle Ages his appearance, in red bishop's robes and a mitre, was adored in the Netherlands and familiar across Europe.

Father Christmas dates from 17th century England, where he was a secular figure of good cheer (more associated with drunkenness than gifts). The transformation of Santa Claus into today's Father Christmas started in New York in the 1880s, where his red robes and white beard became potent advertising symbols. In some countries (such as Latin America and Eastern Europe) the tradition attempts to combine the secular and religious elements by holding that Santa Claus makes children's presents and then gives them to the baby Jesus to distribute.

From: <https://christianity.org.uk/the-history-of-christmas/#.W9LmchNKhsM>

What Does Christmas Mean To You?

When you prepare for Christmas
What matters spring to mind?
The coming of the Saviour
Or the gifts that you can't find?

Do you think of baby Jesus
As you deck the halls with holly?
Or are your thoughts preoccupied
With piling high your shopping trolley.

Will you be moved this Christmas
By the sound of carol singing
Or are you more in tune with
The sound of shop tills ringing?

On that family occasion
When you choose your Christmas tree
Do you think of how that tiny babe
Came to die for you and me?

Christmas to you could mean much more
If you're prepared to see
The reasons why each Christmastime
Just mean so much to me,

So as you celebrate this Christmas
Why not resolve to start anew?
And change your whole perspective
Of what Christmas means to you.

By Colin Hammacott

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.

AND THERE WERE SHEPHERDS

Luke's story of the birth of Jesus is brilliantly told – the angel's visit to Mary to tell her she would be mother of the long-promised Messiah, the old priest in the Temple told by another angel that his wife would have a son to be called 'John', who would prepare the people of Israel for that event, and then Mary and Joseph making the 60 mile journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, as required by the Roman census. When they got there, no room at the inn, and they settled instead for a convenient stable, where Mary gave birth to a boy child.

Suddenly, Luke changes the tone. 'And there were shepherds ...' – that's what he actually wrote, just like that. 'And there were shepherds', doing exactly what shepherds do, looking after their flocks by night. But this night was different: yet another angelic message – a call to abandon their sheep and go into Bethlehem to see the baby Messiah. They were given directions and a 'sign' to identify Him. He would be lying in a feeding trough. Well, at least they would recognise that.

And why the shepherds, in this glorious story of our salvation? Because the event needed witnesses, and the chosen witnesses would be this bunch of scruffy, smelly shepherds straight from the sheep-pen. Nothing could speak more eloquently of God's purpose than that. This was not a Saviour for the strong, rich and powerful, but for everybody. The carpenter and his wife guarded the Saviour of the world, and the very first witnesses were not kings or priests but a handful of shepherds.

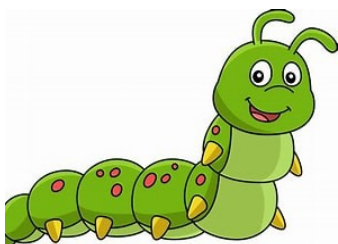


THE CHRISTMAS CATERPILLAR

Sometimes, upon a Christmas day
I wonder if there's any way
That Christmas might be quite a treat
For those who have a few more feet!

I really love my Christmas socks
That fill, each year, my Christmas box
O Santa, festive stocking filler,
I wish I were a caterpillar!

By Nigel Beeton



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.



REFLECTIONS ON THE CHRISTMAS STORY

The following is a mix of Bible readings and comments by Tony Horsfall, a former OMF missionary to the Far East and now retreat leader and author based in Yorkshire.

Matthew 1:18 Joseph's dilemma

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit...."

It is not clear at what point Mary told Joseph the news of her pregnancy, but when she did it came as a bombshell. What should he do, knowing the child was not his? Could her story be true? He was however a righteous man, and he sought God for direction rather than acting impulsively. God spoke to him through a dream, confirming that the child was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and this gave him the courage to stand by her, and take her as his wife. It was a brave decision, but he now knew that the child would be the One to save people from their sins.

It is easy when we have difficult decisions to make to be impetuous or hasty, but the best decisions are made slowly and with prayer. When you are making important choices ask God to guide you clearly, and to give you the courage to do what is right.

Matthew 1:22 Long-awaited Immanuel

All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will be with child and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' (which means 'God with us')... And Joseph gave Him the name Jesus.

The plan of salvation is intimately connected to the Old Testament, and was the fulfilment of prophecies made long ago. God was sending His Son into the world that we might be saved. God is with us – this astonishing, mind-blowing truth underpinned Joseph's straight-forward trust in Him. Today as you get on with your life, pray that the wonder of knowing that God is with you will never be far from your awareness.

Luke 2:1-7 Bethlehem

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world... so Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

This is perhaps the most familiar picture we have of the Christmas event—but remember what was happening. This was no ordinary child. In Jesus God became a human being and dwelt among us, perhaps the greatest miracle (and mystery) of all. As you visualise the scene

again, let worship arise in your heart: *'From heaven you came, helpless Babe, entered our world your glory veiled.'* Emmanuel, God with us! The Servant King, worthy of all our adoration and love.

LORD God, in this season please help me to live in the wonder of your upside-down Kingdom where your love for us compels you to become helpless, vulnerable and dependent. May your Kingdom come in and through my life today.

Luke 2:8-12 The Shepherds arrive

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But 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.

The first visitors are not VIPs but humble shepherds who have been summoned by an angelic visitor. For those who have eyes to see, there hidden in the manger beneath the blankets is the Son of God, the one sent by the Father to be the Saviour of the world. Very few of those crowded into Bethlehem that night were aware of what was happening. Only those with faith could recognise the arrival of the long-awaited Messiah. It is the same today.

Lord, I pray for eyes to see where the glory of Heaven touches earth. May I be alive today with the truth that the Saviour, rescuer, King Jesus has been born 'to us' and that there is joy in this for all people. May my life reflect that glory even in a small way in my interactions with people, so that in this Christmas season the good news of great joy will be known.

Luke 2:13-15 Angel hosts

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests.'

The darkness of the Judean hillside was lit up by the appearance of a great angelic choir, messengers sent to herald the birth of the Saviour. Their song breaks the stillness of the night, first in praise of God for his act of mercy in sending the Son, and then in proclamation of the peace the child will bring to earth. The shepherds now decide to do the unthinkable - leave their flocks, and head off into town to see the new born King. Such is the drawing power of the Saviour.

Sometimes there are things we too must leave behind if we are to follow his call, but whatever sacrifice is needed, it will be worth it just to find him for ourselves.

Luke 2:16-20 Mary ponders

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ... Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen...

The shepherds became the first evangelists, proclaiming the good news... That was their response, and it should be ours too.

But for Mary there followed a time of reflection. Exuberant witness and quiet contemplation are not opposites. They are in fact good companions in the spiritual life.

Thank you, LORD Jesus, that you are still found when we search for you. May I be willing to share the discovery I've made with others at this time. But I also want to know you better in my inner life, too. Please give me that balance of active following and heart-pondering reflection, especially in this Christmas season.

For those who like more traditional poems, here are verses from a famous one by the American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, written in 1863.

I heard the Bells on Christmas Day

I heard the bells on Christmas day
Their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to men.



And in despair I bowed my head:
'There is no peace on earth, ' I said
'For hate is strong, and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.'

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
'God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,
With peace on earth, good will to men.'



Till, ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day
A voice, a chime, a chant sublime,
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

REMEMBERING LOVE AT CHRISTMAS

Winter is an amazing time of year. For many on the Isle of Skye, it is time to enjoy a welcome break from a busy tourist season with friends and family. The “Christmas rush” begins with many making plans for Christmas day, ordering presents, arranging travel plans, finishing projects at work, all in preparation for the 25th of December.

Christmas leaves us with many happy memories from over the years. Time, we have spent with those we whom we love and have loved. Christmas then, is also a time of remembrance. A time to remember those people who had a positive effect on our lives and enriched them.

My earliest childhood memory was from the winter of 1987, where, as a young child of 2 years old, I can remember my grandmother taking me on a sledging expedition. My mother and father were in hospital as my brother was being born, and my grandmother had taken the reins of my childcare. Off our two intrepid explorers went to the outskirts of Oban in Argyll, where on a rather steep hill, an activity off high velocity would be partaken in.

My grandmother’s sledge had metal runners, and being a construction of her fathers, she was particularly proud of it. It was maintained to the highest standards, and the runners were shined with sandpaper to such perfection that they gleamed in the morning sunshine.

My grandmother, having found a suitable starting point then initiated our descent down the hill. I can recall we moved at great speed and at the bottom of the hill found ourselves travelling through a thick bed of rushes. It was perhaps, a blessing in disguise, as they naturally slowed our significant forward momentum to a gradual stop! We then found ourselves embedded in amongst the thicket and snow. Now at rest, I can then distinctly remember hearing from behind me, my grandmother roaring with laughter. It is one of my happiest early memories.

I consider it a blessing, that this is my earliest memory. Because it was a joyous moment that really gave me insight in to why we are all here brothers and sisters – to spend and enjoy time with those whom we love.

My grandmother sadly passed away in 2018 at the age of 83 after a long period of illness. She was a woman of strong Christian faith and gave up much of her time volunteering in the local community. To remember her, I decided to run the Isle of Skye Half Marathon that year and raise money for Alzheimer Scotland.

Even now as we approach another Christmas without her, the memory of her laughing within the rushes and snow - in a seemingly insignificant field on the outskirts of Oban - has stayed with me all these years.

Many of us have lost people we have loved. And Christmas, more than any other time can be that bit more difficult for this reason. Where there was once someone we loved, now rests



an empty chair. Many of us will raise a glass of remembrance to those whom we have known and loved.

By remembering those we have loved and lost, we not only honour their memory but also their legacy. We show the impact they had on not just our lives, but the lives of all the people they knew. And it gives us comfort to know that as Christians, one day we will see them again in the Kingdom of Heaven.

But how is this possible, brothers and sisters? How do know with such certainty that we can see our loved ones again? That death is not the end ?

In the gospel of Luke Chapter 2 we read:

“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “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 Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest Heaven, and on Earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.” When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

On the 25th December, thousands of years ago, the most significant moment in human history occurred. The creator of Heaven and Earth, The Christ, descended from the right hand of power to dwell with his people in the humbleness of human form. There he lay in a manger, under the protection of his parents and the Angelic host from above.

But why brothers and sisters, was this moment initiated? What was the purpose of this divine intervention?

In the heavenly heights a divine counsel was held, God the Father, The Son, and Holy Spirit were so moved by the fallen nature of humanity that a unanimous decision was made. That decision would change the course of human history forever. The Triune God, moving of one will, ordained that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, would descend from Heaven to preach the gospel of peace and truth and give his life for ours.

You see brothers and sisters, a barrier had been placed between God and humanity. And that barrier was not built from bricks, mortar or cement – but rather a barrier of sin. A barrier of which the substance was the breaking of divine law. Our ancestors transgressed the will of the great creator, and we fell far from the light of Heaven.

I recently preached on who God is – a bold sermon to preach on some might say. We must try to understand this very question brothers and sisters, because it explains not just the “who” – but also the “why.” In the gospel of John, our Lord Jesus Christ profoundly stated:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

“For God so loved the world”. God - as a Trinity - is not distant from his creation. He is not an absentee landlord, he is not posted missing in action, and he is not indifferent to affliction and suffering. God was so invested in his creation that he loved it. God loved everything in the world including you and I, whom he made in his image.

When you love someone or something, there is a supernatural and transcendent quality at work. It is the deepest possible connection that reaches to the very depths of our souls. Love transcends the barriers of space and time, love can overcome that which seemed impassible, love can conquer the impossible. And why is this, brothers and sisters? Because love demands the totality of who we are as human beings. True love, by definition, must be one hundred percent commitment – body, mind and soul. True love must be all in.

Our brother Paul wrote in his beautiful words to the people of Corinth thousands of years ago *“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”*

It is love that binds a marriage together through decades of joys and sorrows. It is love that raises children to be the good people we wish them to become. It is love that compels us to help those who cannot help themselves. It was the love of music that compelled Mozart to complete his many complex symphonies, it was the love of painting that compelled Michelangelo to spend four years completing one of greatest artworks in human history – the Sistine Chapel.

God’s love for us was the single motivating factor for the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. His motivations and intentions were completely pure. He wanted to provide a way back to spiritual life and tear down the barrier of sin that separated God from humanity. By Jesus’s death, and to those who believe in his name, we are seen as just in the eyes of God and promised adoption as his sons and daughters. The apostle John summarised this beautifully in his gospel:

“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God - children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”

This is what we celebrate at Christmas, brothers and sisters. We celebrate the birth of our saviour. He who from within, all things in the universe divine were formed. He who is King of Heaven and Earth, he who sits at the right hand of power to the glory of God the Father. In Christ the full glory God divine resided, and we beheld his glory as the brightest shining light in the darkness that fell upon the Earth.

The 18th century poet Alfred Tennyson once stated *“Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.”*. Remembering those who are no longer with us can be painful, but it can also bring us great joy from knowing and remembering the love we shared with them. It reminds us that God brought these people we cared about into our lives and that thanks to our Lords birth, sacrifice and resurrection, we have the hope and promise that one day, we will see them again.

I don't know if they do much sledging in the heavenly heights, but if they do, I am sure my grandmother will be waiting there for me, proudly holding a sledge with polished runners, smiling back at me and wanting to go for just one more adventure.

May God Bless you all and wishing you all a very Merry Christmas.

An Article by Hugh Campbell
- Portree Church of Scotland



The following words were found on a piece of wrapping paper near the body of a dead child at Ravensbruck, the concentration camp where 92,000 people lost their lives. They show how love can be borne in the midst of appalling suffering. Even more they show how if we want a tangible vision of who God is, we can find it through the people who knew him.

“ O Lord, remember not only the men and women of goodwill, but also those of ill-will. But do not remember all the suffering they have inflicted on us; remember the fruits we have bought thanks to this suffering - our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility, our courage, our generosity, the greatness of heart which has grown out of all this, and when they come to the judgment let all the fruits we have borne be their forgiveness.”

Anon

From Delia Sinth's book entitled "A Journey into God"

Submitted by Mairi Nicolson

CHRISTMAS THROUGHOUT THE CHRISTIAN WORLD

For nearly four weeks leading up to Christmas Christians recognise a period called Advent. It means 'coming'. It is a time of spiritual preparation. 'Coming' refers to Jesus' first coming as a baby, but it also looks forward to a day when Jesus is expected to return in triumph at his 'second coming' to establish perfect justice and a new order of peace.

Originally Christians marked Advent as a time when they refrained from excessive eating and drinking. Then Christmas Day reintroduced them to the joys of feasting. Christmas celebrations lasted for twelve days, with gifts exchanged as a climax at Epiphany (6 January). Today, however, Advent is more likely to be associated with accelerating festivity, with the days following Christmas something of an anti-climax until 'twelfth night', on which decorations are removed. Many Christians worldwide are trying to revive the spirit of Advent by setting aside time to pray and address global poverty.

Christmas Day is celebrated as the anniversary of Jesus' birth, although the actual date is not known. Most Christians celebrate it on 25th December. However, the Orthodox Church (the ancient churches in Eastern Europe and parts of Asia) follows a different calendar and celebrates on 7th January. Christians make a point of taking communion on Christmas Day. Many make it the first thing they do as the clock strikes midnight.

On 6th January the Christmas festival continues with a celebration of Epiphany, which means 'the appearance'. Christians remember the visit of wise men (Magi) to Jesus, bringing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. The Christmas tradition of exchanging gifts originally honoured these men, who were the first non-Jews (Gentiles) to worship Jesus. It forms a reminder that in Jesus God was giving Himself for the benefit of the entire world.



Orthodox Christians use this day to recall the baptism of Jesus as a grown man. The significance of Jesus being baptised was that He identified Himself with human beings in all their need. They mark the day by praying for God's blessing on rivers, wells and water sources.

Christmas has never been just an escapist festival for Christians. Those who treat it seriously recognise that not all the world is able to face the days with frivolity or joy. The day after Christmas, Boxing Day, was historically marked as the feast of St Stephen. He was the first man to be put to death rather than give up his belief that Jesus was God. And two days later a day remembering the Massacre of the Innocents recalls Herod's attempt to destroy Jesus by killing all male babies in Bethlehem. Although not so widely marked as Christmas Day, it gives Christians the opportunity to pray for children in today's world who suffer as a result of the actions of adults.

*This is from: <https://christianity.org.uk/christmas-throughout-the-christian-world/>
#.W9LI_xNKhsM*

ALL IN THE MONTH OF DECEMBER

It was:

250 years ago, on 16th Dec 1775 that Jane Austen, novelist (*Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, *Northanger Abbey*, *Persuasion*) was born. Over 30 million copies of her books have been sold, 7,000 of them in her lifetime.

175 years ago, on 4th Dec 1850 that William Sturgeon, physicist, electrical engineer and inventor died. He created the first electromagnets and invented the first British electric motor.

80 years ago, on 27th Dec 1945 that The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development were founded. They had been created at the Bretton Woods Conference in July 1944.

70 years ago, on 1st Dec 1955 that African American civil rights activist Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white man in Montgomery Alabama. This violated the city's racial segregation laws, and led to the Montgomery Bus Boycott (5th to 20th Dec 1956) and the birth of the modern American civil rights movement.

Also 70 years ago, on 20th Dec 1955 that Cardiff was proclaimed the capital city of Wales.

65 years ago, on 9th Dec 1960 that the first episode of the TV soap *Coronation Street* was broadcast on ITV.

60 years ago, on 22nd Dec 1965 that Richard Dimbleby, journalist and radio-television broadcaster, died. The BBC's first war correspondent, he was one of the greatest figures in British broadcasting history. Father of the TV presenters David Dimbleby and Jonathan Dimbleby.

40 years ago, on 7th Dec 1985 that Robert Graves, poet novelist, critic, translator and classical scholar died. Best known for *I, Claudius*, and *Goodbye to All That*.

30 years ago, on 15th Dec that the European Council announced that the new European currency would be called the Euro.

Also 30 years ago, on 21st Dec 1995 that the city of Bethlehem passed from Israeli to Palestinian control. On 26th Dec Israel also passed dozens of West Bank villages over to the Palestinian authority.

25 years ago, 13th Dec 2000, that George Bush finally claimed the US presidency, 36 days after the election was held. The results were delayed by disputed votes in Florida.

15 years ago, on 16th Dec 2010 that Ireland was granted a 67.5 billion Euro bailout from the European Union to rescue its banks and other financial institutions from collapsing.

10 years ago, on 19th Dec 2015 that Jimmy Hill, football player, manager and host of the BBC football TV series *Match of the Day* (1973-88) died.

GOD IN THE SCIENCES

This series is written by Dr Ruth M. Bancewicz, who is Church Engagement Director at The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion in Cambridge.

The Incarnation: fearfully and wonderfully made

*My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.*

*Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were
written in your book*

before one of them came to be. Psalm 139:15-16

You began life as a single cell. For a few hours you were a miniscule but highly complex blob of jelly, until it began to divide: two cells, four, eight, sixteen, a ball, a hollow ball, and then something more recognisably like a living organism. You were still tiny, but developing a nervous system, a head, a body, arms and legs.

Until recently I hadn't thought much about Jesus being an embryo. Somehow, I find that thought even more shocking than His birth. How could God, who made the universe, have become something so completely and utterly vulnerable? Maybe in the past, when the development of a child happened in 'secret', it was possible just to let that part of the Christmas story go untold.

Today, when we see images of a developing child, or even embryos outside the womb, it is harder to ignore the process of Jesus developing into a baby. The incarnation meant that God's Son went through all the stages in the diagram in my developmental biology textbook: 'zygote', 'morula', 'blastocyst', implantation, and so on.

Jesus was there in the beginning, and all life owes its existence to Him. But instead of remaining aloof, He chose to become one of us. The Son of God shared the same kind of DNA as every other organism on the planet. He knows what it feels like to have a body, to feel hungry and thirsty, pain and pleasure, dark and light.

In Psalm 139, the writer is meditating on God's intimate knowledge of him, which began when he was an embryo. There is nothing God doesn't know about him, and even darkness cannot obscure him from God's sight. The incarnation means that God's intimacy with us now extends even further. He became one of us, lived alongside us, and shared our very fragile material nature.

The transcendent God is also immanent, longing for us to relate to Him as Father. He became as fragile as we are so He could rescue us from the messes we so often find ourselves in. With His help, we can remember what it means to be fearfully and wonderfully made.

Reproduced by permission from Merry Christmas Everyone: A festive feast of stories, poems and reflection, Edited by Wendy H. Jones, Amy Robinson & Jane Clamp (Association of Christian Writers, 2018)



ADVENT PRAYER

Chaotic and bright
like paint smeared on the edges of creation
the colours of Advent crackle into being.

Blue of the waiting sky
where hope settles like dawn before sunrise.
Purple of longing and courage
the shade of prayers whispered in the dark.
Green of promise growing
quiet shoots pushing through cold soil.

Christmas glows in colours too.
Gold of glory and surprise
hidden in a manger and in the faces of strangers.
Red of love that risks and reaches and sacrifice
warm as firelight and fierce as justice.
White of angels and snowfall
the colour of new beginnings and rebirth.

God is never one colour.
God is the shimmer of every shade that heals.
The deep indigo of mystery.
The soft silver of mercy.
The radiant flame of love that never dims.

Life is painted with sacred colours.
The bruised tones of sorrow.
The bright hues of joy.
The bold strokes of grace.

Some days we live in Advent blue.
Some days we shine Christmas gold.
Every day we are drenched in the colours of God.

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Facebook: Whispers of Grace"

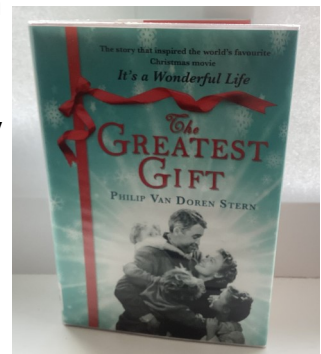


Submitted by Donna McEwan

The Greatest Gift

Christmas is very much a time of year when traditions matter to people. Some traditions are centuries old whilst others are more recent . A newer one is the Christmas film when the whole family gathers round the tv to watch something together which they can all enjoy. And not just any film as for many families it is the same film that they all agree they simply must watch every year. For some it's Dorothy clicking her red shoes and making a wish, for others it's Indiana Jones cracking his whip and I'm sure I'm not alone when I say that many watch Steve McQueen in the hope that this will be the year when he will actually get his motorbike over that barbed wire fence and escape to freedom ! The film that perhaps above all others encapsulates Christmas is the 1946 film " It's a Wonderful Life " starring James Stewart in which the hero George Bailey comes to realise how much his life matters not only to himself but to his family and his community.

What is perhaps not so well known is the story of the book on which it is based and the history of how it came to be made into a film. Apparently, the idea for the book came to the author Philip Van Doren Stern in a dream and when he woke up he knew what the whole story would be without needing to change anything. It's a short story only about 24 pages long and he called it "The Greatest Gift" but unfortunately no one was prepared to publish it. So, Philip arranged for 200 copies to be printed at his own expense and sent out as Christmas cards. One of these cards somehow came into the hands of the filmmaker Frank Capra , he showed it to James Stewart who was eager to star in a film adaptation . Strangely enough it wasn't an instant success, and the studio actually lost money . It wasn't until years later when it became free to broadcast on tv that it became the perennial favourite that it now is.



The short story differs in several ways from the film; the film necessarily has to introduce more characters and situations than a small book can support. There is no storyline about George giving up his future so that his brother can have a better life and no Uncle Billy and the story of how Potter takes over the town and steals from George's business . In many ways it's not your typical Christmas entertainment even though it's set at Christmas time. Perhaps difficult for us to realise but when the film and book were written it would have been very unusual to have as its central character a man suffering from depression and feeling suicidal. There is also domestic abuse, the death of a child and many people's lives ruined by a criminal's actions. Yet it is ultimately an uplifting story that still has important things to say to us all, reflecting as it does much about our relationship with God.

One Christmas Eve George tells the stranger who appears beside him on a bridge that "Other men are leading exciting lives. I never did anything really useful or interesting and it looks as if I never will . I might just as well be dead . In fact, I wish I'd never been born ! " The stranger who is never called an angel in the book and who is certainly never called Clarence grants George his wish . Throughout the rest of the story we see how

George's life really has made a difference to himself and his community. In real life he had saved his brother from drowning but now there is a deep and lasting sadness in his parents' house. The bank where he had worked has gone bust destroying many lives because all its money was stolen by the man who applied with George for the job at the bank. In the film *Mary*, George's wife never marries but in the book, she marries the swindler's brother who turns to drink and abuses his wife and children. George realises his mistake and rushes back to find the stranger, begging him to change everything back to what it was before. "I wanna live again" he shouts. George goes back to the real world grateful for his old life which he has now come to understand was a good life that really mattered to him and those around him. The experience has changed him; he's not the same George Bailey.

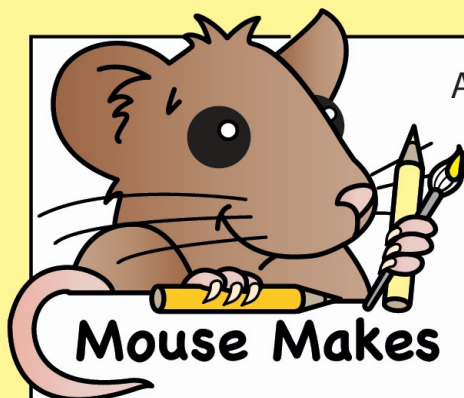


Sometimes we too may feel like George that we haven't achieved much, that we unlike the powerful and famous will soon be forgotten and leave no lasting legacy. But as the "Greatest Gift" shows we all have our part to play. In the film Clarence tells George "Strange isn't it? Each man's life touches so many other lives. When he isn't around he leaves an awful hole doesn't he?" We may feel insignificant but, as Christians we know that God has a plan for each and every one of us right from the moment we are born. Since God is on our side and cares for us we know that we matter. We matter to our family, to our community but most importantly of all we matter to God. At the end of the film George's brother calls him the richest man in town because of all the love that surrounds him. We know that God is love and we too are rich in the things that matter. So this book and film is perfect to enjoy over Christmas. After all God sent Jesus to us at Christmas time because He truly is the greatest gift.

A happy and peaceful Christmas to you all. And to all children reading this whether nine or ninety don't forget "Every time a bell rings an angel gets his wings."!

Heather Quaye





At Christmas we celebrate the birth of Jesus,
God's Son and our Saviour
coming into the world as a baby,
and we look forward to the time
when Jesus will come again,
not as a baby but as the
King of kings and Lord of lords!

read
John 14:3

A baby needs clothes
to keep warm like
a snuggly sleep suit
or a vest and nappy.
What were you dressed in?
Jesus was wrapped in

read Luke 2:7

A baby needs somewhere
to be born like at home
or in a hospital.
Where were you born?
Jesus was born
in a stable in

read Luke 2:1-6

A baby needs
somewhere
to sleep like
a crib or a cot.
*What did you
sleep in?*

Jesus slept in a

read Luke 2:7

A baby needs
a name.
*What name were
you called?*

Jesus was given
a special name
that had a
special meaning.

read
Matthew 1:21-23

HAPPY CHRISTMAS!

NADOLIG LLAWEN ★ NOLLAIG CHRÌDHEIL ★ NOLLAG SHONA
JOYEUX NOËL • FELIZ NAVIDAD • BUON NATALE • GOD JUL • FROHE WEIHNACHTEN

Wordsearch - Epiphany

6th January brings Epiphany - the visit of the Wise Men to the baby Jesus. Matthew calls them 'Magi', the name of an ancient priestly caste from Persia. Early church tradition says there were three: Balthasar, Caspar and Melchior. As for their gifts? Gold is a symbol of wisdom and wealth, incense is a symbol of worship and sacrifice, and myrrh is a symbol of healing - and even embalming. Jesus challenged and set aright the way in which the world handled all three of these things.

Find the following words in the grid below

Epiphany Visit Wise Men Magi Priestly Persia Balthasar Caspar
Melchior Gold Wealth wisdom Incense Worship sacrifice Myrrh
Symbol Healing Embalming Ancient Gifts Tradition Challenged world



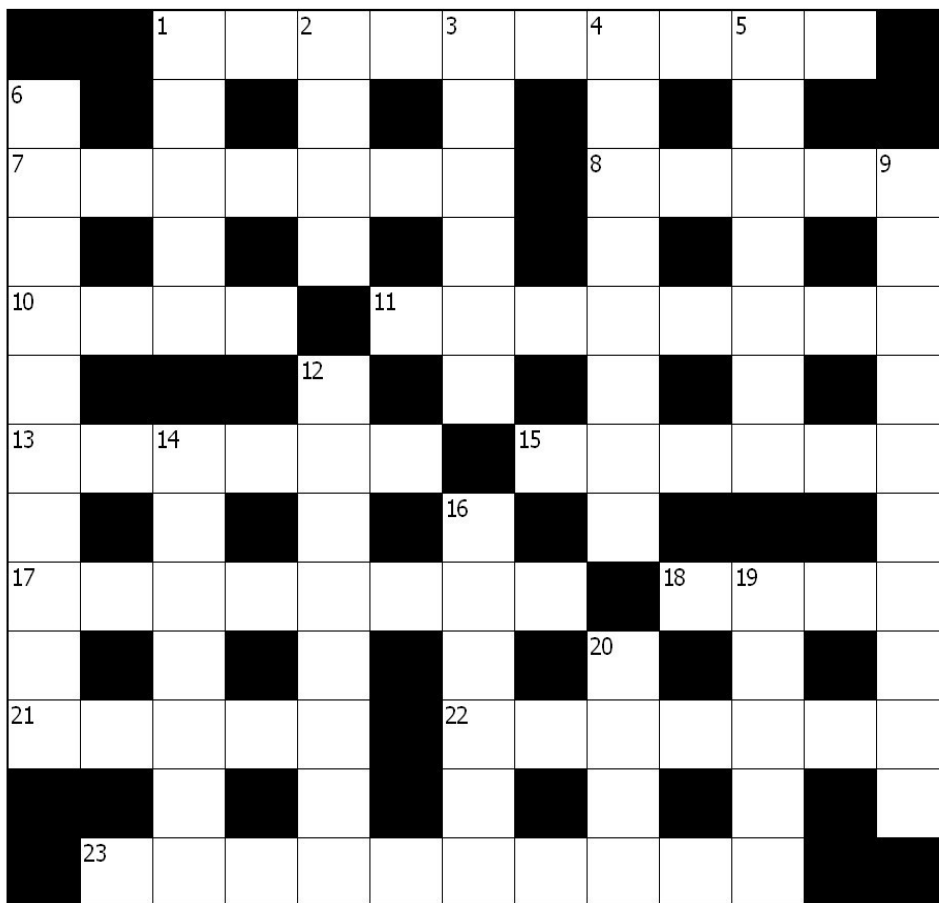
Crossword

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 22:19,20) (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)



SUDOKU

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				3		4		5
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			5	9	4			
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Solutions to these puzzles are given on Page 44

December is sometimes a time of year for sombre reflection on life, and of our need for God's protection, both during life, and at its end...

The Compassing of God

The compassing of God and of His right hand
Round my form and frame, protecting may it stand;
High King's compassing and grace of Trinity
Round me abiding ever eternally,
 Round me abiding ever eternally.

The Three's compassing my shield in my life-means,
The Three's compassing my shield through this day's scenes,
The Three's compassing my shield this night throughout,
From hate, from harm, from act, from evil about,
 From hate, from harm, from act, from evil about.

An ancient Celtic prayer

Happy Death

Thou God of salvation great, outpour
On my soul Thy graces from above
As up the sun of the heights doth soar
And on my body outpours its love.

Needs must that I die and go to rest,
Nor know I where or when it will be;
But if of thy graces unpossessed,
So I am lost everlastingly.

Death of anointing, repentance due,
Death of joy, death of peacefulness giv'n;
Death of grace, death of forgiveness true,
Death that endows life with Christ and heav'n.

An ancient Celtic prayer

REMEMBERING REMEMBRANCE

Remembrance

In November we come to remember
How war tore our country apart,
From village and town and all around
Men and boys left home and hearth.

Mothers and wives and sisters all
Saw their brave young men go away,
For some it meant the ultimate price
As they gave their tomorrows for our today.

Another Man left His home above
To rescue this world from sin,
It cost Him His life which He freely gave
So new life could enter in.

In this world there will always be war,
But the time will surely be
When the earth shall be filled with the glory of God
As the waters cover the sea.

By Megan Carter



SHEPHERDS TO SHEPHERD

(Luke 2:8-20, John 10:11)

You will find the baby,
Said the angel,
You will find the baby
In Bethlehem,
The baby of glory and peace,
The baby of good news and joy.

So the shepherds began
Their journey of trust
In the word of the Lord.

Hurrying,
Finding,
Telling,
Glorifying,
Praising,

It was just as the angel had said.
And they went back to watch over their flocks,
Having met one of their own.

By Daphne Kitching



*If wondering about making New Year Resolutions,
consider those of John Wesley:*

Do all the good you can
By all the means you can
In all the ways you can
In all the places you can
At all the times you can
To all the people you can
As long as ever you can.

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

By David Winter



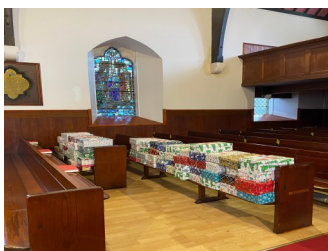
BLYTHSWOOD CHRISTMAS SHOEBOX APPEAL 2025: UPDATE

This year as many of you know we decided to contribute to the Blythswood shoebox appeal for Christmas as a congregation, to combine our efforts and give us another opportunity to work together.

We started with a shoebox wrapping session in the church hall on 8 August, enjoying a demonstration of how to do it by Isabel MacLeod who has been involved with the appeal since it first started in 1983. Of course, we all appreciated the cuppa that followed, having wrapped 35 boxes, with no idea how many we would be able to fill.

The project was launched in our church at the Sunday morning service on 24 August, which included the Blythswood shoebox appeal video. This video has since been updated and can be seen on their website <https://blythswood.org/shoeboxappeal/>. It's well worth watching the new video, which focuses on boxes being delivered to devastated and impoverished villages in Ukraine and shows the delight they bring particularly to children and older people. Further moving information on the needs of those receiving a shoebox is given in the news section <https://blythswood.org/blythswood-news-bn88/>.

After the service we had a delicious soup and sandwich lunch in the church hall with our wrapped boxes on display, ready for taking away to fill. It might seem early to be starting to fill a box for Christmas in August but it's really never too early. Some regular shoebox contributors gather items all year round, keeping an eye open for bargains in the shops as the seasons change.



Filled boxes started to pile up at the front of the church in early October, and by the end of the month when the van came to take them all to Evanton we had collected 78 boxes, far exceeding our expectations. Since then, we heard that a total of 1015 shoeboxes were sent from Skye, a wonderful response to the appeal, coming in from all over the island, and being collected from churches, schools, and the Blythswood shop in Portree.



Working together on this project within our congregation and with people from other churches and the community was heartening for all of us, and the result speaks for itself. Some filled one or more boxes, and others contributed necessary items such as hats, socks, scarves, and toiletries. It was a positive experience and hopefully we can repeat it next year, possibly starting even earlier than August.



Thank you to everyone who participated in any way, providing and wrapping boxes, filling them, organising the church lunch, and packing them for transport at the end of October, and to Sandor our minister and the Kirk Session for their support and encouragement.

Catriona MacDonald



THE BENEFITS OF FELLOWSHIP

The following is the text of an email I received in October. For all who wait behind for After Morning Worship Fellowship on a Sunday, it is chance to catch up with news, but it can help to bring light to those experiencing difficult times.

This past summer, on August 3, 2025, I visited your church during the morning service. After the service, I joined some members of the congregation for tea. I had wonderful conversations with the minister and other church members. I want to thank you for the incredible hospitality I felt while I was at your church. I have never felt so welcome in a foreign church as I did with you. Several members of the congregation came up to me to ask where I was from and what brought me to your church. For this, I wish to thank you sincerely.

After the service, I spoke with some members about the loss of my 12-year-old daughter and about why I was traveling alone in Scotland. I was searching for a ray of light to help me continue living without my daughter. The hospitality and conversations with you truly helped me and showed me that God is there for me, especially during this difficult time.

Kind regards,

Anita van Gaalen

The Netherlands

THE ROBIN ON MY CHRISTMAS CARD

The Robin on my Christmas Card
Upon a postbox, red –
He fixed me with a gaze quite hard
And this is what he said:

“O, viewer of this Christmas card
I bet that you don’t know
Why I upon this card am here
To bring a yuletide glow?”

I said to him, “O birdie, do
Reveal your secret deep
I see you all the yearlong through
And hear your joyful cheep!

“So why, O Robin, tell me why
When you’re around all year
On lawn, or branch, or in the sky
Why now this Christmas cheer?”

He said to me that long ago
The postmen you would see
Their jackets vivid red would glow –
“In fact, they looked like me!

“From then till now my bright red breast
And cheery trilling tweet
Has come upon the Christmas fest
To bring a Christmas treat!”

By Nigel Beeton



SOME QUOTES FOR CHRISTMAS

The Incarnation

The incarnation of Christ is the clearest affirmation of the truth that man is created in the image of God. - *Lawrence Adams*

To perceive Christmas through its wrapping becomes more difficult each year.
- *E B White*

This most tremendous tale of all,
Seen in a stained-glass window's hue,
A Baby in an ox's stall.

From John Betjeman 'Christmas'

Filling the world He lies in a manger! - *Augustine*

Remember, Christ was not a deified man, neither was he a humanized God. He was perfectly God and at the same time perfectly man. - *C H Spurgeon*

Christ took our flesh upon him that He might takes our sins upon Him. - *T Watson*

With friends and relatives in mind....

We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give. - *Duane Hulse.*

The human species, according to the best theory I can form of it, is composed of two distinct races, the men who borrow, and the men who lend. - *Charles Lamb*

Strange to see how a good dinner and feasting reconcile everybody. - *Samuel Pepys*

Of all the awkward people in your house or job there is only one whom you can improve very much. - *C S Lewis*

Gossip is letting the chat out of the bag. - *Anon*

A good example is the best sermon. - *Anon*

You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you. - *Dale Carnegie*

Happiness is made to be shared. - *French proverb*



ONE DAY AT A TIME

One day at a time with its failures and fears,
With its hurts and mistakes, with its weakness and tears,
With its portion of pain and its burden of care,
One day at a time we must meet and must bear.

One day at a time to be patient and strong,
To be calm under trial and sweet under wrong;
Then its toiling shall pass and its sorrow shall cease;
It shall fade and depart and the night shall bring peace.

One day at a time and the day is His day;
He has numbered its hours, though they haste or delay.
His Grace is sufficient; we walk not alone;
As the day, so the strength that He gives to His own.

Annie Johnston Flint

AND POST-CHRISTMAS...WITH NEW YEAR ON THE WAY

Depression: a period when you can't spend money you don't have. – *Anon*

Bargain: it's easy to tell when you've got a bargain: it doesn't fit. – *Anon*

Making the most of today is the best way to be ready for tomorrow. – *Anon*

I find that distance lends enchantment to bagpipes. – *William Blezard*

The second day of a New Year's diet is always easier than the first. By the second day you're off it. – *Jackie Gleason*

LONELINESS

Some people describe loneliness as the feeling we have when our need for social contact and relationships isn't met. But loneliness isn't the same as being alone. Some people may only feel lonely at certain times in their life.

Speaking to people living on the streets and selling the "Big Issue" we spoke about how loneliness affects everyone.

Here are a few statistics from the "Big Issue"

64% of us can learn a lot by interacting with strangers.

65% say the world would be a better place if people interacted with strangers more.

69% of Brits say we spend too much time on digital devices and that we miss out on real human contact.

57% say a quick chat, a smile, can lift your mood.

Loneliness affects 10% of adults, increasing their risk of depression, anxiety, heart disease, poor sleep, cognitive issues.

Four out of ten British people go a whole week without a meaningful conversation.

It's good to talk.

May you all have a blessed Christmas

Kay MacKinnon x

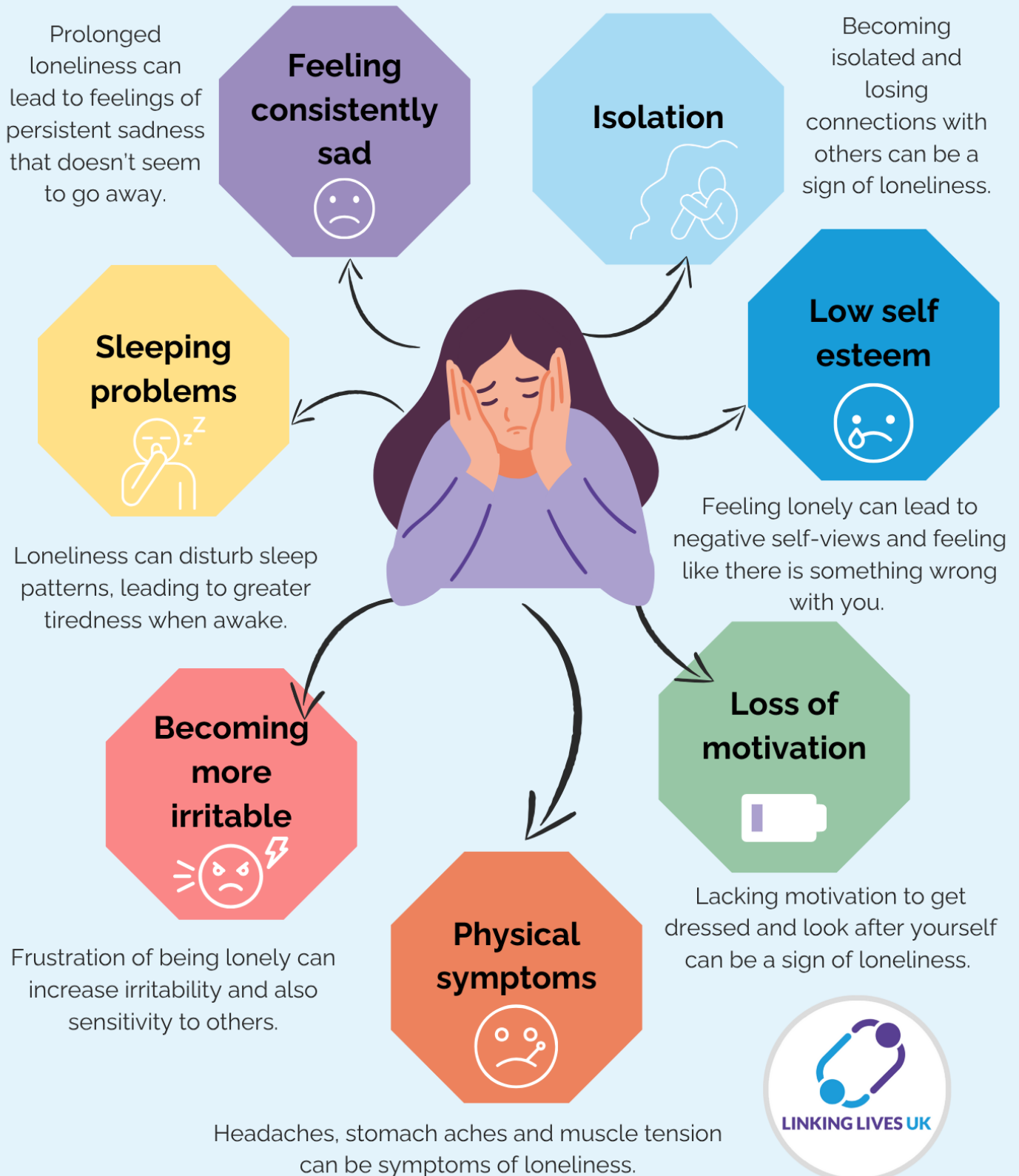
While people can experience loneliness at any time of the year, Christmas can be a particularly difficult time for many.

Television adverts and programmes showing groups celebrating together can heighten the awareness of being alone.

The posters on the following two pages were received recently and indicate the signs of loneliness and ways it can be tackled.

7 common signs of loneliness

Identifying the invisible symptoms of loneliness is the first step to overcoming it.



www.linkinglives.uk

Charity Numbers: England 1170325; Scotland SC053855

Improving quality of life
through friendship

9 stepping stones out of loneliness

8. Taking care of yourself and staying grateful are powerful ways to boost your mood.

8. Practice mindfulness

9. If feelings of loneliness persist, sometimes we need to ask for help, and that's ok. Your GP is the best place to start.

9. Seek help

7. Pets are proven to decrease levels of cortisol (stress-hormone) and lower blood pressure.

7. Adopt a pet

6. New technology can connect us with others. For help, ask your local library.

6. Embrace new tech

5. Helping others gives us a sense of purpose and can take our minds off ourselves. It can also be a great way to meet other people.

5. Volunteer

4. Exercising releases endorphins, boosting mood and reducing loneliness. Start gently with a walk or simple stretches.

4. Exercise

3. Re-igniting a hobby or finding a new one is a great way to engage your mind and make new friends at the same time.

3. Engage in hobbies

2. Reach out to family & friends

2. It may not always be possible to see people we know face to face, but scheduling a weekly or fortnightly call is a great place to start.

1. Recognise it's not your fault

1. Loneliness can cause guilt or shame, often due to life circumstances like moving, bereavement, or health issues. Recognising the cause helps us realise it's not our fault and fosters connection.

www.linkinglives.uk

Charity Numbers: England 1170325; Scotland SC053855



Improving quality
of life through
friendship

ALONE AT CHRISTMAS

Can you know what it's like
 To be alone on Christmas Day ?
 So far removed from wife and tyke
 In a land so far away.
 A land that's strange n'dark n'drear
 Where there's nothing you really love,
 Nothing in the way of Christmas cheer.
 Reminding you of him above
 Whose birth it is we celebrate
 On this of all days in the year
 And the slogan he gave them
 Once again we give to you
 "Peace on earth, Goodwill to men
 God grant that soon it may come true

- Written on Christmas Day 1944 in the solitude of my lonely room.
 M J Parten

Solutions to the puzzles on Pages 30-31

			T	A	B	E	R	N	A	C	L	E	
S			A		O		A		B		U		
A	B	S	A	L	O	M			I	N	C	A	S
C		T		D			I		A		E		A
R	O	E	S			C	A	P	T	U	R	E	D
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F	R	I	G	H	T		C	A	V	E	L	L	
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C	Y	C	L	O	N	I	C		H	E	R	B	
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S	O	N	A	R			A	M	A	Z	I	N	G
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1	5	6	9	4	8	3	7	2
3	9	4	2	7	6	1	5	8
7	2	8	3	5	1	9	4	6
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5	8	7	4	2	9	6	3	1
6	1	9	8	3	7	4	2	5
4	3	5	1	6	2	7	8	9
8	7	1	5	9	4	2	6	3
9	6	2	7	8	3	5	1	4

And finally, looking forward to 2026

NEW YEAR 2026

If we put our hand in God's hand
As we enter this New Year
Not knowing what the future holds
But that our Friend is near.

We shall not fear what lies ahead
If He is by our side,
Nor wander from the pathway
If He will be our guide.

The Sinless One from heaven came
To dwell with us on earth,
He sought and bought us with His blood
And offered us new birth.

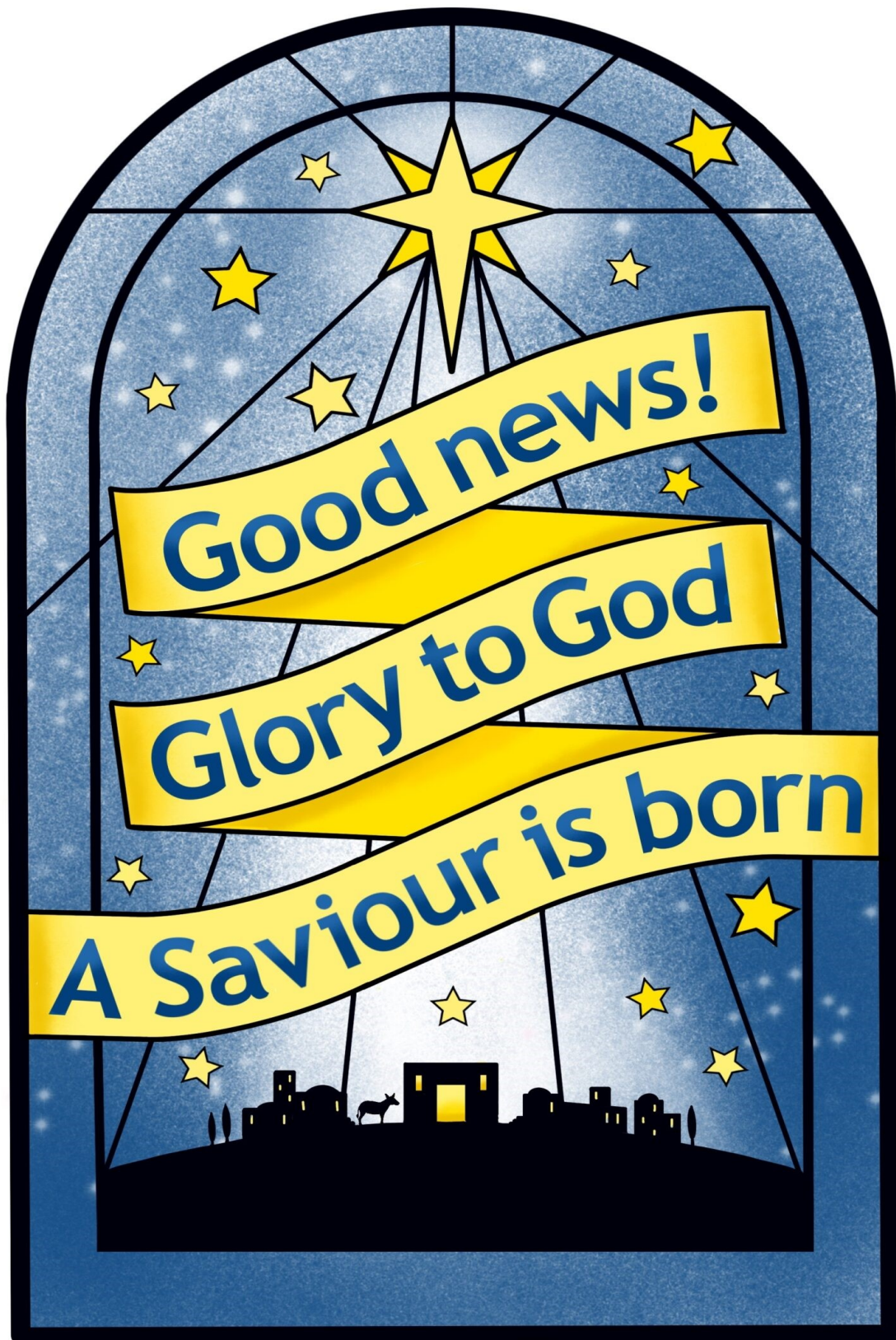
Now as we travel through this year
He knows the things He's planned,
So let us trust and know just this –
Our times are in His hands.

By Megan Carter

A New Year's resolution-prayer - following in His footsteps

Almighty, eternal, just and merciful God, grant us the desire to do only what pleases you, and the strength to do only what you command. Cleanse our souls, enlighten our minds, and inflame our hearts with your Holy Spirit, that we may follow in the footsteps of your beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

St Francis of Assisi, 1182 – 1226



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