

GRAPEVINE

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THE MAGAZINE OF THE DIOCESE OF BRECHIN

The Bishop of Edinburgh writes:

Conspiracy!

Various parts of the world have been devastated by hurricanes recently. Even the UK has been affected. One of the surprises about Hurricane Ophelia (to me at any rate) was that she brought warm weather with her. Apparently this was because warm air was sucked from southern Europe and North Africa into the British Isles. It was an interesting reminder that whatever artificial boundaries we erect around ourselves we belong to one planet and breathe the same air.

Back in the 1960s, there were those in America who feared a Roman Catholic conspiracy to seize power. They had their first Roman Catholic President after all: J F Kennedy. Contradicting this the theologian, John Courtney Murray, suggested that the USA could do with more, not less, conspiracy. 'We need,' he argued, 'a conspiracy that can contain us all.' For to conspire means, literally, to breathe together, to breathe the same air. Rather than breaking into fearful little interest groups, plotting to take advantage of one another, it was far better, surely, to develop an open public discourse that acknowledged that the destiny of a nation depends on what is held in common. That, whether they like it or not, citizens of one country breathe the same air.

Half a century later, conspiracy theories still abound, each becoming an excuse to fragment our perception of the world into 'those for us' and 'those against us'. Let us be honest,

the world is not a comfortable place to be at the moment. We naturally feel anxious when nation states posture about the use of nuclear weapons, when terrorists threaten our safety, when we live with daily uncertainties about our political and economic future. Courtney Murray's advice seems counter-intuitive when the temptation is to huddle closer to people we know and build every higher walls around us. Yet now more than ever we need a 'conspiracy that can contain us all' and to heed the reminder of Hurricane Ophelia that we really do breathe the same air.

This is not a new idea for Christians who believe that all humanity breathes the breath of God; that this is what should unite us. That breathing together of the Spirit of God enables us to be more completely what God means us to be. And we believe that although human beings are often at odds with each other yet God always invites us beyond our divisions and works to reconcile our

differences and helps us rediscover our one-ness in Christ. Perhaps this is why, at our best we long to break down barriers and delight in discovering that truly nothing can separate us from the love of God.

As we approach the darkest season of the year there are numerous opportunities to get this message across. Opportunities to reclaim the light of Advent hope, to join the angels' Christmas song of joy and to speak of a God whose incarnation, whose being-with-us gives meaning and purpose to human existence, in its sorrows and brokenness as well as its delights and dreams. In an angry and fearful world we have the opportunity to speak of peace and trust, hope and love, for these are some of the names we give to the Spirit of God breathing in us.

At the birth of Jesus, as at his resurrection, the oft repeated message is, 'Do not be afraid.' These are God's words for us, but we have discovered that they are not just for us, not just for a few, but for everyone: 'Do not fear for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name, you are mine.'



Interim Bishop of Brechin

STARFISH PROJECTS FOR SWAZILAND

The Starfish Projects at Holy Trinity, Monifieth are focused on our Companion Link with the Anglican Diocese of Swaziland and are all about doing small things and doing them well, so that they may make a difference. One of our constant projects, since 2007, has been the sponsoring of orphan children to enable them to continue their schooling.

Until recently, Primary education in Swaziland was not free and so many thousands of orphans and other poor children were denied access to even rudimentary schooling. When, only a few years ago free Primary education began to be phased in the government schools were flooded with late entrants. Classes of 70 or over were common, with children in their early teens sitting next to 5 year olds. All of this had to be managed with no additional classrooms, teachers or teaching resources. The situation continues to be challenging for both staff and pupils.



Phindile

Secondary education is still not free and so the poorest and most vulnerable children may only attend school at Primary level.

In 2007, following my first visit to Swaziland, the congregation of Holy Trinity pledged to support an orphaned girl through her Secondary schooling.

Phindile was then 13 years old. Her mother had died and her father had left the family. She was living with her disabled grandmother and the little family was destitute – foraging for scraps of food among equally impoverished neighbours.

For five years, we supported Phindile with all her school expenses – school and exam fees, books and stationery, travel and school meals, uniform and other personal requirements. We also provided groceries for the family. We managed this in partnership with Phindile's parish priest, Canon Orma, who runs two Neighbourhood Care Points in her large parish, providing food and other support for large numbers of orphaned and vulnerable children.

When Phindile finished school, she had done well enough in her exams to go to college and so our support continued for a further three years while she studied successfully for a Diploma in Accounts and Business Studies.

She is now working in a secure position at one of the Government Border Posts on the South African Border. She is engaged to a responsible young man who works in the Government Revenue Office and plans to marry in the next couple of years. She has grown into a confident, self-assured young woman: our support has made a difference not only to her, but also to her family as she is now able to provide assistance for her grandmother and her sister, who is a young single parent.

When Phindile completed her studies, we agreed with Canon Orma to begin again with another orphan – a boy this time. Mthobisi lives with his go-go (granny) and his younger half sister in a very poor, remote rural community. His go-go is their only adult living relative.

We have supported him through his Secondary Education and he is due to finish school in December this year. He was one of the many late entrants to Primary

education and is already almost 19 years old. We hope he may do well enough in his final exams to go on to Further Education.



Pat with Mthobisi, Buyisile and their go-go

Mthobisi's younger half sister, Buyisile, was also a late entrant to school because of the family's circumstances. She is 15, but is only now about to start Secondary school in January 2018. We feel that we must find a way to support her too.

If Mthobisi goes on to college, we will be challenged to provide funds to support both of these young people along with providing some regular grocery money for the family, but we are determined to find a way. They are both fine young people and their very elderly granny – now in her mid 80s – has done a most amazing job in taking good care of them both.

Pat Millar

a word from the editor

Sincere apologies to everyone that this edition was not available on the scheduled date. This was entirely due to a computer failure caused by the download of updating software.

The Twelve days of Christmas – Fact or Fiction?

There is no doubt that between Christmas Day and the start of the next season in the Church year we call Epiphany, there are 12 days - the 12 days of Christmas – although with Christmas trees and decorations going up in some places in October, and Christmas parties in full swing from the end of November, the focus on these 12 days of celebration seems somewhat less now than in the past.

For Christians, of course, Christmas begins with Midnight Mass on 24 December and finishes on 5 January with the next day being Epiphany when we celebrate the arrival of the Wise Men at the home of Jesus and his parents. This means that the addition of the Wise Men to the traditional nativity scene can be argued as being out of place, but this sort of argument simply distracts us from the real meaning and purpose of Christmas – the first coming into our world of God's Son.

Likewise other 'traditional' features of Christmas are also open for debate, none more so than the popular Christmas song, the Twelve days of Christmas. It is thought to have its origin in France and today there are numerous versions. There are some people who argue the song has roots in Christianity, others in ancient folklore. Whatever the truth is, the following explanation is one of the best 'religious' reasons behind the song and makes a good summary of the foundations of our faith.

- ♦ The partridge in a pear tree is Jesus.
- ♦ The two turtledoves are the Old and New Testaments in the Bible.
- ♦ Three French hens stand for faith, hope and love, the greatest of God's gifts.
- ♦ The four calling birds are the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

- ♦ The five gold rings recall the Hebrew Torah (Law), or the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament.
- ♦ The six geese a-laying are the six days of creation; God rested on the seventh.
- ♦ The seven swans a-swimming represent the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- ♦ The eight maids a-milking are the eight Beatitudes of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount.
- ♦ Nine ladies dancing are the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit named by St Paul.
- ♦ The ten lords a-leaping are the Ten Commandments.
- ♦ Eleven pipers piping represent the 11 faithful Apostles.
- ♦ Twelve drummers drumming symbolize the 12 points of doctrine in the Apostles Creed.

If you think Jesus being symbolised as a partridge in a pear tree sounds a little blasphemous, remember that Jesus likened himself to a hen:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.
(Luke 13:34)

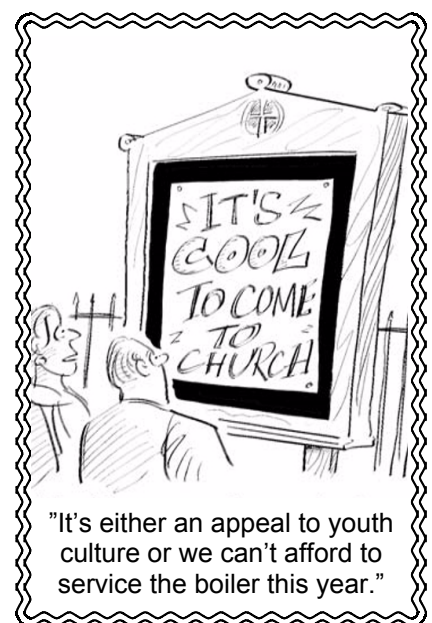
The 'true love' in the song is said to refer to God the Father and the 'me' receiving the gifts is every Christian. Whether the roots of the Twelve days of Christmas are in Christianity is fact or fiction, it does not change the real facts which the Bible teaches and have been central to Christian faith from the earliest times, so let's enjoy singing it and enjoy celebrating Christmas for what it really is.

Giving Thanks

A gradual goodbye it was, an ebbing to the end,
From rock to dulse to drying sand we watched his life descend:
And 'though the bay, familiar yet, gave way to spreading land,
Through the shrinking puddles, still, we smiled and held his hand.

And kindness in it all I saw; no shock, no sudden drain,
Just fading, merely fading, like evening on the wane;
My dad receded gently, like summer dries the fen,
And joined the tide of fathers that slip away from men.

Bruce D. Gowans
(written following the death of his father
from dementia earlier this year)



Bishop Forbes – Leading us Still

“I was delighted to be invited to preach at the Bishop Forbes evensong at the Cathedral on 8 October. As it turned out I was even more thrilled to learn, for the first time, what a great bishop he was. One of the heroes of our church, I discovered that whilst he was very much a man of his age yet his ministry and leadership continue to inspire us across the ages.”

Readings:

Ezekiel 34.11-16; John 10.11-16

After a week in which some of our fellow Anglicans have expressed disgruntlement about the Scottish Episcopal Church's stance on marriage – and have censured us and expelled us from theological forums – it is interesting to be celebrating today a Scottish bishop who was himself tried for heresy by his colleagues and suffered their censure and admonition.

160 years on from that trial, it is hard for us to understand why Alexander Penrose Forbes's views on the Eucharist should have caused such indignation. I suppose that's largely because the theological tide has flowed in his direction ever since. His opponents now seem somewhat benighted and out of touch, and their treatment of their distinguished colleague now appears to be ungracious and embittered.

For whilst Benediction, the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, may not be to everyone's liking, the centrality of the Eucharist each Sunday is mainstream for most of us, and most of us have little problem in affirming Christ's presence in the bread and wine. Whilst for us the Eucharist is certainly a remembrance it is not a mere memorial of a past event but a making-present to us and in us of the grace of God in the death, the resurrection and the continuing presence of Christ.

On the other hand, we would be wise not to be too disrespectful of Bishop Forbes's opponents. True, it is not a battle we now think worth fighting. But does not every period of Christian history have its tender places? Every age has causes that divide, that generate huge heat, yet leave later generations bemused, wondering what all the fuss was really about. Scriptures in the vernacular, for example, kneeling at Communion, vestments, Prayer Books have all had their day in the spotlight,



threatening to blow the church apart, to go supernova, yet cooling quickly to become instead a red dwarf, warming but not incinerating the church. So it was with the Oxford Movement, such a profound influence on Alexander Forbes, from which large parts of our church still draw comfort and warmth, but a source of such anxiety and misunderstanding in the mid-nineteenth century.

This longer historical perspective suggests that if we had a time machine that could take us 160 years into our future we would be likely to find both that our Christian descendants were nonplussed by our problems over sexuality and also that they would be embroiled in some, to our eyes, astonishing controversy of their own. If that same time machine

could go back to 1857 and whisk Bishop Forbes forward to 2017 it would be nice to imagine that he would be comforted to discover that he had become mainstream – even if equally astonished or even horrified to discover what else we have made of his legacy.

This raises the question for me as to how one age should judge another. Knowing our own capacity to get extremely hot under the collar about issues that later generations may regard as akin to the argument in Lilliput about which end of a boiled egg should be eaten first, we should at least approach the past with humility if not kindness. In the unlikely event that forward time travel is invented, I would suggest that we should be equally charitable towards future generations.

Nevertheless, surely there are some non-negotiables, certain essential characteristics of our faith that are timeless and that we should expect to see in evidence in every age of a church that seeks to be faithful Christ, no matter how that faith is dressed up. Our two readings offer us one such characteristic; namely, that in our mission and ministry we should demonstrate what it means to be a good shepherd.

The idea of the shepherd was, of course, very dear to the people of Israel who longed for the return of the shepherd king, David. Ezekiel presents not a human king but God as the true shepherd who seeks out the lost and rescues them from peril, binds up their wounds and feeds the famished and the fat with justice. Jesus picks up the same image. 'I am the good shepherd,' he says. I know my sheep as they know me. I gather my sheep together in unity. I defend my sheep from danger and lay down my life for them. I offer them abundant life.

This image of the shepherd well describes Alexander Forbes. For I would suggest that his lasting legacy, the work for which he deserves to be celebrated, has very little to do with theological controversy and only incidentally to do with his impressive programme of church and school building, but has everything to do with the quality of his life as a Christian pastor.

From the age of 30 he made it his life's work to know his sheep by name, to seek and save the lost, to gather into the fold of Christ those who had strayed – to baptize them, confirm them, feed and water them and to send them to their rest. He worked tirelessly for a reformed and more just society and to build a church community for the whole people of God, poor as well as rich, lay as

well as ordained. To be zealous for God's kingdom.

And, if by virtue of that time machine the great bishop were to walk through our cathedral door now, whatever else might have changed he could justifiably call us to account on these matters. Are we as zealous for the Kingdom as he was? Do we spend ourselves as he did for the flock of Christ – knowing them by name, serving them, gathering and uniting them? Do we feed the hungry, heal the injured, and nourish the sleek and the fat with justice? Are those of us who are priests and bishops still measuring ourselves against the example of Christ the Good Shepherd? Are we, the whole Church of God, following the lead of Christ?

One of the great tributes paid to Bishop Forbes by the people of

the Brechin Diocese and the city of Dundee was to present him with a pastoral staff – that symbol of all we look for in a bishop. A stick to root him or her to the ground, keeping them steady against the wind, safe from falling. A sharp point at one end to encourage, a hook at the other to rescue from danger. This is certainly how the people of the city saw their bishop after 25 years of remarkable ministry – a shepherd striding out ahead leading his flock.

Although we know he was a man of a different age, shaped in a different world, yet in this respect he leads us still, in imitation of Christ the Good Shepherd. If we ever cease to follow this lead, we shall have ceased to be the Church of God.

+John

THE STORY OF THE CHRISTINGLE

The word 'Christingle' actually means 'Christ Light', and celebrates the light of Jesus coming into the world. Stories of how the Christingle began look back to the Moravian Church, which is found in the Czech Republic. The Moravians have held Christingle services for more than 200 years, and according to them, this is how the first Christingle might have been made:

Many years ago the children in a village were asked to bring a Christmas gift to put beside the crib in the church. One family was very poor, and had no money for gifts, but the three children were still deter-

mined to take something. The only nice thing they had was an orange, so they decided to give the Christ-child that.

But then they discovered the top was going green, so the eldest cut it out, and put a candle in the hole. To add some colour, one of the girls took a red ribbon from her

hair and tied it around the middle of the orange. It was hard to make the ribbon stay still, so they fastened it in place with toothpicks. The toothpicks looked a bit bare, so the youngest child added some raisins to them.

The children took their decorated orange lantern to the church for the Christmas Mass. The other children sneered at their meagre gift, but the priest seized upon it with joy. He held it up as an example of the true understanding of the meaning of Christmas, for the following reasons.



The orange is round, like the world; the candle gives us light in the dark, like the love of God; the red ribbon goes round the 'world', as a symbol of Christ's blood, given for everyone; the four sticks point in all directions, and symbolise that God is over all: North, South, East and West; and the fruit and nuts remind us of God's blessings.

Five Riddles to Solve

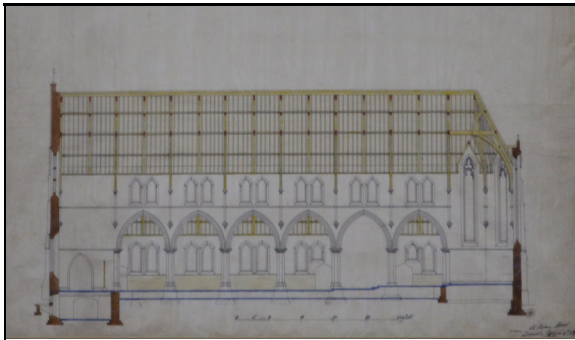
1. A murderer is condemned to death. He has to choose between three rooms. The first is full of raging fires, the second is full of assassins with loaded guns, and the third is full of lions that haven't eaten in 3 years. Which room is safest for him?
2. A woman shoots her husband. Then she holds him under water for over 5 minutes. Finally, she hangs him. But 5 minutes later they both go out together and enjoy a wonderful dinner. How can this be?
3. What is black when you buy it, red when you use it, and grey when you throw it away?
4. Can you name 3 consecutive days without using the words Wednesday, Friday or Sunday?
5. This is an unusual paragraph. I'm curious as to just how quickly you can find out what is so unusual about it. It looks so ordinary and plain that you would think nothing was wrong with it. In fact, nothing is wrong with it! It is highly unusual though. Study it and think about it, but you still may not find anything odd. But if you work at it a bit, you might find out.

If you wish, send answers with your name and address to the editor, details at the bottom of page 12.

Celebrations at St

On Friday, 20 October St Mary Magdalene's put on a Birthday Concert to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the church building. In anticipation of Bishop Edward Luscombe's 93rd birthday in November this was incorporated into the occasion.

Adult and junior choirs provided the musical feast with everyone singing four appropriately chosen hymns. The Rector, the Rev'd David Shepherd provided commentary on the building, the history and the choice of music. Before the final hymn Bishop Luscombe expressed his appreciation for the event before pronouncing the blessing.



Original architect's drawing 1867 of the south elevation

Giving background to this occasion the Rev'd David Shepherd writes:

The people who walked through the door 150 years ago were members of the Catholic Apostolic Church. In 1952, it was the people of St Mary Magdalene's who walked through the door and made it their spiritual home.

In the past 150 years, this Church has twice faced the prospect of closure. Once in 1944 and again 1976. But by the will of God, it has survived. And we hope that, whatever challenges and difficulties the Church may face in the next 150 years, Christian people will continue to worship God in this place.

When they first started, the Catholic Apostolics had no intention of becoming a Church.

They regarded themselves as a pressure group which would seek to improve the quality of worship in churches throughout the world. They would be a gathering of apostles; sent out - like the original apostles - to proclaim the Good News. They too would be guided by the Holy Spirit.

Their great belief was that the end of the world was fast approaching. Jesus would return; and they wanted to prepare the Church so that it would be ready to greet him. Their first meeting was in Albury House, near Guildford. They met in the home of Sir Henry Drummond MP in 1825. Had their meeting taken place ten years later, they might have found themselves joining the Oxford Movement. But their mission was not to reform the Church of England; it was to prepare the whole Church.

For twenty-five years, the Church had no name. But at the second Census of 1851 members were told to describe themselves as members of the Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church... as in the Creed. From then on, they were known as the Catholic Apostolic Church.

Their first chapel was opened in July 1835. Their first meeting in Dundee was in 1836. By 1842, they had built themselves a small chapel at the east end of Bell Street in Meadow Close. Those who like to see our Church lit up with candles might like to know that, from the beginning, the Catholic Apostolics used oil lamps!

In 1835, they set up a College of 12 Apostles. They divided the world up between them. Sir Henry Drummond was the Apostle for Scotland and Switzerland! Perhaps he had a holiday home beside Lake Geneva! Because they thought Jesus would be

arriving soon, they did not plan long-term. They believed that Jesus would come before the last of their Apostles died. So they did not lay down any rules for their successors.

The Apostle in each country ordained an Angel for each Church. He was a bishop for his people. They appointed elders, prophets, evangelists and pastors to assist the Angel in his work. The churches did not have any money problems because each parishioner gave 10% of his or her income to the Church. So their churches were well-built and well-furnished. They also developed a very fine Liturgy which is still highly regarded.

The congregation in Dundee rose to 700 members and the small chapel in Meadow Close proved far too small. So, in 1865, the elders bought a plot of land (Chapelshade Gardens) on Constitution Road. The Church was designed by a Dundee architect, Thomas Robertson. In his original drawings there is no spire; that came later, in 1882. With the spire came a bell chamber - but no bell!

The Church was opened for public worship on 30 November 1867. Which is why we are celebrating its 150th Birthday this



Painting of the interior in 1914

Mary Magdalene's

year. (Our own congregation celebrated its 163rd birthday in July.) The new Church flourished. In 1905, they built an extension to provide an upstairs hall with the

they were wrong about the end of the world coming soon. Jesus said to his disciples: "No one knows the hour but the Father." So the Apostolics were a little pre-

sumptuous in predicting a date. And they were also wrong about Jesus returning. He has never left us! "Where two or three are gathered together in my name; I am in the midst of them."

Because of their beliefs, they made no

provision for electing more apostles. So when the Apostles died out, there was no one to ordain the Angels. And without ordination, there could be no more priests and deacons. Their last Apostle died in 1901. This meant that, although the congregations remained strong, the churches died for lack of clergy. One by one they closed and the people were advised to go to other churches.

The last minister here in Dundee was the Reverend William Denovan. When he died in 1944, there was no replacement. So this Church became "a ghost church" for eight years.

St Mary Magdalene's had been longing to build a larger church for its people. The Catholic Apostolics sold us this building for £5000. It was a most generous gift. Today, this church is insured for £10.4 million!

Our plan is to make this Church more visible to outsiders. And to welcome strangers into our Church. We can restore a door. But we also have to be part of that resurrection process. In his revelation of himself to St John, God said: "Behold, I make all things new." When he said this, he was not just talking about a new Jerusalem, but the renewal and renovation of his people. We are part of his new Creation. And so is this Church.

I have said that, during the coming year, each of us should try to do our very best for God. As Christians, we are not spectators, but players. We are supposed to be – all of us – Good Samaritans, bringing healing and love to those who have been battered and cast aside in this cruel and sinful world. We are here to be miracle workers. Christ dwells in our hearts; and we should be mindful of his presence.

The sad fate of the Catholic Apostolic Church should remind us that churches can die. And many churches in Scotland have died, because there has been no renewal and no vision. It is no use waiting till the average age of the congregation is over 80! Renewal and renovation should be something a church considers every year. How do we make all things new? This is the challenge that we continue to face day by day and year by year.



Combined adult and junior choirs under Bill Sinclair, Director of Music

Vestry and choir room downstairs. There was also an office for the Angel.

As you will appreciate, there have been many changes in the past hundred years. The aumbry for the reserved sacrament on the high altar has gone. So too have the brass altar rails and the original pulpit. But we still have the same organ, built by Conacher's in Huddersfield. But it was rebuilt by Mr Rothwell in 1937 and by Nicholsons in 1986. In the last rebuild, five more banks of pipes were added to the main instrument and a new console.

We ourselves have put in 27 stained-glass windows. And we have brought in all the plaques which used to be in the porch. After the impact of two world wars, we have created a Remembrance Corner. One of the two Catholic Apostolic altars has been given to St Peter's Church in Auchmithie. Ours is now the only Catholic Apostolic Church in Scotland which is still functioning as a Church. For this alone, some of us think this Church should be A listed.

So what went wrong with the Catholic Apostolics? First of all,



Bishop Luscombe speaking at the conclusion of the concert

The 'wonder' of the shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem

Shepherds in first century Palestine would have been attuned to the wonders and ravages of nature: star-lit nights, cold and heat, storm and calm, and the unwelcome attention of predators, both animal and human. They would have been more aware than we of human dependency on the seasons, and more respectful than us of the precarious nature of existence. Fear, as well as appreciation, would have shaped their religious sensitivities.

The shepherds near Bethlehem may have been guarding sheep for the Jerusalem Temple, which used them as part of the sacrificial ritual of Judaism in those days. Yet the kind of work shepherds did and the hours they had to keep barred them from orthodox religious observance; they were regarded as uncouth and untrustworthy and were not allowed to give testimony in law courts.

It was typical of St Luke (the only New Testament writer to refer to the shepherds) to put them in the forefront of his narrative. Luke is the writer who favours the underdog: tax collectors, sinners, women, old and poor people and non-Jews all figure favourably in his account. Deliberately he sets before us shepherds as the first Christmas worshippers. They already knew how to *wonder*.

William of St Thierry wrote: "A man who has lost his sense of wonder is a man dead". The 19th Century scientist Michael Faraday wrote: "Let us consider... how wonderfully we stand upon this world. Here it is that we are born, bred and live, and yet we view these things with an almost entire absence of wonder..." This is no plea for anti-intellectual faith, but rather for the discovery of an extra dimension. Wonder is the prime ingredient of worship and we need

to recover it and use it. It takes practice.

William Blake encouraged us to look into the ordinary and see the extraordinary:

"To see a World in a Grain of Sand,
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower:
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour..."

The late Michael Mayne, Dean of Westminster wrote, "A sense of the sublime leads to a sense of awe, which is I suppose that combination of wonder and

fearfulness you may feel in the presence of what takes your breath away. It is not afraid in the sense of feeling scared, but rather an awestruck

sense of amazement that the ordinary is rather more extraordinary... it is not the rabbit out of the hat but the rabbit out of the rabbit that is so surprising..."

So, in the astonishing story of heaven-come-to-earth in Bethlehem, of divinity in a cowshed, it is *shepherds* who receive the revelation. Not priests, not presidents, not philosophers. "An angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified." For all they knew it might have been bad news. "But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord'."

The response of the shepherds was to go and see. Not to question or even to reason. The main constituent of their belief was already *wonder*. They were accustomed to marvelling, for they were surrounded by a world of marvels. So they went to look. And as they looked, they marvelled. Later, they were to return "glorifying and praising God for all they had seen and heard."

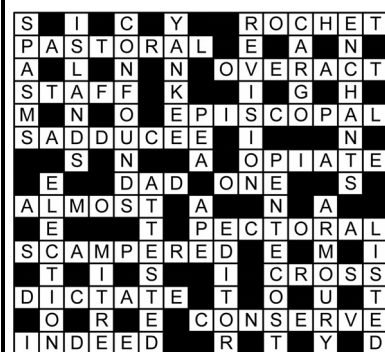


CROSSWORD WINNER

It was good to have a number of entries from people who have not sent one in previously – keep it up!

The winning answer drawn out at random came from John Hitchon of Inverbervie. Congratulations to him and you all have another chance this edition on page ?

The correct solution was:



Bridge to Hawaii

A man was riding his Harley along a California beach when suddenly the sky clouded above his head. In a booming voice, the Lord said, "Because you have tried to be faithful to me in all ways, I will grant you one wish."

The biker pulled over and said, "Build a bridge to Hawaii so I can ride over anytime I want."

The Lord said, "Your request is materialistic. Think of the enormous challenges for that kind of undertaking; the supports required to reach the bottom of the Pacific and the concrete and steel it would take! I can do it, but it is hard for me to justify your desire for worldly things. Take a little more time and think of something that could possibly help mankind."

The biker thought about it for a long time. Finally, he said, "Lord, I wish that I, and all men, could understand our wives. I want to know how she feels inside, what she's thinking, why she cries, what she means when she says nothing's wrong, and how I can make a woman truly happy."

The Lord replied, "Do you want 2 lanes or 4 on that bridge?"

THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Sometimes incidents of pre-judice against and persecution of Christian individuals and groups are given publicity in the news media. But around the world there is a constant stream of occurrences, not all of which are widely reported. These are just some of the events which merit attention, our prayers and perhaps our action.

Speak up for Noah

In December 2017 the One Million Voices of Hope petition will be presented to the UN and the UK government calling on them to ensure Noah and thousands of Christians and other minorities in Syria and Iraq have a home and a future, asking that Christians and other minorities enjoy:

- The right to equal citizenship
- Dignified living conditions
- A prominent role in reconciling and rebuilding society.

You can join over 400,000 people from 127 countries by signing the petition at:

<http://advocacy.oduk.org/ea-action/action?ea.client.id=77&ea.campaign.id=54115>

Vanishing Christians

"The Middle Eastern Christian population is on the verge of extinction, with its numbers plummeting from 20% a century ago to just 3-4% today." So writes Tamer Nashef, an independent researcher into the history of science, Western philosophy, and Christianity. If current demographic trends persist, he claims that it is likely that Christian communities will have vanished in the Middle East without trace by the end of the century. Read his article at:

<http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/comment/2017/06/19/the-plight-of-christians-in-the-middle-east>

Jordan

The Foundation for Relief and Reconciliation in the Middle East provide monthly food, shelter and medical care to 700 Iraqi Christian families in Jordan. This 'Voices of Iraq' project is an initiative to give displaced Iraqi Christians a voice.

Recently they delivered clothing coupons to over 500 children from all over Jordan. Buses brought them to the distribution point (the Syrian Orthodox Church in Amman) run by a partner of FRRME, Father Emmanuel, who sadly died recently. His compassion and altruism was widely known. With FRRME's support, he took in many Iraqi Christian refugees who had nowhere else to go. His funeral was attended by hundreds of people.

At the Assemblies of God Church, run by Pastor You and his family, FRRME gave vouchers to 115 refugee families which were used to buy fresh food. FRRME is also continuing support for a trauma and healing workshop for women who have experienced domestic violence.

Many more reports and examples of FRRME's work at:

<http://frrme.org/news/>

Africa

A UN survey that focused on key Islamic terror groups operating in Africa has concluded that 'religious ideas' are the primary motivation of recruitment. While factors such as low literacy, government bullying and poverty were factors in encouraging individuals to join violent extremist groups, 'ideological appeal is nonetheless compelling to those susceptible.' A Church leader from Nigeria – where Christians have been the targets of Islamist violence at the hands of Boko Haram since 2009 – told Global Christian News, 'What this means for Christians and the Church is that we do not fall into the 'politically correct' narrative that distorts and blames society and poverty for radical ideologies that give rise to terrorists.'

The Barnabas Fund works worldwide bringing hope to suffering Christians. Reports can be seen at:

<https://barnabasfund.org/news/>

Burma (Myanmar)

Persecution of the Rohingya people in Myanmar has recently been much in the news. These are

majority Muslim people with a minority who are Hindu. Open Doors report that over half a million Rohingya people have fled violence in Rakhine state, Myanmar. More than half are children. They are seeking refuge across the border in Bangladesh. Open Doors has delivered food aid to Rohingya families living in a makeshift refugee camp in Bangladesh. 1,000 families received rice, lentils, clothes, salt, oil and potatoes, as well as plastic sheets to construct shelters and protect from the heavy rains.

Although other agencies are active in bringing relief to these displaced people, you can read of the work of Open Doors at:

<https://www.opendoorsuk.org/news/>

But the Rohingya is not the only group who is persecuted in Myanmar; Christian minorities are as well. Ethnic Kachin, Chin and Naga also endure suffering. Today the majority of Chin are Christians. Kachin people comprise a percentage of Christians: numbers vary between one third and two thirds. The vast majority of Naga people identify themselves as Christians. But Christians are seen as the expression of a foreign religion, outside of the nationalist view and for years the military regime has applied stringent discriminatory measures.

More at:

<http://www.asianews.it/news-en/>

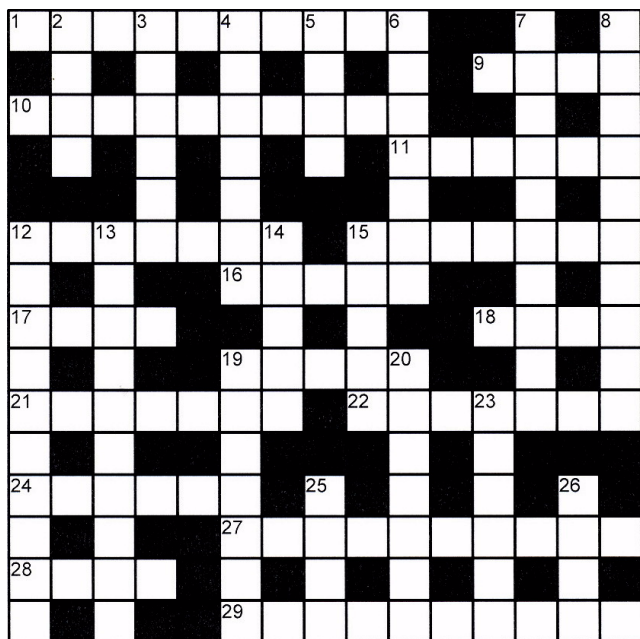
Egypt

A 45-year-old Coptic priest was hacked to death in Cairo in October and another priest injured. This is part of a string of attacks on Copts earlier this year, notably when twin bombings killed 49 worshippers at Palm Sunday services in Cairo and when 28 Christians were slaughtered at Minya, 150 miles south of Cairo.

Coptic Bishop Angaelos said, "Coptic Christians who have endured injustice, persecution, and loss of life for centuries without retaliation, repeatedly forgiving unconditionally, deserve to live with respect and dignity in their indigenous homeland."

CRYPTIC PRIZE CROSSWORD

Another chance to exercise those gray cells. Ten answers can be found in the words of the carol 'The First Nowell'. Send your entries to the editor at the address on the back page by Friday, 2 March.



CLUES ACROSS:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 Will putting a fig in my mum preserve her? (10) | 16 Stir loudly to gain priority(5) |
| 9 Keen to bend (4) | 17 Find the remainder here stored (4) |
| 10 Acquire a glove by a vehicle at the back of the train (10) | 18 Reject a veteran for nothing (4) |
| 11 Agreement reached by the Air Corps using a rope (6) | 19 Sounds as if the creature is barred (6) |
| 12 A thing of beauty in an unmeasured range is frugal (7) | 21 This gin increases perception (7) |
| 15 Nice tan goes back historically (7) | 22 They're absent from a trust up north (7) |
| | 24 With a weathercock he points to the ultimate destination (6) |

- | | |
|--|--|
| 27 Money set aside for a siege (10) | 8 It's no diner for dramatic performances (10) |
| 28 Discover one in an idea changer (4) | 12 It's shattering to get in line (10) |
| 29 Is it flamboyant to make the grass shine? (10)) | 13 Can siestas provide help? (10) |

CLUES DOWN:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 2 State high French in another land (4) | 14 This thing is not in the sunshine (5) |
| 3 I am gray in Hungary (6) | 15 Benefit from inviting the Sunday School to tea (5) |
| 4 The original cover-up? (7) | 19 A glass of gin broken against a lower limb is bright (7) |
| 5 Surely Cain wasn't from this race (4) | 20 PS lift up one's admiration (7) |
| 6 Tearing a Welsh man (7) | 23 Pilot flew Ma to Iran (6) |
| 7 Didn't anticipate that there was no fee given to the nurse (10) | 25 Wander about in a cricket match (4) |
| | 26 They colour the skin (4) |

Name

Address.....

Trafalgar Square's very special Christmas Tree

This year, as every year for the past 70, a magnificent Norwegian spruce will stand proudly in Trafalgar Square in London. It is seen as a symbol of freedom and a token of friendship.

This huge – it is generally more than 20 metres tall – annual gift from the people of Norway has been sent every year since 1947. It is Norway's way of thanking Britain for standing by them during the dark days of the Second World War. For when the Nazis invaded Norway in 1940, King Haakon VII fled to the UK. The British enabled him to set up a Norwegian government in exile in London, where he could send radio messages back to his occupied homeland.

The tree is known to Norwegian foresters as 'the queen of the forest', and

each year only the very best is chosen to grace Trafalgar Square. Sometimes the trees are hand-picked years in advance. Many of them are very old, which means they were quietly growing deep in a Norwegian forest during the dark days of Nazi occupation and death.

Many years ago, a tree in another occupied land played a crucial role when a Gift to the whole world was put on display. He was not lit up for a holiday season, but instead became the Light of the world. In December we remember His birth, and look ahead to His amazing gift to us of forgiveness and friendship with God – through His death on a tree.

Jesus is the reason for Christmas, and He is for life, not just for Christmas.



Health and Safety at Christmas!

The Rocking Song

Little Jesus, sweetly sleep, do not stir;
We will lend a coat of fur,
We will rock you, rock you, rock you,
We will rock you, rock you, rock you:

Fur is no longer appropriate wear for small infants, both due to risk of allergy to animal fur, and for ethical reasons. Therefore faux fur, a nice cellular blanket or perhaps micro-fleece material should be considered a suitable alternative.

Please note, only persons who have been subject to a Criminal Records Bureau check and have enhanced clearance will be permitted to rock baby Jesus. Persons must carry their CRB disclosure with them at all times and be prepared to provide three forms of identification before rocking commences.

We Three Kings

We three kings of Orient are;
Bearing gifts we traverse afar
Field and fountain, moor and mountain,
Following yonder star.

Whilst the gift of gold is still considered acceptable – as it may be redeemed at a later date through such organisations as 'cash for gold' etc., gifts of frankincense and myrrh are not appropriate due to the potential risk of oils and fragrances causing allergic reactions. A suggested gift alternative would be to make a donation to a worthy cause in the recipient's name or perhaps give a gift voucher.

We would not advise that the traversing kings rely on navigation by stars in order to reach their destinations and suggest the use of RAC routefinder or satellite navigation which will provide the quickest route and advice regarding fuel consumption. Please note as per the guidelines from the RSPCA for Mr Donkey, the camels carrying the three kings of Orient will require regular food and rest breaks. Facemasks for the three kings are also advisable due to the likelihood of dust from the camels hooves.

Away in a Manger

Away in a Manger,
No Crib for a bed.

Call Social Services without delay!



CHURCH ARMY BUS



The Centre of Mission now has a mission bus. It is a blue double decker fitted out as a café, and has a Play Station and TV & DVD on board. The bus is to be used for work with the homeless in Dundee but is available for outreach across the diocese.

We are looking for volunteers to help man the bus, run the café if you are interested please contact Stuart on <sbudden983@gmail.com>.

Scottish Episcopal Church Mission Association (LINKS)

The Diocesan SECMA group met on Wednesday, 11 October at St Luke's Church in Downfield, Dundee for a Musical Afternoon. About 25 people enjoyed an afternoon listening to Dee'Ukes, a ukelele group of 8 people, on this occasion. They played and sang a variety of tunes from the past 50 years, with the audience joining in to several of them. Over a cup of tea, the Bring & Buy stall raised over £70 for Mission Funds.

The Diocesan Committee will meet in early December to plan the activities for 2018. There will probably be a lunch and speaker in January or early February, but Rosemary Eddy (01382-667119), the Diocesan Correspondent will keep churches informed. Watch the Brechin Bulletin for details.

Judy Robinson

Christmas gifts

Grandfather was talking to his grand-daughter, "When I was a child all we got for Christmas was an apple and an orange." The little girl clapped her hands in joy. "Brilliant! I'd love a new computer and a mobile!"

The Feast of Saint Nicholas

Children in their innocence and enthusiasm, capture the mystery and the excitement Christmas. It is the theme of The Feast of St Nicholas by Jan Steen who was born in Leyden in 1626, the son of a Roman Catholic brewer. Though continuing his work as a brewer and innkeeper he had a great output of paintings until to his death in 1679.

He excelled in telling a story through his canvases, and this painting is one of six he produced on the popular Dutch feast of St Nicholas (Sinterklaas in Dutch). It is celebrated on 6 December and the traditions have changed little over the years.



During the night before, St Nicholas rides across the rooftops on his white horse with his faithful servant, dropping gifts and sweets down the chimneys into waiting shoes. The horse enjoys the carrots and hay left out in each household. If some children have not been good, then a beating with a bunch of birch twigs (a *roe*) awaits them in their shoes when they wake up the following day.

Though a homely scene the painting dating from 1663 is filled with details giving meaning to what is going on and some of Steen's own children feature in it, but whether or not their reactions reflect their behaviour during the year is not clear.

We don't know when most children stop believing that Sinterklaas actually rides over the rooftops on a dark and stormy December night dispensing presents

through the chimney. But the myth is perpetuated for their younger siblings. To the right of the painting you can see a boy carrying his baby sister, who is holding a gingerbread representation of Sinterklaas, while his awed little brother is standing by. The older boy is pointing to where the presents came from.

In the days leading up to Sinterklaas, children put their shoes in front of the fireplace at night in the hope of finding something nice to eat in the morning, such as a sugar mouse or a handful of ginger biscuits. In the painting a laughing girl is holding up a shoe but clearly something has gone terribly wrong for the owner, who is crying his eyes out.

Sinterklaas is very moralistic in origin. 'If you are good you get sweets, if not a good thrashing' goes a song. Evidently the crying boy (actually Steen's son Thadeus) has been naughty and has found a *roe* in his shoe and he doesn't like it. His grandmother, on the right, beckons him. Perhaps Sinterklaas has left something for him after all, hidden behind the curtain.

The little boy (Steen's son Cornelis) in the centre of the painting is looking straight at us as he points to the shoe. He is probably there to highlight the importance of being good and the consequences of being bad. As so often with Steen, his depiction is so jolly and good-humoured you feel you don't have to take too much notice. The stick this boy is holding is a 'kolfstok', (something like a hockey stick: the ball is at the mother's feet. This is for a game played in winter when ice covers the canals and fields.

Food is important in any celebration and the basket to the left in front is stuffed with all sorts of goodies: special bread and cakes, ginger nuts and gingerbread, nuts and apples. Particularly impressive is the large, richly decorated diamond-shaped loaf that leans against the chair. This sweet white bread was traditionally enjoyed at the Feast of St Nicholas, as well as at Christmas, and on the New Year's day.

The little girl (Steen's daughter Catharina) has obviously been very good: she is carrying her doll and a bucketful of gifts very contentedly and she's not about to share no matter how playfully her mother asks her. And her apron is bulging full of sweets. She is holding the figure of St John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ, and so thoughts go from this family to the Holy Family. This is reflected in the person of the father sitting quietly surveying the scene and perhaps musing on his own childhood.

In the 18th century, when Dutch migrants went to America, they took their traditions with them and so the well-loved Sinterklaas eventually developed into the figure known today as Santa Claus.

The next issue of **Grapevine** will be coming out for 25 March 2018.

All articles, letters, comments should be with the Editor by 5 March 2018.

Preferably articles should be no longer than 500 words.

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