



St. Matthew's Church
Perth

e- Newsletter No.31

4th December 2020



“Jesus is coming”

Look busy!

I know it sounds cynical, maybe funny, but 'busy' and 'Christmas' are synonymous in many people's minds. Not this time, not this time. For many there is no reason to 'look busy' because there are no jobs which mean squeezing Christmas into a busy schedule. For many there is little money to 'look busy' with. For once the rich nations are having to face up to Christmas in a way that is normal for those who are poor. And it hurts. So, so much, it hurts.

What is a normal Christmas? Too much of lots: food, drink, family, friends, gifts, exhaustion, anger, disappointment.

“Just God, simply Christmas” is the strap-line or motto of Alternativity, a group of which I am a trustee. The aim of Alternativity is to take the pressure of Christmas off from those who are the poorest and weakest and most harassed, often women, who are the most marginalised. To think how we can 'do' Christmas differently. To 'do' Christmas in a way that does not cost the earth.

The GOOD NEWS of Christmas is a narrative of freedom and interdependency and love. Of wanting what is best for each other.

This Christmas I pray for you peace, tranquillity and rest.

Blessings on you and yours and may 2021 be all we can hope for.

In Christ's name.

Rev. Barbara Quigley



PRAYER

Loving God, in this year, when handshakes and hugs have been discouraged, embrace us with your love and wrap us in your care, so that we may know that we are never alone.

We think of those for whom being alone brings pain rather than peace. We pray for those who wait – for the card, the phone call, the e-mail, text or letter, to remind them that they are not forgotten. May we be your agents, bringing hope and reassurance to those who lack them.

We pray for those who mourn the loss of a loved one, who feel keenly the pain of separation, especially at this time of year. May memories of good times shared in the past comfort and sustain them.

We pray for those who, surrounded by people, still feel a sense of disconnection and experience loneliness in a crowd. May we be sensitive to where people are and how they are feeling in these situations.

We pray for refugee and asylum-seeker, far from their own land and culture, unsure of the future. Bless the efforts of agencies and individuals who reach out to offer welcome, friendship and practical help to the stranger in our midst.

Lord Jesus, let us learn from you, and know that, no matter what, we are never alone, and that nothing can separate us from the love of God; help us to trust in you and recover our sense of self-worth, reaching out to others to show your love to them.

Amen.

COFFEE AND CHAT on Zoom

On Mondays at 11am – 11.45am

Meeting ID: 583 638 8728

Please Note: Meeting ID Mon 7th December only:

824 5252 0538

MEDITATIONS on Zoom

On Wednesdays at 9am

Meeting ID: 583 638 8728

Sunday and Christmas Services.

To reserve your place please use the following link to

Eventbrite:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/sunday-worship-tickets-127686837769> OR if you do not use the

internet Phone Beverly, our Facilities and Outreach Manager, on 01738 259961 and leave a message with your phone number.

CHRISTMAS SERVICES

You are invited to join us at our Christmas services on:

Sunday 6 December @ 11am "Blue Christmas"

Sunday 13 December @ 11am Communion (with Retiral Collection for "Compassionate Christmas"- see article)

Sunday 20 December @ 9.30am and 11am

Thursday 24 December @ 4pm and 7pm

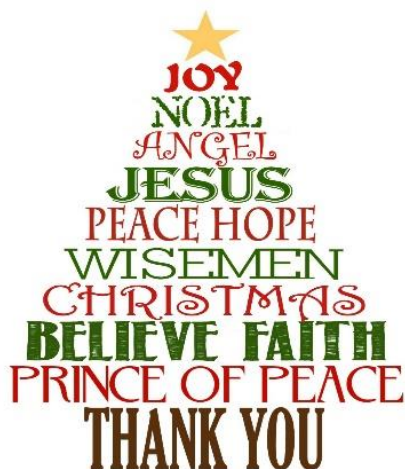
Friday 25 December @10.30am

All places should be booked, either at church the previous week, or through the Eventbrite link.(see box) for track and Trace purposes.

Doors open 30 minutes before service.

As usual a mask to be worn at all times.

We look forward to welcoming you!



EARLY MORNING ADVENT WORSHIP IN ST MATTHEW'S

"A Play, a Pie and a Pint" was an award-winning initiative by theatre groups in Scotland to interest people in drama by offering lunchtime theatre with all three ingredients.

St Matthew's will have its own Advent version in the week before Christmas, "A Prayer, a Poem and a Pomegranate" - a series of four early morning services in the sanctuary (9am), each lasting about twenty minutes.

It's a wonderful opportunity, in the run-up to Christmas, to explore some of the key themes of this Advent season; to prepare our hearts and minds for the birth of the Christ-Child.

*Ewen Gilchrist, formerly minister at St. Matthew's - now retired but occasionally allowed out to play - will lead the services. The dates are **Monday to Thursday, Dec 21st-24th at 9am in the Sanctuary.***

How, you might wonder, does a pomegranate fit into all this? Come along and find out!

Editor's note: Please e-mail Fiona Bruce on FMBruce6@googlemail.com or phone on 01738 628154 if you wish to attend and on which dates.

Message from Rt Revd Dr W Martin Fair - Moderator of the Church of Scotland (edited)

Dear Friends,
There will be all sorts of things on your minds and on your to-do lists right now and more of it coming, no doubt.

1) In the midst of all of that, might I remind you that there's an offer from me of a generic digital service that might suitably be used on **Sunday 27 December** or **Sunday 3 January**.

2)) Might I also mention the **'Scented Lament' project** to you. You've probably read about it on the Church of Scotland website or social media platforms and you can find all the details here: <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news-and-events/news/2020/Moderator-invites-contributions-to-end-of-year-art-installation>

Note from Editor: Please also see the separate article on the "Scented Lament (Rosemary) Project in our Newsletter.

3) Finally, we've been glad that that BBC Scotland has been continuing with 'The Service', and a second series of 'Reflections from the Quay' will run from Advent to Easter. I'm humbled to have been asked to preach at **'The Service'** that will go out from **St Giles' Cathedral on Christmas Day**. I mention this in case there will be people who are not able to attend a Christmas Day service - whether because there isn't one happening locally or through lack of digital access.

Let me finish by assuring you of my ongoing prayers for you and for your congregations. In what will be a very different Christmas season - almost unthinkable that we won't be raising the roof with 'O come, all ye faithful' - my prayer is that, nonetheless, the joy and peace of the season will be known to you and to the people of our communities.

He came down that we might have love.
He came down that we might have peace.
He came down that we might have joy.



SCENTED LAMENT (ROSEMARY) PROJECT

Rev Peter Gardner is the Kirk's pioneer minister to the visual arts communities of Glasgow and works in collaboration with his wife Heidi, as installation artists Gardner & Gardner.

Rosemary



"In August, the idea came to us to create an installation which would help us all reflect on what we have gone through this year," Peter said.

"For all of us, 2020 will be ingrained in our minds as the year of the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting struggles of the lockdown months. We plan to create a temporary installation called **'Scented Lament'** that will be made using the **aromatic herb rosemary**, traditionally associated with remembering and invite folk in parishes throughout Scotland to send us **lengths of rosemary (approximately 15-20cm)**, either cut from their garden or bought for cooking. We will attach all the rosemary to a 180cm diameter plywood ring, creating a rosemary wreath.

"We see the cutting, the posting and the bringing together of the rosemary as acts of remembering pandemic griefs and losses and naming them in God's presence.

"Made for the turn of the year, this installation will symbolise our coming together as a heartsore community. It is intended as a collective minding, a visual expression of our souls' unspoken laments. It will allow us to look back over the year when Covid-19 changed everything, inviting us to call to mind the sorrow of lives lost, sacrifices made and so many expectations dashed.

"It will be temporarily exhibited in a number of sites in Glasgow, where 'Scented Lament' will surprise with the unexpected fragrance of rosemary.

"With quietness and stillness, it will offer a public declaration of collected, personal griefs and losses, while looking ahead to a time when lament will turn to shalom..."

We would ask that the cut sprig of rosemary is sealed inside a sandwich bag, then placed in an envelope and posted to:

**Gardner & Gardner
Studio 118
The Briggait
141 Bridgegate
Glasgow G1 5HZ**

The rosemary should be posted around Thursday 10 December, so that it will arrive at the Gardner & Gardner studio between Monday 14 December and Friday 18 December, as fresh as possible.

VACANCY UPDATE

As Covid-19 prevented us holding our Annual Stated Meeting at the end of March, the Virtual General Assembly of the Church of Scotland agreed an alternative process which we are now about to start. As previously intimated, we need to send out 2 mailings to our "worshipping congregation" to advise:

1. We are being given the right to call a Minister for a 5-year reviewable term
2. Subject to our engaging in discussion with the Presbytery Task Group on the long-term ministry needs of the Presbytery in the City.

The first letter you will receive (around mid-December) advises you of this and will be accompanied by a "Frequently Asked Questions" Form. If you have any other questions, please contact me.

If you have no questions you need do nothing.

The **second letter** (sent out in early January 2021) will answer any questions which have been asked and **will contain a voting slip which you should return.**

Hopefully we will then be able to move forward to the next step of the process!

Fiona Bruce

Session Clerk FMBruce6@googlemail.com

Bright Hope For Tomorrow

Advent began on Sunday 29 November running until Thursday 24 December. This year, people from across the Church of Scotland are joining together to look forward to '**Bright Hope For Tomorrow**' through the church's **Advent Calendar**. You can sign up for this through the Church of Scotland webpage.

Lorna Morrison

Guild President

Charity Stamp Collection 2020

With Christmas approaching and all these lovely cards dropping through your letterboxes, can I ask you to save the stamps off the envelopes. Trim them with scissors if possible, to about 0.5cm (¼ inch) around each stamp, do not soak them off the paper.

We love interesting overseas stamps as they are worth more than our boring 1st and 2nd class stamps in the UK. If you can separate your UK stamps from the foreign stamps that would also be helpful. The collection box for stamps is in the café area of the church.

Thank you for your help in supporting this project.

Lorna Morrison

ADVENT BAGS

We have missed seeing young folk round our church these days. We usually see all of our uniformed organisations at Armistice but unfortunately, due to Covid restrictions, they could not be there.

To let them know that we are still here and are thinking of them in this Advent Season we gave each of the under 12's (totalling about 80 young folk) -

**Brownies,
Rainbows,
Cubs and
Beavers-** a pack with **4 advent candles and a small angel**



with a note explaining the symbolic meanings of each candle- Hope, Joy, Love and Peace.

These bags were all put together by our Artist-not-in-residence, Viv McGregor, and Jean Young and we wish all the young folk and their Leaders a peaceful, happy Christmas and New Year.

GUILD NEWS

Virtual Christmas Big Sing

This **Friday 4 December at 3pm**, the Guild's 'virtual' Christmas Big Sing will be going live on the main **Church of Scotland website**

and on the Facebook page. The event will include carols, readings and a reflection from the Moderator, Rt Rev Dr Martin Fair. National Convener, Mabel Wallace, will also lead us in prayer.

Whilst it is not the same as meeting in person, we hope that you will be able to join us from the comfort of your own home and sing your hearts out to some well-known carols.

This comes a little late for accessing it live, but I am sure it will be available on the CofS Facebook and web site.



Janet's Jottings



This Christmas

In a few days we will start our Advent journey towards Christmas. Normally a time of anticipation, exploration, reflection and the promise of hope to come. However, there's no doubt that for many of us this Christmas is definitely going to be different.

Is that necessarily a bad thing?

We are all so used to years of tradition hyped up by commercialism that Christmas has to be more or less the same every year – for the majority of the population this usually means – a Christmas tree, maybe a visit to the watchnight service, presents, turkey, (with or without the sprouts!), crackers, sweating over a hot stove to produce a table groaning with food, party games, tolerating extra family (or not!) or other guests in the house, family squabbles and probably for many - a bout of indigestion!

Why is it that we have to have everything the same every year?

Some people never get the choice of how they celebrate their Christmas, such as nurses and carers or emergency workers whose shifts fall on Christmas day. Others such as political prisoners, who might be locked up in jail for speaking their mind; or for having a faith in the first place.

Homeless people curled up in a shop doorway or sleeping on a park bench. Hostages like John McCarthy, Brian Keenan, Terry Waite and many other hostages who missed many Christmases away from family and friends. Emergency Aid workers in far off parts of the world trying to feed the hungry and hold the peace between warring factions.

It seems that Christmas is not always a 'one size fits all' celebration and yet this year in particular because of the virus people are feeling quite indignant that they may be denied their 'usual Christmas'

You have probably heard people saying, if you haven't said it yourself, I know I have certainly said it – It would be nice if we had the 'Christ' back in Christmas.

I was pondering about this statement and what it actually means, when it occurred to me that Yes, we should be thinking about putting the Christ back into Christmas. However, I once read that someone said that instead of celebrating Christmas, which is one day, we should put the Christ back into being a Christian ALL year round!

All year round, as Christ taught us, we should be:- Reaching out to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, forgive the guilty, welcome the stranger, show compassion to the unwanted child, befriend the lonely, tend to the ill, love our enemies and most importantly 'remove the plank' from our own eyes before next Christmas!

The very first Christmas only happened because God made it happen. It was a low-key event, down market, no tinsel, decoration, sparkling lights or an abundance of festive food. It was held in the most unexpected of places and witnessed by the most unexpected of people. As Anne said last Sunday the shepherds were not highly respected, often seen as ritually unclean and wouldn't be welcome at a feast.

They came to meet and worship the son of God, they came as they were, in their working, probably smelly, clothes and shared what little they had. They were welcomed and appreciated by Mary and Joseph.

Can you imagine if that scene happened in 2020? The shepherds wouldn't have got through the door without a liberal squirt of sanitiser and a mask and the 3 wise men would have to leave their track and trace details. I can just see the raised eyebrows when they announced they followed a star from somewhere in the East!

So whatever happens this year or in the future may I suggest that Christmas (the Christ mass) should be celebrated in our hearts and that it is a time of renewal for us to put Christ back into us being Christians all year round.

The UNEXPECTED

This is a column when different readers will tell us something unexpected about themselves. This week Rev. Ewen Gilchrist, our former minister, tells us part of his story.

I'm not sure that I have anything to share which is "unexpected" to the good souls of St. Matthew's who endured/tholed/survived (delete as appropriate) my sincere if flawed attempts over eighteen years to share the mystery and the grace of our Gospel!

Still, there is this idea that if you're a minister, you've surely always lived in an ultra-religious environment. You know, angels for breakfast, miracles for tea and Jesus' stories every supper time. Well, it wasn't quite like that!

I grew up in the West of Scotland, blessed with a Protestant father and a Catholic mother who, having lived through the anti-Catholic riots in Edinburgh in the 1930s, knew enough about the nature of God not to define the Almighty as proddy or pape.

I did the Sunday school thing, sometimes spent half my "collection" in the sweetie shop on the way to church (no thunderbolting so far) and for a few years went along to Crusaders, a slightly muscular Christian group for boys. Even better than the Gospel, they offered weekend football on a regular basis. Who was I to question this wonderful mix of theology and pragmatism!

Later teenage years were freelance. I blundered through school and wasted a year doing nothing at college. Then, just as I was about to tumble, against all odds, into journalism, something no less unexpected happened. I was out one day with my big brother. He's almost five years older than me and had declared me fit, at last, to be seen with him in public.

We were at his friend's house, sitting in a bedroom, flicking through LPs. These were ye ancient days of vinyl, double albums, the weekly wisdom of the NME and magnificently illustrated album covers with sleeve notes.

Someone I had never heard of before – an America singer called



Melanie – was singing "Lay Down (Candles in the Rain)". I still don't know exactly how or what or why, but I think something in the fragile passion of her voice arrested my attention. That frail, reedy voice was backed by a gospel choir and they were singing, fervently, about love, peace and justice. All the big stuff.

Her voice, pushed to its very limits, and urged on by the rolling waves of the Edwin Hawkins Singers,



smashed on the barely explored shoreline of my consciousness. Love, peace and justice – that sounded pretty good to me. But what, I found myself asking, what if it's just a cosy mantra of warm, fluffy thoughts. I mean, if I was a 10th century Viking happily terrorising my way across Europe I might well think that rape, pillage and plunder was an equally attractive mantra.

As far as I can recall – it's a while ago! - that's what I was thinking as the song crashed in waves on the distant shores of my slowly waking soul. Love, peace and justice. Or rape, pillage and plunder. It was obvious to me which mantra was "better" but how could I know if it was true, absolutely true. Not culturally preferable; not just a "nice idea"; not just legally sound.

I wanted to know, needed to know, whether love, peace and justice was in fact the way the world is meant to be; not some utopian ideal but actually the way things are meant to be.

People talk about everything being relative; that folk from different cultures and different races and different religions have to listen to each other, respect each other's sometimes very different perspectives. I get all that but I also knew it wasn't enough. Is there anything, I found myself asking, that is absolutely rock

solid true and unchanging in this wonderful, tragic, complicated thing which is life? I was eighteen or nineteen, waking up, stirring, asking questions I couldn't have asked before.

And so, in search of an answer, one Sunday evening I walked into a church in Milngavie (not the kirk of my long-ago Sunday school days), sat in the back pew and listened attentively to everything that was preached, prayed, read and sung. I was on a serious quest. I was looking for answers.

The service came and the service went. I heard no answers. As I was about to leave someone came up to me, about my age, said hello and invited me to meet some of her friends. They stuck around after the service and did "God stuff", whatever that was. And that's how it all began. I went to a service looking for some sort of intellectual answer to the meaning of life, and instead I bumped into Jesus saying "come and meet my friends".

Oh, the answers were to come (and hundreds more questions!) in the years that followed but – looking back – I find it fascinating that the door that first opened before me - in my search for answers, purpose and meaning - was warm, unconditional fellowship rather than rigorous intellectual clarity.

Gathered into that fellowship, over several years, I was able to discover and embrace the truth that love, justice and peace is so, so much more than a cosy mantra – it is nothing less than God's direction for how humans should live. Humans of every race, creed and culture. Love, justice and peace is what this whole thing is about – and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus I gradually saw that mantra as the very core of the universe.

And it all began in my brother's friend's bedroom, listening to rock music that many a parent of the day would surely have dismissed with a pleading or thunderous "turn that noise down!" Which just proves, I guess, how wonderful and unexpected are the ways of the Holy Spirit. God makes holy mischief!

By the way, if you're so inclined, you can watch (in glorious, grainy black and white!) Melanie and the Edwin Hawkins Singers performing this song on Dutch television. It's on YouTube. Just so you know I haven't made any of this up! – *Ewen Gilchrist*

An Update from Riverside Explorers who meet in St Matthew's Church

Here is a brief update on what the Explorers have been doing over the last few weeks, such as training expeditions for bronze and silver Duke of Edinburgh's awards with the actual expeditions 13-15th November. We are fortunate to be able to carry out DofE expeditions at this point in time but a few rules have changed as a result of Covid-19. At the moment, the Scout Association is not allowing residential activities which means we are not allowed to wild camp on the expedition. Instead each participant is required to camp at home in their own garden and full equipment should be carried each day as though it was a normal expedition.

We have also been doing maintenance work on Kinnoull Hill and have received very appreciative comments from Kinnoull Hill user group.



CROSSREACH CALENDARS

I have received an e-mail from **Mary Wright** from St Leonard's in the Fields thanking us for supporting the good work of Crossreach by selling calendars – we raised £50 ourselves so thanks in turn to those who supported this.

Mary is pleased to report that, together with their neighbouring congregations, they have been able to send a cheque to Crossreach for £250.00

Fiona Bruce

The Retiral Collection following the Communion Service on Sunday 13 December will be in aid of Compassionate Christmas, a very worthwhile cause.



Giraffe is a well-established social enterprise and charity that supports young people with mental ill health, learning disabilities and autism in our training kitchen and café on South Street.

Since April, we have had to adjust our services to be able to offer online training and outdoor activities to reduce loneliness and isolation for our young people.



We know that the need is still great over Christmas, and wanted to end the year on a high note with a **Compassionate Christmas**. This December we have teamed up with local businesses and our partner network with a simple

aim – to give **500 people in need** a great Christmas.

This simple aim comes with a simple target – we **plan to raise £10,000** to make this happen! Each person will receive a **Christmas parcel** containing:

- A full 3 course Christmas dinner prepared by Giraffe
 - A selection of Perthshire’s finest food and drink products -sourced from local producers/wholesalers/retailers.
- We are working closely with Perth & Kinross Foodbank, Letham4All, TullochNet, the Salvation Army, Perth Centre Support, Caledonia Housing, Crieff Community Connections and others to distribute the meals to those who are vulnerable.

Any donations would be gratefully received -for example just £20 provides a meal for one person.

Editor’s Note: If you are not able to donate following our St Matthew’s Communion Service there is a poster attached with a QR code that

can be printed out and scanned with a mobile phone camera to take you directly to the donation link.Or you can donate via this link - [TotalGiving™ - Compassionate Christmas - Giraffe and Compassionate Christmas - Fundraising Page](#)



Handel’s Messiah

Handel’s Messiah is being performed by Dunedin Consort at Perth Concert Hall “As Live” via VIMEO from 7pm on 23rd December 2020. Tickets can be booked via Perth Concert Hall website.

Christmas Newsletter contributions by Monday 14th December please.

Newsletter contributions to FMBruce6@googlemail.com