

CHURCH NEWS

First Hollywood Presbyterian Church

Christmas 2021



Records and Notices



Deaths:

He heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds Psalm 147:3

30th September 2021

Helen Sullivan

3rd October 2021

Gladys Stacey

Any contributions to the Church News are welcome at any time.

*Please forward to
office@firsthollywood.co.uk or
Tel 90425035*

Please plan to join us for our Christmas celebrations.

For all our service details please check our website and FaceBook page or contact the office on Tel: 02890 425035.

www.firsthollywood.co.uk



*Cover Image: Mark Shields,
Hollywood Hills in Winter*

*Back Page Image: Zach Woods,
Mount Stewart*

HELLO AND WELCOME

Hello, welcome and season's greetings! Perhaps I should have submitted a new profile pic of me, sporting a 'Christmas jumper' for this issue?! Love them or loathe them, you just can't avoid them - garish festive knitwear has been assaulting the eyes of unsuspecting shoppers at your local supermarket, since 1st November, aided and abetted by Christmas songs, wriggling their way into defenceless ears. Not that I'm theologically



Rev. Stuart McCrea

opposed to Christmas jumpers (or songs, as you will read later in this magazine).

In our consumer culture today, preparations for Christmas begin very early - maybe too early for our liking. It's like the start of a downhill sleigh ride from November onward. It starts

quite slowly, but quickly builds up more and more speed as we rush towards Christmas...and we get caught up in it...frantically grabbing decorations, gifts and food and all sorts of stuff we think we need to make this a great Christmas...

Until finally we crash the sleigh into Christmas Day, in a heap of presents and food...and sometimes I think many people are just too glad to get it over with



and get back to whatever normality looks like. I'm sure there are many other people who take a step back from it all and wonder...what is this really all about? As the Church, it's really important that we don't lose the real meaning, among the lights, wrapping paper and mince pies.

The Church tradition of Advent, has been helping people prepare and focus on the real meaning of Christmas for centuries. In the weeks leading up to Christmas, we will be taking time, in and around church, to reflect on the themes of Advent - to help lead us on a journey of hope, peace, joy and love, which keeps our focus on Jesus and the unfolding story of God's salvation plan.

There may be twinkly lights and even Christmas jumpers - but through scriptures, prayers, songs and reflections, we will journey together into the true wonder of it all. I really hope that you will join us for that journey - in person, or online. In the meantime, I pray you are blessed by the distinctly Seasonal flavour of this magazine.



○ come, ○ come, Emmanuel!

Grace and peace to you
Stuart

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Harvest Sunday 10th October 2021

We celebrated our annual Harvest Service on Sunday 10th October. The church was beautifully decorated with cut flowers which were taken to various members of the congregation on Monday 11th October. The large collection of fresh food and grocery items that were donated were delivered to StoreHouse on Monday afternoon, thankfully Scott Burnside had a trailer, otherwise it would have taken two trips to Bangor to deliver all the items.



OPERATION CHRISTMAS CHILD



Through Operation Christmas Child, Samaritan's Purse is sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with millions of boys and girls in more than 100 countries each year. Many of these children have never before received a present or heard the true meaning of Christmas - until they open a gift-filled shoebox from a person like you. Some people are not able to give the £5 per shoebox we request for shipping and related costs. By adopting a shoebox, you can partner with them to deliver the Gospel and help "bring salvation to the ends of the earth" (Acts 13:47, ESV).

Thank you everyone who has contributed to this valuable cause, First Hollywood sent 82 shoeboxes to Samaritan's Purse and a further 23 shoeboxes to Blythswood in November.



LUNCHEON CLUB RESTARTED



Thursday 28th October saw the return of the first Luncheon Club at First Holywood since February 2020, with sixteen members enjoying food and friendship once more. The only change is that members must register to attend as numbers are limited to seventeen due to the room size with Covid restrictions. It was lovely to see familiar faces once more and a return of some normality. A big thank you to the hospitality team for organising its return to our schedule and for their continued work to provide a wonderful lunch and social interaction for our members each month.



General Assembly

of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland

Tuesday
5 October 2021

Presbyterian

The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) took place over three days at the start of October. While the mere mention of the General Assembly may have a soporific effect on some, what happens at the Assembly really does matter for the life of the Church. The decisions taken there can and do

have significant impacts on congregations right across this island.

This year, Rev. Stuart McCrea, Anne White and myself attended the Assembly as representatives of First Holywood. It was quite a different experience from the last Assembly I attended in 2019. Fewer people were at the Assembly than usual, as, due to Covid, only voting members were allowed to attend. This had the unfortunate impact of removing the under thirty representatives, who in 2019 made some great speeches, as well as the Irish mission workers and deaconesses. It is safe to say that I was at the young end of the spectrum. The General Assembly as a whole, like our church, needs to have representatives from different generations. A blend of voices and perspectives can often generate greater insight. I hope we will have the under 30s back again next year. However, one other positive difference was that the Assembly was more respectful than it was two years ago. I didn't hear any heckling; speakers were heard with courtesy. I hope this can be maintained in future years.

This isn't to say that strong opinions weren't expressed on a variety of issues throughout the three days of the Assembly. Contrary to some portrayals of the PCI, there is a considerable amount of diversity in the Church and this was on display during the debates on a host of issues including Covid vaccines, mission in Ireland, the role of the Church in public life, transgenderism and education.

My overall assessment as I left the Assembly was a mixed one. On the one hand, it was evident that a lot of good work is going on in PCI. There are people coming to faith; there is growth in discipleship; the church is still having an impact in public life and in education. God continues to use PCI Churches and members for his purposes on this island. The report on the Council for congregational life and witness, which is the part of the church our members Graeme Thompson and Ruth Bromley work under, was encouraging with the staff being praised. Some of the speeches of younger ministers at the Assembly were impressive and showed the talent and vitality that is there. On the other hand, there is clear evidence as well of decline in many parts of PCI. I should stress that decline is far from uniform across the denomination but nonetheless this is a reality facing the Church as a whole. The news of staff redundancies at Church House points to the reality that the church as a whole



is shrinking and that some very hard decisions are coming down the tracks for the church in the medium to long term.

One of the best speeches at the Assembly was from a minister in a double charge in the Republic, where one of the churches he ministers to was being dissolved. This was a sad and poignant moment as the life of a congregation formally drew to a close. Families had been nurtured in that church; children baptised; couples married; Scripture taught and learned. The passion with which he spoke showed how much it mattered to him to see this congregation close. The sadness of having one church close was very real, but he was clear that the ending of this church would give him more time and energy to engage in new endeavours. I think that is something worth pondering for every church in PCI as we emerge from Covid-19. We need wisdom to discern when to continue and when to stop, when to adapt and when to stay the same. Only God's Spirit can give us such wisdom. Thankfully, God remains as active today as he has always been. Let us hope and pray for the wisdom we need in our Church and in PCI as a whole as we seek to witness to the difference the life, death and resurrection of Jesus makes to all of life.

Mark Baillie

God's Great Christmas Gift

God's gift to us at Christmas is the greatest gift ever given. First held by a teenage girl and placed in a manger while animals looked on. She was first to touch the perfect form as her loyal spouse watched close by.

Humble shepherds were told about it, told to go and see a new born baby lying in a manger. A baby who would one day become a King.

Wise men, whom some called kings, followed a star in the sky. The sign of



what they had hoped one day they would see. They brought precious gifts to lay at the child's feet in worship, in worship before this new born baby King.

When we give our gifts at Christmas and sometimes count the cost, let us never forget with thankful hearts how great was the cost to our Father in

Heaven. To give us, at Christmas, His only begotten Son, the firstborn of all creation.

May our gifts express our worship for all that He has done. Thank you, Jesus.

Eleanor Mackintosh

Christ the Firstborn

"I also shall make him my firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth."

Psalm 89:27



“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation... He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together... He is also the head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.”

Colossians 1:15 - 18

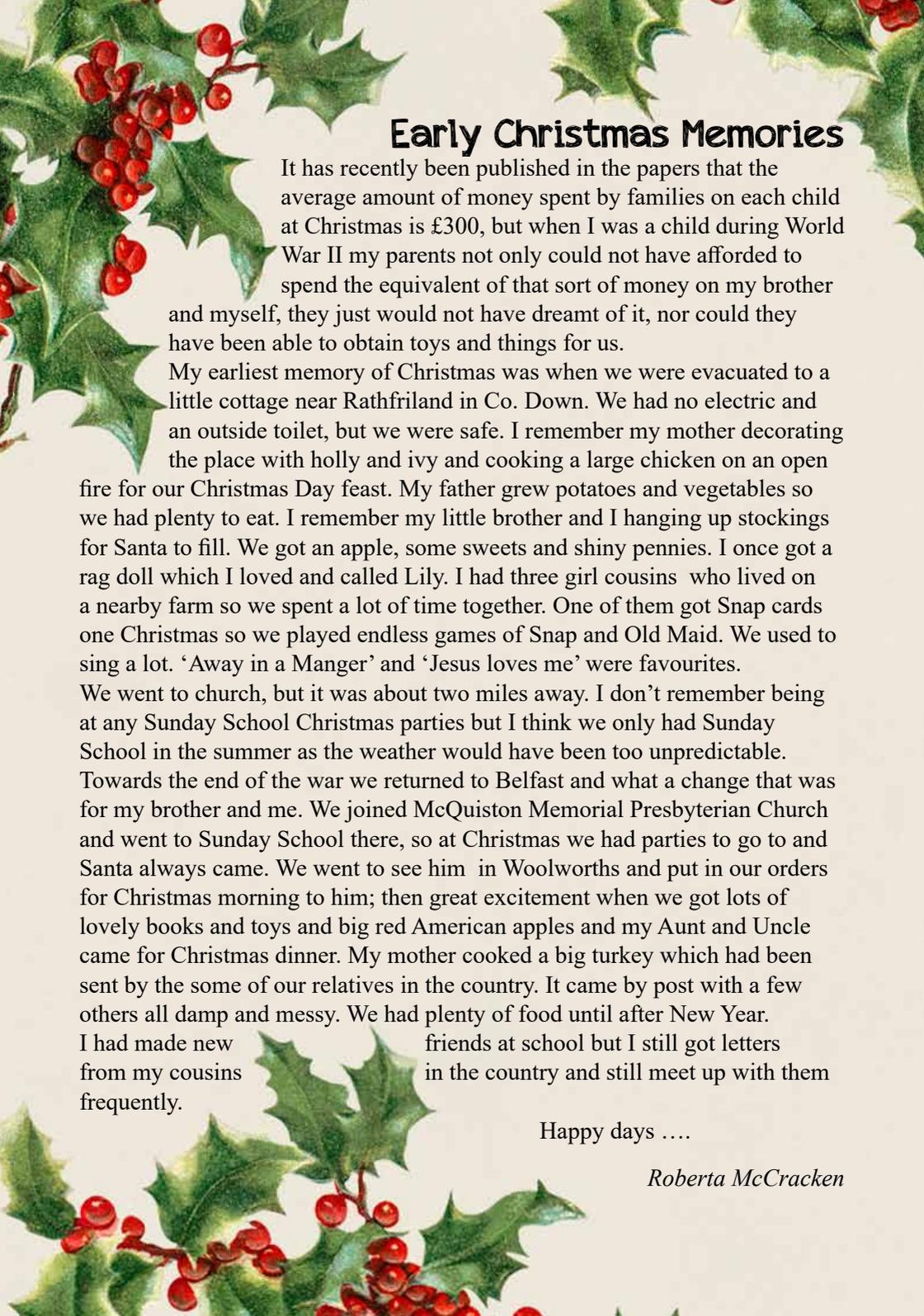
“Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood, ... to Him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen.”

Revelation 1:5 - 6



Calling our Knitters & Crocheters

‘A Bundle of Joy, Baby in a Basket’ is a Christian charity in Newtownards that exists to support and help those experiencing an unexpected joy or crisis situation with a newborn baby (referrals only come from Social Services). If you are able to knit or crochet blankets, hats, cardigans for babies, we will pass them on to the charity to help a family with a newborn. If you would like to know more about the charity please speak to Rosemary Logan or Ellen Boyd.

The page is decorated with illustrations of holly leaves and red berries. The leaves are green with sharp, pointed edges, and the berries are bright red and clustered together. The illustrations are positioned around the text, with some at the top corners and others at the bottom corners.

Early Christmas Memories

It has recently been published in the papers that the average amount of money spent by families on each child at Christmas is £300, but when I was a child during World War II my parents not only could not have afforded to spend the equivalent of that sort of money on my brother and myself, they just would not have dreamt of it, nor could they have been able to obtain toys and things for us.

My earliest memory of Christmas was when we were evacuated to a little cottage near Rathfriland in Co. Down. We had no electric and an outside toilet, but we were safe. I remember my mother decorating the place with holly and ivy and cooking a large chicken on an open fire for our Christmas Day feast. My father grew potatoes and vegetables so we had plenty to eat. I remember my little brother and I hanging up stockings for Santa to fill. We got an apple, some sweets and shiny pennies. I once got a rag doll which I loved and called Lily. I had three girl cousins who lived on a nearby farm so we spent a lot of time together. One of them got Snap cards one Christmas so we played endless games of Snap and Old Maid. We used to sing a lot. 'Away in a Manger' and 'Jesus loves me' were favourites.

We went to church, but it was about two miles away. I don't remember being at any Sunday School Christmas parties but I think we only had Sunday School in the summer as the weather would have been too unpredictable.

Towards the end of the war we returned to Belfast and what a change that was for my brother and me. We joined McQuiston Memorial Presbyterian Church and went to Sunday School there, so at Christmas we had parties to go to and Santa always came. We went to see him in Woolworths and put in our orders for Christmas morning to him; then great excitement when we got lots of lovely books and toys and big red American apples and my Aunt and Uncle came for Christmas dinner. My mother cooked a big turkey which had been sent by the some of our relatives in the country. It came by post with a few others all damp and messy. We had plenty of food until after New Year.

I had made new friends at school but I still got letters from my cousins in the country and still meet up with them frequently.

Happy days

Roberta McCracken

CHRISTMAS DESERT ISLAND DISCS OF THE MCCREA FAMILY

HAZEL

Christmas music always plays a huge part in our family celebrations. The discussion of when it is appropriate to start listening to Christmas music usually starts in October! I have a rule of no Christmas music to be played until start of December. We each enjoy listening to a mixture of carols



and festive songs. Stuart has a tradition of waking everyone up early on 1st December with a loud rendition of "You're a mean one Mr Grinch" from Dr Seuss, The Grinch. The story is about the Grinch, an unloved, lonely creature whose heart grows two sizes bigger as he discovers the joy of Christmas when he is loved and accepted by a small child. This tradition started when our children were very young, as they thought the song was funny and it still continues.

I have always loved singing carols, both traditional and contemporary since I was a child. The candlelight service of nine lessons and carols in my home church was the highlight of the year. People filled the church, and there was always a deep sense of God's presence, love and togetherness as a community of believers.

One of my favourite carols is 'O little town of Bethlehem'. I remember taking my aunt to organise and plan her funeral several years ago, when she was first diagnosed with Vascular dementia. She chose this carol to be sung and we laughed at the astonishment on the face of the lady who was helping us. My aunt's funeral was in the summer a few years ago and we kept her wish. As Stuart reminded the congregation at the service, the words of this carol are apt, no matter the time of year, that our prayer is knowing God's love, his forgiveness and presence with us always,

*"O Holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray;
Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell:
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel."*

CAITLIN

My favourite carol is *'Come and join the celebration'*. I love how its excitement contrasts other slow carols and I feel like it brightens up the day. I've always really enjoyed hearing it on Christmas morning because it reminds me of singing it every year at my grandparents' church when I was younger and since then, for me it's been a classic. I think the song radiates joyfulness and brings us all together in the celebration that Christmas should be.

*"Come and join the celebration, it's a very special day;
come and share our jubilation, there's a new King born today."*

LUKE

My earliest memories of Christmas revolve around the carol *'Away In a Manger'*. It's a classic, a staple of carol services everywhere and having a grand total of 41 alternative tunes it can be set to, you would be hard pressed not to find at least ONE that you enjoy (my current favourite is the Mueller tune). However, I truly believe that its simplicity is its greatest strength. Having lyrics that are accessible to even the youngest of us, it was always performed by the children's choir in our home congregation. I have fond memories of that time and the excitement that came with it as we learned about the events of the Nativity story.

*"Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.
The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay,
The little Lord Jesus asleap on the hay."*



EVAN

My favourite carol is *'Go tell it on the mountain'* because for me it captures



an important part of Christmas: spreading the joy and hope of the good news of Jesus' birth for everyone to hear. I remember the first time I ever sang it in church. The whole band was playing, and the congregation was so lively that I couldn't help but smile the whole way

through it. It has been my favourite Christmas song ever since.

*“Down in a lowly manger
Our humble Christ was born
And brought us all salvation
That blessed Christmas morn
Go, tell it on the mountain
Over the hills and everywhere
Go, tell it on the mountain
That Jesus Christ is born”*

For me it is a great reminder of what the true meaning of Christmas is.

STUART

Do I have to choose just one? Ok...but first can I tell you about more than one?? I'm going to anyway! My family know that as much as I love traditional carols and classic Christmas songs, what I really enjoy is discovering new (or old) interpretations of those. So I have an ever-growing playlist labelled 'A Very Dad Christmas' which has multiple versions of beloved carols, ranging from the instrumental surf-rock jangle of The Ventures, to the soaring vocals of Sarah McLachlan, the fragile harmonies of Sufjan Stevens, or even the distortion-soaked offerings of rock band Weezer – and that doesn't even cover half of the music genres in the playlist! Ask me about it sometime.

But to choose a favourite seasonal hymn, I'm going with the one I mentioned



in my introduction of this magazine – ‘*O come, O come, Emmanuel*’. Technically, it’s classified as an Advent song rather than Christmas carol. What I love about it, is the really humble and heartfelt cry of ‘O come, O come...’ yearning for the presence of Jesus, Emmanuel, God

with us – answered by the promises of ‘*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee...*’. A cry from the heart – an answer from the heavens. For a couple of great versions, search for the band Rain for Roots – it is on their wonderful seasonal album ‘Waiting Songs’ (vocals by mothers and their children) or for a fuller congregational rendition, check out LifeWay Worship on their album ‘Acoustic Christmas Volume 1’.

IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD.

Almost a century ago, the writer and artist Percy Wyndham Lewis referred to what people call ‘The Christmas Spirit’ as essentially gastric. Along with the oft repeated ‘commercial’, we could say that nothing much has changed, except that we might add ‘exploitative’. What we can certainly see is that the erasure of Christ from Christmas seems to be progressing with intent. Tolerance is our society’s watchword, but for all our openness to the variety of human experience, we don’t seem to want faith interfering with everyday life. If it must exist, keep it private. We have no qualms with fantasy movies, superheroes, other worlds and beings with magical and supernatural powers, but we’re not so keen on any notion of a real Divine visitation. For those of us who celebrate Christmas as just that, it is the entry point to a transformed humanity, to the ultimate good, to beauty restored and harmony regained. We have cause for the deepest celebration, a great festive banquet for the One who has made all delight possible and who can bring lasting purpose, peace and freedom to an unsettled and burdened world.

CS Lewis’s ironic lament in ‘The Magician’s Nephew’ holds true today.

“Oh, Adam’s sons, how cleverly you defend yourselves against all that might do good!”

THE WORDS OF CHRISTMAS

In the pages that follow are some reflections which attempt to reclaim the spiritual significance of words which remain inextricably linked with Christmas for everyone.



This Christmas, we’ll sing about **LIGHT** in our favourite carols, Silent Night, O Little Town ... We’ll read St John’s incomparable words, *“the people in darkness have seen a great light.”* We’ll adorn our

houses inside and out with lights, we’ll light candles and log fires and sit by the glow of our digital screens. Pray that the Light of the World would reach deep into lives and be reflected outward again in love for a dark world.

This Christmas, we'll 'hail the heaven born Prince of **PEACE**' and read again the angel's message of peace to the shepherds and the world. We'll enjoy peaceful walks in the crisp winter air and we'll savour the blissful moment of peace when the presents are wrapped and the children are asleep. Aim to pray a silent blessing of God's peace upon people you encounter this Christmas.

This Christmas, we'll 'deck the halls with boughs of Holly' as we **DECORATE** our homes. We'll drive around looking with pleasure or despair at houses eclipsed with plastic Santas, reindeer, snowmen and icicles. We'll help children decorate cards with glitter, gold and stardust. Pray that the beauty with which God has decorated His creation would be restored again for His glory and our good.

This Christmas, we'll re-imagine the shepherds startled delight at the soaring sound of heavenly **MUSIC**. We'll read again Mary's spontaneous psalm of praise and accompany her with much loved carols. We'll hear the standard Christmas songs ad infinitum on the radio and have the most irritating ones stick in our brain. We'll suddenly find our shopping frenzy halted in a moment of calm as the Salvation Army band swells into harmonious melody. Pray that the music of praise from our churches and our lives would lift downcast souls this Christmas.

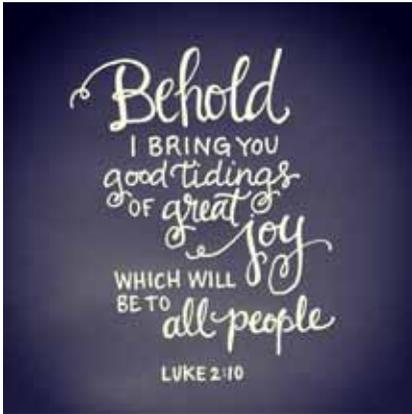


This Christmas, we'll listen again to the increasingly bizarre **GIFTS** given by a true love in the '12 Days of Christmas', and sing of the extravagant offerings of the wise men. We'll find ourselves racing around searching for last minute presents, in spite of our resolve, and we'll wrap carelessly with cheap paper or we'll take exquisite care with M&S opulence range. We'll still feel that delicious charge of excitement as we open an unfamiliar package. This Christmas, give thanks to 'the Father of Lights' for every perfect gift, especially the 'indescribable gift' of a Saviour.

Following are more extended reflections which might be used as meditations over the Christmas period with suggested Bible verses to contemplate silently.

JOY

Joy is at the heart of the Christmas story. “Fear not;” said the angel, “for behold I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.”



It features in many of our beloved carols - ‘Joy to the world, the Lord is come.’ ‘Glad tidings of great joy I bring to you and all mankind.’ ‘Tidings of comfort and joy’. ‘Joyful all ye nations rise.’ Etc.

But the world could be forgiven for thinking that Christians don’t approve of people enjoying themselves. Reformers over the centuries have challenged and exposed many of the excesses in the church and society,

but some puritan souls have wanted to wipe the smiles off peoples’ faces permanently. Their solution to excessive festivity was to abolish Christmas and any form of merrymaking altogether. One parable seems enough to defend that position, that of the so-called rich fool in Luke 12:19, who memorably said to himself, “Take it easy. Eat, drink and be merry.” “You fool,” was God’s response, “This very night your life will be required of you.” But it’s important to note that the man is not condemned for eating, drinking and merrymaking, but for ‘not being rich toward God.’ He simply forgot where the pleasures of eating and drinking and making merry came from in the first place. He ought to have echoed King David’s prayer after a great outpouring of gifts to God in 1 Chronicles 29. “Everything we have has come from you, and we give you only what you first gave us.”



These given pleasures that we are to enjoy freely are only a hint of the deepest Joy that the Christmas story heralds; Christ’s promise that the nourishment He gives will “become a fount of living water springing up to eternal life”. That’s something worth celebrating this Christmas!

Read - Psalm 47

John 15:11

James 1:17

1 Peter 1:8

MYSTERY

We'll likely hear the Coventry Carol sometime over Christmas (Lully, Lullay). It's a rather disconcerting 16th century lullaby/lament about Herod's vicious 'slaughter of the innocents' originating in the so-called Mystery Plays of the Middle Ages. The word mystery here is synonymous with miracle. The plays, which depicted the whole story of the Bible, from creation to last judgement, emphasized the hand of God's Providence working through nature and also, as

creator, God's freedom to work without, above or against nature. This is the kind of mystery/miracle we celebrate at Christmas. Not a mystery as puzzle to be solved or as a secret to be hidden or disclosed, nor a deliberate vagueness to shut off thought (though each of these may hint at and suggest ultimate mystery). This mystery refers to that which is



beyond the limits of the human capacity to understand. Acknowledgement of it is not the avoidance of intelligence or reason, but the recognition of multiple

realities. The Christmas story opens us to this different kind of 'knowing', perceived in glimpses and revelation, manifest in and for us, by and through God. This manifestation is the meaning of Christmas and everything that follows. *"Christ ... the visible image of the invisible God."*



Read - Colossians 1:15-17
Colossians 2:2-3
1 Corinthians 13:12

TRADITION



Christmas abounds in traditions. Some shared by all (Turkey, plum pudding, Christmas jumpers, lights, decorations, cards, gifts), others are unique to each family, repeated every year, come what may, to dread or delight! Tradition accompanied Christ throughout His life. Brought

as a child to the temple for the rites of purification (Luke 2:27). Taken, aged twelve, to Jerusalem for the festival of Passover ‘according to the custom’ (Luke 2:42). When He later celebrated the feast with His disciples, they sacrificed the passover lamb, ‘as was customary’ (Mark 14:2), and even at His trial - the tradition to release a prisoner to the people - and death - His body bound according to the burial customs - tradition accompanied Him. Jesus recognised the deep eternal truths the traditions symbolised. At other times He challenged the Teachers’ traditions - “*Why do you transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?*” (Matthew 15:3-6) They had become burdensome rules and self-serving rituals.

Tradition can be a quarrelsome word. Placed in opposition to ‘Modern’ it can be presented as a hindrance to progress, ‘old fashioned’, ‘out of date’. The original meaning of the word is ‘to hand over, to deliver, to bequeath’. A true and living tradition, rather than being obstructive, stale or irrelevant, is that which remains ever pertinent, ever meaningful, whatever the passing fashions. Repeated patterns of behaviour can become merely habitual - done because they’ve always been done - their original meaning lost. Christmas traditions can be plain silly, or simply good fun. At other times they can bring personal comfort and often meaningfully unite family, friends and community. This Christmas, take time to reestablish the timeless



meanings of the traditions we've allowed to become habitual, hold lightly those which stop us from receiving new light, and continue in the best traditions which faithfully transmit the living truth from one generation to the next. Be glad of all customs and traditions that reaffirm stability in a shifting age and hold fast to the good.

Read - 1 Corinthians 11:2
2 Thessalonians 2:15
Colossians 2:8

MEMORIES

Memories of other times of the year can remain sketchy, but Christmas memories seem more established. Visits to aunts and uncles, grannies and grandas; events, sights and smells; presents, places and people. They can bring back laughter, thankfulness and warm feelings of love and friendship. But it's not surprising that we can also resist dwelling on past Christmases. Even as we recall days of fun and excitement, pleasure and delight, an unbidden sadness can creep upon us. We realise how quickly time passes, and faces, gestures and voices return to vivid life with an ache of love and loss.



Mary must never have forgotten the strangeness of her son's remarkable birth that first 'Christmas', for we're told that 'she treasured and pondered all these things in her heart' (Luke 2:19). In her later life, she must have felt the stab of sorrow as she recalled Simeon's words in the temple, "*And a sword will pierce your very soul.*" But Mary would also bear witness to her son as the promised Christ, hope of the world.

While we recall Christmases past for ourselves, we can also remember that first 'Christmas'. It was a one time event in history, but each year we mark its eternal significance as we celebrate Christ 'born in us today'. This Christmas, take delight in good memories, especially those when God's presence seemed especially near, and say with the Psalmist, "*I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart, I will recount all of your wonderful deeds.*" And if those more painful memories arise, consider the words of Corrie ten Boom.

“Memories are the key, not to the past, but to the future. I know that the experiences of our lives, when we let God use them, become the mysterious and perfect preparation for the work He will give us to do.”

Read - Exodus 12:14
Philippians 1:3
Mark 14:9



WONDER

The season of Christmas is frequently described as a time of wonder. Again, our carols remind us; ‘star of wonder, star of light’. ‘The wonder of His love’. ‘Their watch of wondering love.’



We’ve all seen that look on a child’s face as they watch one of their favourite films. Toy Story? Paddington? A look of rapt absorption. Wonder. Some adults still find their way there. Star wars? Lord of the Rings? It’s something that seems to wane as we get older, as we encounter the ‘real’ world.

Aristotle said that philosophy begins with wonder. There are two kinds of wondering, the probing, questioning kind, and the kind that contemplates with amazement and admiration. The night sky is often invoked when we speak of wonder, and it inspires both kinds. Our curious wondering has taught us that light travels at 186,000 miles per second! Imagine how far it would travel in a year. Some galaxies have been estimated at 350 million light years away. This means that the configuration, the arrangement, of all these points of light, as we see them, does not exist. We are looking at a collection of pasts. And here, the second kind of wonder kicks in. We are close to, or maybe already past, what is graspable. The ‘why’ has started to absorb us and we turn to the Origin of everything for enlightenment. If the vastness of the universe seems



inconceivable then the notion that its Maker should inhabit the smallest human frame is no less wondrous and yet our minds have been stretched in such a way that we can begin to believe. The events of Christmas restore a child-like wonder to us. The Child of Christmas would later say *“Unless you become as little children, you cannot enter the realm of God”*. It is said that wonder acts like a shock, causing a dislocation that makes everything that seemed natural or self-evident lose its compact solidity and obviousness. This is exactly what the Story of Christmas does. It triggers the search for meaning, and wonder becomes worship.

Read - Habakkuk 1:5

Psalm 86:8

Exodus 15:11

Isaiah 29:14

Mark Shields

IN THE BEGINNING WAS
THE WORD...



Jesus Still is the Great Physician

Over the last couple of years we've come to value increasingly our Health Service and all who work in it. We are blessed with the medicines, treatments and therapies which have made our lives so much better. As Christians, we believe that all of these advances in healing come ultimately from God and it's good to remember that He is not limited in how He can touch people's lives in healing ways. We can sometimes despair when we sense we have run out of options. Here, Eleanor Mackintosh reflects on her own personal experience to encourage faith in times of illness and uncertainty.

*“My son, pay attention to what I say; turn your ear to my words.
Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart;
for they are life to those who find them and health to one's whole body.”*
Proverbs 4:20-22

Do we really believe that Jesus heals today? Or do we just take comfort from how He healed when He walked on earth? Is our faith only in our advances in medicine and science or can we still trust in God's word to heal us today? God's word is a living word! It does not change, it remains the same forever. In Psalm 139, we learn of God's personal knowledge of us. He formed us in the womb and put every part of us together, just exactly the way He wanted us to be. If we truly believe this, then why can we not, in faith, trust that God's power is great to heal us? God has blessed us with many gifted medical doctors yet we remember that He is the Great Physician.

I will always be thankful for my mother's sharing of how God healed her when she was a teenager. She never tired of pointing us to the higher power before taking us to the doctor. Doctors also accept that theirs is not always the last word. If God has promised me abundant life and Jesus has purchased it for me through His death and resurrection, then I want that quality of life to serve Him, enjoy Him and share it with others.

Eleanor Mackintosh

COMMITTEE UPDATE

Property Update

The committee will present the quotes from two suppliers for the replacement of the wheelchair lift at the next meeting in November for final decision.

Concerning the main kitchen, the committee is in the process of revisiting the companies who submitted quotes to confirm they are valid due to time passed with the pandemic, the committee is also making sure everything is still in line with the hospitality needs of the church. Once this has been agreed we will aim to get the work done next year.

As for future plans, the committee is currently getting quotes for the refurbishment of the church tower. This is mainly cosmetic, apart from straightening the lightning rods, which are bent, and making sure the earths are maintained. This work will be carried out next summer in drier months. The painting will also include parts of the main church hall, the main entrance and stairs and also window frames, which need a little touch-up in places. The quotes will then be presented back to the committee to be agreed before the tender is awarded.

Finance

All members will receive details of their annual contributions for 2021 with this magazine, so this is a good opportunity to look at what each of the funds are used for within the church.

The Freewill Offering is used to cover the Minister's stipend, staff salaries and expenses, Young Life and other youth ministry, church heat and lighting costs and general maintenance.

The Building Fund covers repair and replacement of church property including the significant refurbishment recently carried out on the manse.

The United Appeal contribution that First Holywood makes is determined by PCI based on our congregation size and is in the region of £16,000 per annum.

The OutReach Fund is used to support various Outreach programmes such as Scripture Union, Prison Fellowship and Storehouse.

FAIR Fund is available to be used by the Minister to support members of the congregation or local community who are in significant need.





On Saturday 6th November, Anne White and Lynda Francis joined the Prayer Gathering and March for Climate Justice in Belfast.

There were up to one hundred people in Central Church, May Street, brought together to pray by Tear Fund, Evangelical Alliance, 24-7 Prayer and Christian Aid; one of the speakers was Rosamond Bennett, CEO of Christian Aid.

We prayed the following for the leaders and delegates attending COP26 in Glasgow:-

- Inclusive negotiations - that the voice of the poor would be heard
- Ambitious action - that there would be greater investment in clean energy and an end to dependence on fossil fuels
- Climate finance - that wealthy countries would give their fair share of the already agreed \$100 billion per year to poor nations
- Loss and damage - that there would be a desire for justice and that a new fund would be set up to compensate for the damage already experienced by developing countries

After the service, we joined with many other diverse groups including Surfers against Sewage, the National Trust and several political parties to march from Cornmarket, along North Street and Royal Avenue to the City Hall where there was a large rally. There were many speakers including Dara McAnulty a teenage author and naturalist from Fermanagh.

We should give thanks for some signs of progress - that almost 40 nations joined the UK in committing to end international support for coal, oil and gas projects and that the final COP agreement gave a signal to the end of fossil fuels; we can be thankful for the lives that will improve as a result.



However, the promises made in the Glasgow Climate Pact are not enough for the most vulnerable people suffering climate change, so we must continue to pray for world leaders to deliver financial support to the developing countries and to make cuts in emissions in line with 1.5 degrees. Let us bring to God our concerns for what was not achieved, knowing that He can do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine.

Girls' Brigade Tribute

Katherine Anne Galway
22.1.85 – 25.12.20

It was with great sadness and shock that we were told on Christmas Day last year of the sudden death of Katherine Galway.

Katherine was blessed to have a wonderful Christian family who encouraged her to get involved in everything. We would like to thank Anne and Robin for entrusting their daughter into our care and for all the love, help and support they gave us over the years.

Katherine started G.B. as an Explorer and moved up through the sections, gaining her badges along the way and finally she became an Associate Leader, helping in the Junior Section on a Tuesday night with Joanne and Elinor. In March 2020 she completed 33 years service in the Company. On a Tuesday night she would arrive and her first words would be "Hi Rosemary... you OK... Joanne coming?" When I replied "Yes" she was happy.

Katherine loved craft, baking and music and she would be in the middle of everything that was taking place. She would be first at the table for craft or to bake but she would also be first at the kitchen sink to do the dishes and tidy up. Katherine was a very loyal member of our Company but she also supported outside events such as Junior Day Out – Jungle N.I., Explorer Zoo Day and a Service in Whitewell to mark 125 years of Girls' Brigade.

She enjoyed going to camp – Donaghadee weekend which was spent in Donaghadee Presbyterian Church and this soon became the highlight of our G.B. calendar for several years.

Katherine loved G.B. and everyone in G.B. loved Katherine. Our Tuesday nights will not be the same without her. She will be greatly missed but lovingly remembered by us all. She was a special girl leaving us beautiful memories which we will always cherish.



Rosemary Ferguson (Captain)

LIVING : ACTIVE : SHARP

Bible Reading Plans

Over recent weeks, Stuart has been encouraging the habit of regular personal Bible reading and prayer time. This is something all of us admit to being irregular at maintaining, yet we know that when it is neglected we become more inclined to trusting our own judgement, making our own plans in life and generally losing our way. When we return to our reading, we marvel again at the Bible's richness and relevance, and wonder how we could do without it. Part of the problem for most of us is that we need a structure, something to direct and guide our reading and meditating. For many years, Bible reading notes have provided that help for us.

Many of our congregation take advantage of the following notes: **Encounter with God, Daily Bread** and **Every Day with Jesus**.

If you feel that you need that daily prompt to get back to a better dialogue with God and His Word and especially if you can't easily access online resources or simply find it more engaging to read from a booklet, then please contact Nicola in the office about subscribing.

Online resources

LECTIO 365

Lectio 365 is a resource by the 24-7 prayer movement and developed to help people learn to pray the Bible every day and go deeper in prayer each morning and night. It is only available as a free download, but for those well accustomed to digital technologies this could be the ideal way to reinvigorate a commitment to prayerful Bible reflection and study. The content

is available in written and audio format. Each study series explores passages verse by verse. The readings, thoughts and Morning prayers follow a simple P.R.A.Y rhythm:



P:ause to be still.

R:ejoice with a Psalm and R:eflect on Scripture.

A:sk for God's help.

Y:ield to His will in your life.

On Sundays, stop and pray a Sabbath prayer of rest, and journey through special seasons including Advent, Lent and current events. The Night Prayers offer reflective questions, Bible readings and prayers to help process the day and prepare to sleep.



Reflect on the day that has passed, relinquishing stress and control.

Rejoice in God's goodness, noticing His presence throughout the day.

Repent of sins, receiving forgiveness for what has gone wrong.

Rest in readiness for sleep.

There is also a Lectio resource available that helps families to read the Bible and explore faith through conversation and prayer together.

You can get further information and download the resources at

<https://www.24-7prayer.com/resource/lectio-365/>

TIDES

The Presbyterian Church also offers a resource to help develop regular Bible reading called Tides. Tides aims



to fuel the devotional lives of ordinary disciples through a rhythm of daily devotions that is accessible to all. Each weekday morning, Tides provides you with a section of God's word to read, a short reflection sharing what this could mean for your life, and a simple way for you to respond. This is a home-grown resource, created and written by contributors from right across the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and currently being accessed by almost 4,000 subscribers. If you are hungry to read God's Word, reflect on what He is saying and respond in your daily life then join this growing movement of Bible reading by registering at

<https://www.presbyterianireland.org/tides>



GLOBAL GREETINGS

Something you might consider doing this Christmas is to send a greeting to some of the Presbyterian Church's Global Mission workers.

DIANE CUSICK

We have maintained a connection over the years with Diane Cusick, early childhood development co-ordinator with the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian Synod of Zambia. You can read about her work and download Mission Reports at -

<https://www.presbyterianireland.org/Mission/Mission-People/Cusick.aspx>

Her blog can be accessed at -

www.dianecusick.blogspot.com

But can you imagine the support and encouragement it would be, after the ups and downs of the last year, to send her a personal Christmas message? You could even send an actual card to her PO Box in Zambia. Details are below (It won't matter if it's a bit late) -

Contact Details:

PO Box 320261, Woodlands, Lusaka10101 Zambia

E: diane.ecd@gmail.com



NAOMI KEEFE

Naomi Keefe is another of our Global Mission workers who has visited us in the past. She lives in Recife/Olinda in north - eastern Brazil and is involved in Church-based and Bible-based community development and outreach. As with Diane, you can keep informed about her ongoing work and read her Mission Reports at - <https://www.presbyterianireland.org/Mission/Mission-People/Naomi-Keefe.aspx>



It's Summer at the moment for both Diane and Naomi with extremely high temperatures, but they'll still be celebrating Christmas and Naomi will be organising an Evangelistic Street event called 'The Dragon versus the Baby'. Again, why not send her a word of encouragement by email or card to -

Contact Details:

Caixa Postal 73

AC Central Recife

Codigo 32300018

Avenida Guararapes 250

CEP 50010970

BRAZIL

E: naomikeefe@hotmail.com

There are fourteen workers on the PCI Global Mission page. You may know some of the others and have supported them over the years. But whether you know them or not you can read about their life and work for God in those places He has led them to. Most of their profiles show contact details and any one of them would love a kind and sustaining word from 'home'. We give thanks to God for all their service and ask for His continued protection, guidance and strength in their lives.





New Beginnings

Just like that, we've made it through a term of Young Life which hasn't been interrupted by a lockdown!

And what a term it's been. In a

youth ministry context, almost two years is a very long time so it really has felt like a completely new start for Club.

But thanks to the fantastic commitment of the youth ministry leaders through Covid, we are possibly in the healthiest position we've ever been. Young people from First Holywood have been committed and have been inviting

 **younglife**

International



their friends, which has made Club an absolute joy. We have a fantastic group of leaders, who are raising the standard of Club every week. And we also have our new staff person, Skye Houston, well into the swing of things in Holywood and already having a

great impact in the lives of younger girls. We have so much to celebrate and be thankful for. But it feels like this is still the beginning and that the Lord has a lot left in store.

Please continue to pray for the young people and leaders involved. Pray for young people in our town who don't yet know the Lord, that they might be invited to hear about the love He has for them. Pray for the young people who are being disciplined, that they would grow deeply in their relationship with the Lord so that they would be like trees planted by streams of water. And pray for our leaders, who serve so faithfully, that they would continue to be deeply rooted in the Lord despite the pressures they feel around their studies. Thank you for your continued support and partnership.

Carl McManus



A PRAYER FOR OUR CHILDREN

Heavenly Father, we place our children in your mighty, loving hands.

May the security of your presence reassure them when they struggle with problems and difficulties.

Protect them from the negative pressures placed upon them by their peers.

When they are tempted to compromise, please give them the wisdom and strength to resist this world's influences. Guide them to relationships that draw them closer to you and help them to positively influence those around them.

We pray you will guard them against bullies, both online and offline. Please give them the wisdom to know the right thing to do and provide them with the strength to follow you.

Help our children to see the importance and value of placing others' needs before their own. Give them a caring heart for those who are less fortunate. In all things help them to imitate you, Lord.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

CHRISTMAS BIBLE QUIZ

1. What is the name of the town where Jesus was born?
2. What word means 'God with us'?
3. What does the name Jesus mean?
4. Where was Jesus laid after he was born?
5. How did the wise men find baby Jesus?
6. What three gifts did the wise men bring?
7. Who was King when Jesus was born?
8. What was Joseph's job?
9. An angel appeared to tell Joseph to take Mary and baby Jesus to a new place. Where did they go?
10. Who told Mary that she would give birth to baby Jesus?



1. Bethlehem 2. Emmanuel 3. Saviour 4. In a manger 5. They followed the star 6. Gold, frankincense and myrrh 7. Herod 8. He was a carpenter 9. Egypt 10. The Angel Gabriel Image: vecteezy.com



LETTER PHOTO CHALLENGE

Get your phone or camera at the ready and have a go at our Letter Photo Challenge. Take a photo to represent each letter of Merry Christmas and create a collage of your pictures. **Stuart is offering a small gift to everyone who submits their entry to the Church office by Tuesday 21st December. Email: office@firstholywood.co.uk**
 Or you could even use the images for your Christmas cards!



A Christmas Blessing

**May the grace of Christ bring you hope and joy,
and may the peace of Christ be yours.
May Jesus, the Lord, the miracle of God,
fill your heart with Christmas love.**

**May you hear the songs of the angels this morn'.
May you feel the joy that Jesus Christ is born.
May the beauty of Christmas surround you today.
May you find joy this Christmas Day.**

**May you thank the Lord for the hope that He brings.
May you know the love of Jesus Christ, the King.
May you always believe that Christ came to save.
May you find hope this Christmas Day.**

**May the peace of Christmas bring joy with no end.
May you feel the love of family and friends.
May the wonder of Christmas surround you today.
May you feel peace this Christmas Day.**

**May you share this day with our Jesus in prayer.
May you share this day and show all you care.
May you gather together with loved ones this day.
May you find Christ this Christmas Day.**

Marcia A. Newton