

BANYULE BABBLE

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ANGLICAN PARISH OF BANYULE
ST JOHN'S HEIDELBERG ❄️ HOLY SPIRIT WATSONIA

**FEBRUARY
2024**

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HELEN'S HERMENEUTICS

Fellow workers with the Lord

HOPE everyone has had a refreshing and restful time in January. It is a time when we have a break from some of our regular commitments, and maybe the New Year is a time for us to assess those commitments and ask ourselves if there is anything new that we need to take on, or is it time to stop doing something we have been doing, maybe for quite a while.

Whether or not we are working for an employer, it is important to remember that, as Christians, we are all working for God. The Lord has activities that he has planned for each of us to do. We are not 'saved' by our good works. Salvation is a gift we are given through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Our good works arise from our gratitude for what the Lord has done for us. Paul explains this in Ephesians 2:9,10. I love these verses. Ephesians 2:10 (NRSV) says, 'For we are...created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.' Isn't that wonderful? Before we were even born, God was preparing what He wanted us to do. (See also Jeremiah 1:4,5) And moreover, He gives us the spiritual gifts and spiritual fruit so that we are equipped for whatever He calls us to do. As the apostle Peter writes, 'His divine power has granted us everything needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness (2 Peter 1:3).

How does this work out in practice? Firstly, we need to commit ourselves totally to the Lord. When we are conscious of any sin, we need to immediately acknowledge it and confess it so that we can receive God's forgiveness. Then, as our hearts are right before Him, we can know that the Lord is leading us all the time. He will give us thoughts about what we will need to be doing and will stop us if we take a wrong path. We need to be quietly trusting rather than feeling anxious about this. I used to feel anxious that I would somehow miss God's will for me. Nowadays I feel much more relaxed about it. It is a matter of trust.

We are told in the Bible to share the hope of the Gospel with those who ask us about it. I find it helpful to ask the Lord to set up 'divine appointments' so that I can share my faith with others. Then we can also ask that we will be a blessing to others each day and thank Him that He is always guiding and helping us in everything. At the end of the day we can offer what we have done as 'loaves and fishes' as we remember how Jesus multiplied and used the offering of the young boy in the story of the feeding of the 5000.

And never forget how much the Lord loves us – more than we could ever imagine. It is because He loves us and we are His precious children that He offers us the gift of salvation and calls us to be His fellow workers. Another of my favourite verses is Jeremiah 29:11, 'For surely I know the plans I have for you' says the Lord, 'plans for your welfare, and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.'

May God bless us all as we work for Him, both as a church and as individuals, in 2024.

Helen McAlley



Lent, Holy Week, Easter



Wednesday February 14 7.30 pm Holy Spirit: Imposition of Ashes

Sunday February 18 9.30 am Holy Spirit: Lent 1

Sunday February 25 9.30 am St John's: Lent 2

Sunday March 3 9.30 am St John's: Lent 3 (All-age)
5 pm Holy Spirit: Lent 3

Sunday March 10 9.30 am St John's: Lent 4
5 pm Holy Spirit: Lent 4

Sunday March 17 9.30 am St John's: Lent 5

Sunday March 24 9.30 am Holy Spirit: Palm Sunday

Thursday March 28 9.30 am St John's: Service of Shadows

Friday March 29 9.30 am Holy Spirit: Good Friday

Sunday March 31 9.30 am St John's: Easter Day

mainly music: February 2024

There is no *mainly music* during January so there is nothing to report. However, there has been a newsletter about the Supported Communities – formerly called Excluded Communities. We contribute \$1 per family attendance each week – not a lot but something.

Supported groups are mostly convened for a set group of families or children. For example, families at a 'Mother and baby' unit in prison, a regional school, a home for women recovering from drug addictions, children with a disability, or children at a remote childcare.

These comments come from the session facilitators:

Moree East, NSW

Co-operative moments are exciting to see in this space. The children generally find co-operation and taking turns quite challenging, so sharing the props and allowing each other to 'perform' are key activities to build into their lives. These are skills they will find useful at school and in life.

Childcare in remote Queensland

It's a new day and the children were learning how to help each other, plus show care and love to their classmates and their Educators. One boy just started recently. He's been very shy, so I've been doing actions one-to-one with him. It's exciting because he's starting to blossom and engage with other the actions and his friends in the session.

Rosemary Bellair (0428 595 394)

This Month – February

Sunday 4th Epiphany 5: 9.30 am Combined, St John's: Commissioning Service
Isaiah 40:21–31; Mark 1:29–39

Wednesday 7th: 11 am Iris Grange; 3.30 pm Strathalan

Sunday 11th Epiphany Last: 9.30 am St John's, 5 pm Holy Spirit
1 Corinthians 9:24–27; Mark 1:40–45

Wednesday 14th Ash Wednesday: 7.30 pm Holy Spirit
Joel 2:1–2,12–17; 1 Timothy 6:6–19

Sunday 18th Lent 1: 9.30 am Combined at Holy Spirit
1 Peter 3:18–22; Mark 1:9–15

Sunday 25th Lent 2: 9.30 am Combined at St John's
Romans 4:13–25; Mark 8:31–38

Wednesday 28th: 10 am Holy Spirit Mothers' Union; 11 am Streeton Park & general mid-week service at St John's; 3.30 pm Regis Macleod

Wanted

- Another churchwarden
- More *mainly music* volunteers
- Musicians

Holy Spirit Happenings

Church Flowers for the Christmas Day Service

Thank you to all who contributed to the Christmas Day flowers.

The Watsonia florist does a great job. The apprentice florist enjoys walking them across and placing them on their stand and giving them a final check.

Holy Spirit Watsonia Mothers' Union

Our first meeting: *10 am Wednesday 24th January 2024*. Mothers' Union Service after our Three Cs (Clean, Cuppa, Chat), singing songs from *Covenant Songs*. As it is Australia Day on Friday, *Shine Jesus Shine* would be one to sing.

No speaker, as it's Planning Day. Mothering Sunday? Lady Day: March 1st, 4 pm at St Paul's Cathedral. And a lot of changes in MU meeting days.

Then closing with Midday Prayers: MU Worldwide; our Link Branch St Mary's Broughty Ferry, Scotland; Defence Anglican—pray for those who have the heavy responsibility of leading defence. Pray for wisdom and courage in all decision making.

Elsie Storr

Letter to the Editor

Hi Peter,

We spoke this morning about the kitchen sink – our sink*. So now you remember me as an old St. Andrew's person.

I have just read "Memories of St. Andrew's" which gave a good recollection of the St. Andrew's that Elaine and I loved.

We do however take exception strong to one comment – that Mr Constable "was not much liked". This is very contrary to our experience and it is a pity an otherwise good article is corrupted by that small biased comment. Mr. Constable was a dedicated Low Church Anglican who had firm views (apparently unpopular with some). He was highly respected and, in our experience, very much loved. He was very much 'one of us' at all youth group camps. He personally showed his love to us on the birth of our first daughter by arriving at the hospital with a teddy bear!

We would be pleased if in the next *Babble* you could place some comment or Letter to the Editor restoring Mr Constable's reputation as a widely loved and highly respected Minister of the Gospel.

We are happy if you make these comments known to Joyce.

Other than those three inappropriate words, I congratulate you on the *Babble*.

Geoff & Elaine Smith

St Andrew's ca 1943–82, St John's 1983–2000

* The Smiths provided the sink for the St John's Upper Hall kitchen.

Editor's Note: This letter should have been posted in January's *Babble*, but the Editor missed the original email. I have asked Geoff to write his own recollections of St Andrew's; he has done so, and his article is on the next two pages.

Bill Woolnough

In last month's *Babble* we mentioned that Bill Woolnough made the altar rails of the old church at Holy Spirit Watsonia 'and a good deal more'. The Editor has now discovered that the 'good deal more' included the Pascal candlestick (*right*), which is still being used, and the cross (*left*), still also used, now on the wall behind the altar. The cross on the outside wall was modelled on Bill's cross.



Above: Bishop Brad and Warden Katrina, preparing for the 9 pm Christmas Eve service, making the church welcoming by putting tinsel on the 'Keep Out' barriers.



St Andrew's Recollectionsby Geoff Smith



Back: Neil Appleby, Jim Glover, Ian McColl, ??, Chris Purton, Geoff Smith, Elaine Carruthers, John Viccars

Next: Peter Constable, Trevor Wilson, Marg Harry, Jeff McColl, Liz Denvil, ??, Lavinia Cox, Marie Drews, Val Simpson, ??, Kay Dawson, Margo Wilson

Next: Chris Bevan, Barbara Mitchell, Russel Earnshaw, Mrs & Mr Constable; Mavis, Jack & Jenny Viccars, Carlotta Colvin

Front: Liz O'Connor, Alan Baker, Bus driver, Stan Miller, John Constable, Graeme Crichton

Hi there,

My name is Geoff Smith and I think I can make claim to being the person with the earliest association with St Andrew's. I can't pinpoint the year that I started Sunday School but it would be just before the end of WWII in 1944?? Earliest memory? This is strongly engraved on my memory – the love exhibited by my first teacher Bonnie Saunders. She was possibly a girl in her teens. I remember not a single thing she said or taught but God's love flowed through her and her legacy remains. My friend Alan Baker has the same positive memories of Bonnie. How I wished, in later life, I could thank her. Recently I noticed a plaque in the memorial garden to 'Bonnie Harris'. Was that her? If so a posthumous 'thank you' for a job well done. It's amazing that a person can make so much impact that you remember her name 80 years later.

At that stage St Andrew's was part of St John's Parish and services would be conducted by the Vicar, Mr Craig, or various lay preachers. For whatever reason, St Andrew's hierarchy treated St John's with a degree of suspicion – perhaps because they had candles, a definite 'no no' for ultra-low St Andrew's. We did however combine for the Annual Sunday School picnic. A special train picked up the St Andrew's faithful at Rosanna and then stopped at Heidelberg to pick up the St John's mob. The train then sped off to Edithvale, and in later years Apsendale, where the lifesavers' buildings were rented for the day. Races on the beach, sand-castle building, all contributed to a very enjoyable day. Much to my surprise the St John's people seemed 'normal'.

The 50's and early 60's were a period of amazing growth. The Sunday School expanded enormously under the capable and dedicated leadership of Ern Mitchell and then, for an extended period, Eric Carter. Those people and their many assistants were truly 'Saints of St Andrew's'. The new hall was built only to be doubled in size soon after. Sunday School attendance topped the 600 mark and the large team of teachers swung into action. Those were the days before Sunday Sport and Sunday shopping. It has been cynically said that parents were thrilled to send the kids to Sunday School as it was the only time they had to themselves. Many of us teenagers became Sunday School teachers and faithfully prepared and presented the prescribed lesson. I remember one girl in my class, daughter of prominent Church member, who every week on the stroke of 10.30 would proclaim "time's up, let's go." It put me under so much pressure to finish the lesson but that saying is now ingrained in our family vocabulary. A few of us teachers were seconded to teach in the new Macleod church and the later at an Interdenominational Sunday School at Olympic Village. The leader, ex-missionary Mrs Grant, was a stern disciplinarian and served that area faithfully for several years.

During this period St Andrew's achieved parish status and the new church was built. The first Vicar was Phil Cooke and a more likeable dedicated priest would be hard to find. During his tenure I was confirmed and under his encouragement, along with good friend Alan Baker, would ring the bell and read Evensong every week night – generally to ourselves, or alone. But it was good discipline. At this time also, encouraged

by the curate Phil Atkins, we attended several Christmas Camps with CMS League of Youth at Belgrave Heights – deepening our faith. Billy Graham made his appearance during this time and many of us youth attended his rallies.

Then along came a new Vicar, Eric Constable and his tenure saw the growth of a vibrant Youth Club – the YAF (Young Anglican Fellowship). I was privileged to be a member and take part in Friday night activities and other events. During this period I was joined by Elaine, soon to become fiancée and in 1961 my wife. She had a Presbyterian background but in no time was a keen member of YAF. I divert – Elaine would come to my house for dinner on a Friday night before Youth Club. Mum asked what she liked for dessert. Mischievously I said ‘bread and butter pudding’ which was faithfully served every Friday for several years. Elaine suffered in silence and Mum was never told that Elaine hated that dessert. The YAF was led by Jack and Mavis Viccars – Saints of St Andrew’s. A key feature of YAF was the Annual Revue held over two or three nights. Written and directed by YAF members it was produced under such titles as ‘Gags and Rag-time’ and ‘Quips are a-Cracking’. It was a great bonding experience for a very tight-knit group of young people. It was supported by the music of Connie (piano) and Fred (saxophone) Balaam and son Donald (drums) – more saints of St Andrew’s. Another feature of YAF was the annual camp with studies led by Mr Constable (refer photo). Mr Constable was a much-loved priest and he seemed to have a particular affinity with the YAF members. The tragic death of him and his wife has been mentioned in an earlier edition of the *Babble*.

Two members of the YAF went on to become Anglican priests: Gordon Hargreaves and Alan Baker.

I estimate that during my life I have sat through close to 3000 sermons. But there is only one that is firmly engraved in my memory. One Christmas Day, Mr Constable fell sick at the last minute and had to find a replacement. I repeat verbatim, after all these years, the introduction to the elderly priest’s Christmas Day sermon:

You all know the Christmas story back to front, so I don’t plan to preach on that.

I want to preach on birth control. It’s wrong, quite wrong – every method is wrong.

All the YAF members in their late teens pricked up their ears and took notice!

Also at this time existed a series of church dances and we did the circuit of well conducted, non-alcoholic events. The circuit included St Andrew’s, St John’s (with the Balaam band), St Jude’s Alphington, Ivanhoe, East Ivanhoe and Alphington Methodists to name but a few. These dances provided a safe and great meeting place for young people seeking a spouse. Glen Miller’s big band dance music was a common thread. I met Elaine at East Ivanhoe Methodists, which sadly has now closed its doors. I feel sorry for the youth of today whose meeting places seem to be dominated by loud music, alcohol and drugs. Failing success in these venues the option is questionable on-line sites.

Bring back the church dance!

In 1982 we lived in Edinburgh for six months and worshipped at St Mungo Balerno. On our return we decided that a change was necessary and we became members of St John’s Heidelberg. The main reason was that St John’s better catered for the needs of our teenage children. At St John’s we were blessed with the marvellous ministry of John Clarke, and later Peter Swane. We formed a lifelong friendship with Gay and Robin Miller. They were great days. In 2000 we shifted house to Mont Albert ending a long association with St Andrew’s and St John’s.

We look back on our time at St Andrew’s with great affection and thanks. Not only were we nurtured in the faith by a series of dedicated priests, but also benefited by the selfless giving of time and talents of many wonderful lay people. These were truly Saints of St Andrew. I attended the consecration of the ‘new’ St Andrew’s church and with deep sadness was at the deconsecration. So many memories. Thank you St Andrew’s. St Andrew’s is dead, long live the Parish of Banyule.

Farewell to Sarah

We said farewell to our much-loved student Sarah Coe on Sunday 14th January. Wilma Walker, a member of Sarah’s Field Committee, presented her with a floral tribute on behalf of the parish. Sarah’s sermon can be found on p. 15.



We gave Sarah our blessing as she moves on to the next stage in her studies, and to her next parish. Sarah had many offers a year ago from other parishes, but she graciously said that when Denise presented the parish’s request for a student at Ridley College, she said, ‘Stop, pick me!’

Sarah said that she hopes to visit us occasionally, though we know she will be kept very busy!

The Millers have been cleaning stuff out, and found these:

Games night at St John's

A 24-hour table tennis marathon will be staged this Friday night to raise funds for the restoration of St John's Anglican Church in Heidelberg.

Four members of the church — Robin Miller, Eric van Cuylenberg, Tom Socnik and Neil Barras will begin their effort at 9 pm in St John's.

Already they have more than 200 sponsors, who will donate

funds for each hour played.

To set the mood for the four, Australia's leading woman table tennis player, Nadia Bisiach, will play an exhibition match from 7.30 pm.

The same evening St John's will hold a games night, and all local families are invited to take part.

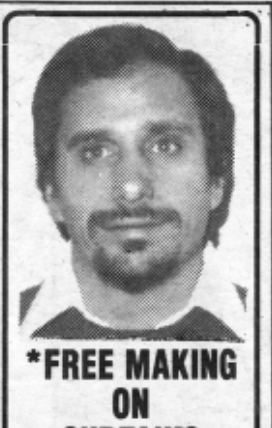
There will be computer games, Trivial Pursuit, Mahjong, Scrabble, Snakes and Ladders, and many other fun games, starting at 7.30 pm.

Supper will be provided and door prizes will also be awarded.

Tickets are \$8 per family and \$4 for a single adult.



● St John's Anglican Church in Burgundy St, Heidelberg. Friday night is games night, with a special 24-hour table tennis marathon, to raise funds for its restoration.



Above: From *The Heidelberg*, Wednesday August 14, 1985 (page 15)

Below: Gay Miller (right) and the Editor (not at all right) singing *Day Trip to Bangor* at Holy Spirit in the evening of Sunday 10th October 2010



February 29

This year being a leap year, February has an extra day, the 29th. It is so well-known that it is the 29th, that we forget it was not always so. In the Roman Julian calendar the extra day was put in after February 24. In the Roman system, February 24 was dated as the 6th day (*sextus*) before the Calends (first day) of March. (The reader will notice that it is only in fact the fifth, but the Romans always counted inclusively—of 'octave' for seven notes or seven days, French *huit jours* for a week, *quinze jours* for a fortnight, etc.) In a leap year they added a 'second sixth'—*bissextus*, so there were two February 24ths. (The reader may remember the term 'bissextile year' for 'leap year': it appears in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* in the bits on calculating Easter.)

Although having two days in the year that were both 24th February was obviously inconvenient, it continued for a long time. A particular inconvenience for the Church was how to celebrate St Matthias's Day (you remember St Matthias: he was selected by lot to take the place of Judas in the Twelve Apostles, and then we hear no more about him). St Matthias's Day was on 24th February, but it seemed silly to have a special service for him on two successive days, so in leap years his day was moved to the 25th. This still continues in the Western Rite Orthodox churches.

The English Reformers were not happy about moving St Matthias's Day like this, so they came up with a cunning plan. In the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer* (the first BCP) they quietly moved the **leap year day** to the 25th:

This is also to bee noted, concernyng the leape yeres, that the xxv. daye of February, whiche in leape yeres is coumpted for two dayes, shall in those twoo dayes alter neither Psalme nor Lesson: but the same Psalmes and Lessons, whiche be sayed the first daye shall serve also for the seconde daye.

This continued in the 1552 and 1559 BCP versions, but was changed in the 1561 revision of the liturgical calendar to the **23rd**. The Editor has not been able to check this text directly, but he has checked editions of the BCP from 1562 and 1564:

When the yeares of our Lorde may be deuoyded into foure euen partes which is euery fourth yere: then the Sunday letter leapeth, and that yeaere the Psalmes and Lessons whiche serue for the .xxiii. day of February, shalbe read agayne the day folowing, except it be Sunday, which hath proper lessons of the old Testament appoynted in the Table, seruyng to that purpose.

Although the Editor would like the repetition of the 23rd to be standard modern-day practice, as it would mean every fourth year he would get twice as many birthday presents, he suspects that it was never more than a liturgical workaround.

A 1660 edition of the 1559 BCP still contained this statement, but legal documents had started referring to '29th February' in the 15th century, and increasingly so as the century progressed. The House of Commons changed its official dating system to use 29th February in the middle of the 16th century. The new 1662 *Book of Common Prayer* recognised that civil use had changed long ago,

and dropped all references to double days, and had special readings for February 29.

British law did not officially recognise 29th February until the Calendar (New Style) Act 1750 (actually passed in 1751), bringing in the Gregorian calendar in September 1752. Readers will remember that the Gregorian calendar drops three leap days every 400 years (century years are only leap years if divisible by 400, so 2000 was a leap year but 1900 was not and 2100 will not be): this makes the average calendar year 365.2425 days long, very close to the actual solar year of 365.2422 days.

Different countries changed from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar at different times. When they did so they lost 10–13 days from the calendar (but not from the days in the week). The result was that different countries operated on different dates. (The last European country to change was Greece, but only for civil purposes. Ethiopia and Eritrea still use a calendar with exactly 365¼ days in the year, like the Julian calendar.)

Sweden was an interesting case. They decided that instead of changing from Julian to Gregorian overnight, they would do it gradually, by abolishing leap days for 40 years. This would have meant that their dates were different from everyone else's for 40 years, and the difference would change every 4 years. They started in 1700 by not making that a leap year; but then they forgot in 1704 and 1708, and made them leap years (they were fighting a war at the time). Because of the mess, they decided to revert to the Julian calendar. So they gave 1712 **two** leap days: the only place and time that has had a day officially dated February 30. (They later changed to the Gregorian calendar in one hit in 1753.)

The Eastern Orthodox Church has February 29 as the feast day of eleven saints. It would seem that these saints drew the short straw, only being remembered every four years; but they are celebrated in non-leap years on an alternate date, usually February 28.

February 29th is perhaps best known as the day when women were traditionally allowed to propose to men, rather than the other way round. Although it might be expected that women can now do that on any day, societal habits and expectations die hard, and it provides an outlet for the all-too-common situation where the man might be quite happy to let current arrangements continue indefinitely, perhaps for decades, perhaps for the rest of his life, while the woman lacks the security that should be her due (the Editor might happen to know of such a situation).

The Editor regrets to report that he heard in his comparative youth of a young man who made sure to make himself scarce on 29th February.

The tradition is found in a number of countries, but traditional legend has it starting in fifth-century Ireland, when St Bridget is supposed to have negotiated it with St Patrick. In some versions of the story, having achieved the day, St Bridget is said to have used it to propose to St Patrick. He refused, but gave her a silk gown in compensation. In consequence, men who refuse women's proposals of February 29 are supposed to give her an expensive gift—a silk dress, or gloves (twelve pairs is sometimes stipulated: it is suggested

that these will hide the lack of a wedding ring), or in the twentieth century, a fur coat.

Supposedly the tradition became part of Scots law in 1288; while in England, since February 29 was not a legally-recognised day until 1752, the bar on women proposing supposedly did not apply then (perhaps).

It is also often said that women being able to propose on February 29 was to enable women to get married before Lent, when marriages did not take place. The Editor thinks this doubtful, because (a) more often than not, Lent has already started by February 29; and (b) even if it hadn't, there would have been not enough time for the traditional reading of the banns in church on three successive Sundays.

Ash Wednesday has never fallen on 29th February since the Gregorian calendar was first used, but it will do so in 2096. Shrove Tuesday will be on 29th February in 2028 (i.e., next leap year).

St Valentine's Day

This year Ash Wednesday happens to fall on St Valentine's Day, February 14. In a normal year, this happens only if Easter falls on April Fool's Day, April 1, but in a leap year, like this year, it happens if Easter falls on March 31. Either way, it is rare. In the 20th century Ash Wednesday fell on St Valentine's Day in only three years: 1923, 1934 and 1945. In the 19th century it likewise happened in only three years: 1866, 1872 and 1877. Notice how the years seem to be bunched up in a small part of the century? Let's try the 18th century: 1714, 1720, 1725 (assuming the Gregorian calendar). The 17th century (Gregorian): 1646, 1652, 1657. What about this century? 2018, 2024, 2029. Amazing! 22nd? 2170, 2176, 2181. 23rd? 2238, 2244, 2249. Astounding!

St Valentine's Day, 14th February in the West (6th/30th July in the Eastern churches), is a most unusual saint's day, because

- (a) It is one of only a couple of saint's days that are widely recognised in the modern Anglophone world outside the church; and
- (b) It is not necessarily a day commemorating a St Valentine: it may be commemorating up to **three** St Valentines, all of them martyred on February 14. (In addition there are about **eleven** other St Valentines, seven of them martyrs: it was a common name in late antiquity. There is also a ninth-century Pope Valentine, and a female St Valentina.)

The trouble is that we don't know much for sure about any of these three St Valentines. They are:

1. **St Valentine of Rome**: A priest in Rome, martyred for evangelism by Emperor Claudius Gothicus (Claudius II): his fate is said to have been sealed when he tried to convert the emperor himself. He was executed outside the Flaminian Gate on the *Via Flaminia* (a common place for executions) on February 14, 269. (Or, according to an alternate account, slightly earlier, under Emperor Gallienus.) He was buried that day in the *Via Flaminia*; at the site of his grave there was later erected a basilica church, and catacombs.

The *Via Flaminia* was the main road from Rome running north over the Apennine mountains to Rimini on the Adriatic coast, and is still the basis of the modern SS3 route. It was built around 220 BC by the then censor Gaius Flaminius, and underwent major repairs several times since, first by the Emperor Augustus. It started at the *Porta Fontinalis*, a gate in ancient Rome's Servian Wall, and crossed the Field of Mars (*Campus Martius*), originally a public training-ground and pasture, in a straight line. In 271–275 AD the further-flung Aurelian Walls were built, which it crossed by the *Porta Flaminia*, the Flaminian Gate, now the *Porta del Popolo*. The part between these two gates became known as *Via Latus*, 'The Broadway'. It was considered an especially wide road then: it is in fact only 10 metres wide and in modern times carried a single lane of traffic in each direction, though it is now largely pedestrianised. It is now called *Via del Corso*. The Anglican church in Rome, 'All Saints', is nearby but not on the road.

From the Flaminian Gate the *Via Flaminia* (still called that now) continues in a straight line to the Tiber, which it crosses by a bridge, the *Pons Mulvius*, the Milvian Bridge. The present bridge was built in 109 BC, but has been through many repairs and renovations since. On the road near this bridge, Emperor Constantine is supposed to have had the vision of the Chi-Rho on 28 October 312, which led to his victory over Maxentius at the 'Battle of the Milvian Bridge' that same day, and ultimately led to the Christianisation of the Roman Empire. (According to another account, he had the vision in Gaul long before.)

The Milvian Bridge is also known in modern times as the original source, in 2006, of the 'love lock' pestilence, in which lovers put locked padlocks on bridges. It is also a site of organised football violence, in which A.S. Roma fans, in very Italian style, lie in wait for opposing fans and stab them in the buttocks.

After the Milvian Bridge the *Via Flaminia* formally left Rome. About 65 km to the north as the crow flies, it reaches *Narnia* (in modern Italian, *Narni*), an important town of great antiquity. C.S. Lewis saw this town in Plate 8 of Murray's *Small Classical Atlas*, ed. G.B. Grundy (1904), which he acquired when he was reading the classics with Mr Kirkpatrick at Great Bookham (1914–1917), and liked the sound of it. At Narnia the *Via Flaminia* crosses the river Nera on what may be the highest bridge the Romans ever constructed. It had four arches, of which just one survives today. Then the original road went north, but a later deviation, the *Via Flaminia Nova*, goes north-east for a bit, to *Interamna* (more formally, *Interamna Nahars*), now *Terni*, before later rejoining the old road.

Valentine's remains were later translated into another church, and what is claimed to be his skull is now in the Basilica of Santa Maria in Cosmedin, Rome. In the Eastern Orthodox churches, his feast day is 6th July.

2. **St Valentine of Terni:** A Bishop of Interamna, said to have been martyred under Emperor Aurelian on 14th February 273, and also buried on the *Via Flaminia*, but at

a different distance from the city. His relics are at the Basilica of Saint Valentine in Terni; his head was also claimed to be in the abbey of New Minster, Winchester. In the Eastern Orthodox churches, his feast day is 30th July.

3. **An African St Valentine:** Martyred in the Roman province of Africa (North Africa) with a number of companions, but nothing else is known about him.

There are many stories of St Valentine, but some are very late and are almost certainly pious fictions. The earliest sources tell us little more than that he existed and was martyred. The feast of St Valentine on February 14 was first established in 496 by Pope Gelasius I, who included Valentine among those '... whose names are justly revered among men, but whose acts are known only to God'. Even the earliest stories that are more than this are still late, and often do not clearly distinguish between Valentine of Rome and Valentine of Terni. It is said that a judge Asterius brought to Valentine the judge's adopted blind daughter. Valentine restored the girl's sight by prayer and laying on of hands. 'Immediately humbled, the judge asked Valentine what he should do. Valentine replied that all of the idols around the judge's house should be broken, and that the judge should fast for three days and then undergo the Christian sacrament of baptism. The judge obeyed and, as a result of his fasting and prayer, freed all the Christian inmates under his authority. The judge, his family, and his forty-four member household of adult family members and servants were baptised' (and in some versions joined Valentine in martyrdom). (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Valentine)

A still later story, with a connexion to the association of St Valentine with love, says that he conducted clandestine marriages to save men from being drafted into the army (or alternatively, for army men who were forbidden to marry). However historians have been unable to find any evidence that married men were immune from serving, and definite evidence that army men could have wives. It also seems doubtful that the Emperor would consider such marriages valid.

Some modern historians, noting that both Valentine of Rome and Valentine of Terni are supposed to have been martyred on 14th February at around the same time, and that both were reported to have been buried on the *Via Flaminia*, have conjectured that they were in fact the same man. Perhaps the Bishop of Interamna was martyred in Rome? Readers will have already noted a discrepancy, in that Valentine of Rome is supposed to have been martyred by the Flaminian Gate in 269 (or earlier), when the Aurelian Walls had not yet been built and the Flaminian Gate would presumably not have existed. It has also been suggested that the Valentine who is commemorated in the inscription on the Valentinian catacombs basilica may have been a donor-patron rather than a martyr.

The Roman Catholic Church now only recognises one St Valentine as commemorated on 14th February, presumably accepting that Valentines 1 and 2 are the same, and totally ignoring the African Valentine. However the Orthodox Church continues to give separate feast days for Valentine of Rome and Valentine of Terni (while also ignoring the African St Valentine).

All later stories have little historical merit, and may be an attempt to find some sort of link between St Valentine and secular love, rather than love for Jesus. The reason for associating St Valentine's Day with romantic love is not at all clear. In Slovenia the day of love was until recently St Gregory's day (March 12), or St Vincent's day (February 22). The patron saint of love (or at least of finding a spouse) is St Anthony of Padua (June 13).

Some have associated the modern Valentine's Day with the Roman festival of Lupercalia, held on February 13–15 in honour of Juno, a goddess of marriage and childbirth (among other functions). This festival involved the sacrifice of a goat and a dog by chosen young men, who then cut thongs (*februa*) from the skin of the animals and ran anticlockwise around the Palatine hill, naked or near-naked. Plutarch wrote:

At this time many of the noble youths and of the magistrates run up and down through the city naked, for sport and laughter striking those they meet with shaggy thongs. And many women of rank also purposely get in their way, and like children at school present their hands to be struck, believing that the pregnant will thus be helped to an easy delivery, and the barren to pregnancy.

(https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Caesar*.html#61)

However the association of Valentine's day with romantic love did not appear until nearly a millennium after Lupercalia ceased being celebrated. It first appears in the late 14th century in the context of birds choosing their mates on that day, in the writings of several English poets, such as Geoffrey Chaucer and John Gower and John Clanvowe, but in the context of humans by French poets such as Oton III de Grandson (who writes of both birds and people) and Christine de Pizan and Jean de Garenceières. Chaucer is believed by many to be the first (though this is not certain, and others think it was Oton III de Grandson), and may well have invented it. In his poem *Parlement of Foules*, written probably in 1382, he writes:

*For this was on seynt Valentynes day
Whan every foul cometh there to chese his make
(For this was on Saint Valentine's day/When every fowl comes there to choose his match).*

Henry Ansgar Kelly has proposed that Chaucer was in fact thinking of the feast day of St Valentine of Genoa, who was Bishop of Genoa from about 295 and died in 307. His feast-day was on 3rd May according to Kelly, but catholic.org has it as 2nd May. The poem seems to be based on the engagement of Chaucer's employer, the young King Richard II of England, to Anne of Bohemia, which was signed on 2nd May 1381 and possibly announced the next day. An especially strong argument for a May date is in the Prologue of Chaucer's later *The Legend of Good Women*, in which the narrator explicitly states twice that his setting is at the beginning of May, and soon afterwards says of the birds:

* For an excellent discussion of the Grandson vs Chaucer question, see <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/nicholson-grenier-winter-granson-poems-introduction>

*And, for the newe blisful somers sake,
 Upon the braunches ful of blosmes softe,
 In hir delyt, they turned hem ful ofte,
 And songen, "blessed be seynt Valentyn!
 For on his day I chees yow to be myn,
 Withouten repenting, myn herte swete!"
 And therwith—al hir bekes gonnen mete,
 Yelding honour and humble obeisaunces
 love, and diden hir other observaunces
 That longeth unto love and to nature;
 Construeth that as yow list, I do no cure.*

Grandson is less clear, but his poems also seem more consistent with a May date.

On the other hand it has been pointed out that at that time, since the Julian calendar then in use had moved forward with respect to the seasons, 14th February then was equivalent to 23rd February now, a time when some birds do start nesting in England.

At any rate, very quickly 14th February, quite possibly in error, began to be used as the date to celebrate romantic love, slotting in well with the concept of Courtly Love that had started a couple of centuries earlier. A document *Charter of the Court of Love* was supposedly issued by Charles VI of France at Mantes-la-Jolie in 1400. Supposedly every February 14, members should meet for a feast, and male guests were to bring a love song of their own composition, to be judged by an all-female panel. There were also to be poetry competitions, jousting and dancing, and the attending ladies would hear and rule on disputes from lovers. Although it has been suggested that this was all invented by Charles' queen, Isabeau of Bavaria, it is also reported that the thing took off, and achieved 950 members, including the King. Perhaps the February 14 date is all due to Queen Isabeau.

Not long after we find the first known Valentine's Day card, in the form of a love poem sent by Charles, Duke of Orléans while imprisoned in the Tower of London after being captured by the English during the Battle of Agincourt in 1415. Written to his wife Bonne of Armagnac, the rondeau starts (and twice repeats):

*Je suis desja d'amour tanné
 Ma tres douce Valentinée*

(I am already sick of love, My very gentle Valentine)

The earliest-known example in English is from February 1477, written by Margery Brewes to her future husband John Paston, calling him 'my right well-beloved Valentine'.

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* said in 1913 'The custom of choosing and sending valentines has of late years fallen into comparative desuetude', but it appears to have since revived. It seems to the Editor rather unnecessary: people in love are in no need of encouragement, while those unlucky in love will not appreciate being reminded of the fact. Perhaps Ash Wednesday is a better memorial of those who gave up their lives for the love of Christ.

* Mantes-la-Jolie, a town on the Seine just outside Paris, will always be associated in the Editor's mind with an incredibly disgusting Youth Hostel he stayed at there for some days with his wife in 1982 on their Grand Tour. By the next year it was no longer on the official list.

The St Paul's Parrot by Sarah Coe

As part of sharing time in the all-age service on Sunday 7th Jan, it was reported that a young rainbow lorikeet had temporarily joined the welcoming team at St Paul's Cathedral on the previous Friday.

The incident occurred on Friday afternoon, when a young couple entered St Paul's and approached the verger-concierge with the bird wrapped in a sweater. They alleged they thought the bird had a broken leg, but could not provide care as they had an appointment. Could St Paul's help the bird?

The concierge, Sarah Coe, contacted clergy Rev'd Canon Robert Vun, and the bird was soon relocated to a towel in a box and fed water by Vun. The bird, previously quiet and still, became animated, and its legs and wings appeared sound. Coe and fellow verger Anthony Drake attempted to release the bird, to the delight of passing visitors, but it sat upon a box and would not fly. One visitor remarked that it was a fledgling that hadn't learned to fly.

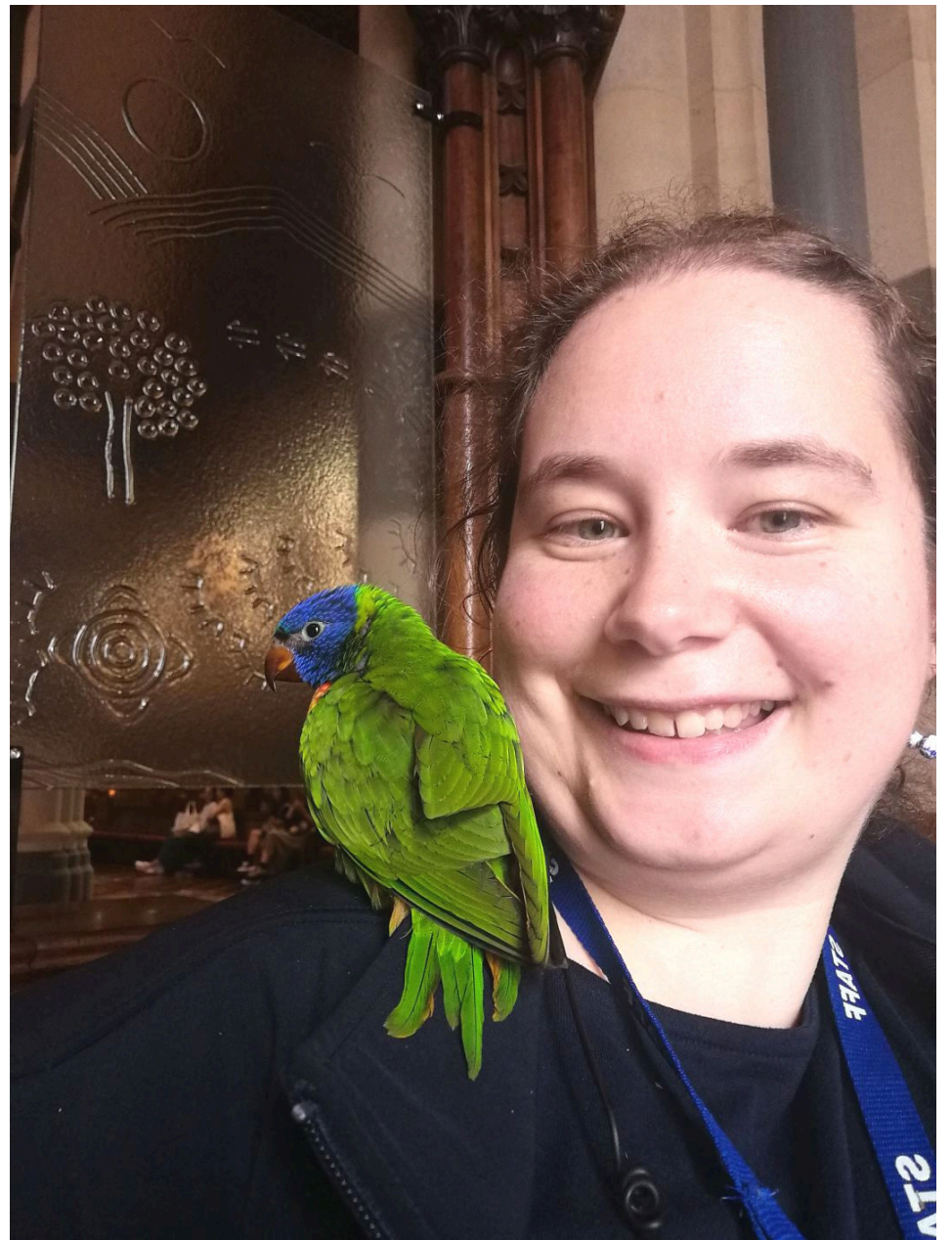


Thus the young lorikeet became a welcomer at St Paul's for a couple of hours.

Miss Coe said she had often claimed that a parrot would be a desirable addition to the welcoming team. A talking parrot could learn useful phrases such as 'Welcome!' 'Anglican, not Catholic', and 'No photos during services, thank you!'

Alas, despite otherwise good behaviour the lorikeet did not learn to speak, so it was taken to Lort Smith Animal Hospital to be transferred to an authorised wildlife carer.

After all, it is illegal to raise native birds if you are not an authorised wildlife carer.



Gwen Matheson

13th Dec 1936 – 19th Jan 2024



Gwen was a strong member of St Andrew's. Her funeral was held on 25th January at St John's, with Helen McAlley officiating, as Denise was on leave.

Helen started by reading a message Denise sent:

Hi everyone,

Gwen was a great Christian lady whose faith in Christ and love of her family and her church family were clear to everyone who knew her.

I first met Gwen at St Andrew's when I came to be the vicar at Banyule. She was always someone who loved being part of the church community and who was interested in other people.

I also love the fact that Gwen told a good story and had a great laugh.

I'm praying for you all today as you farewell your beloved Mum, sister, grandmother and sister in Christ, Gwen. May you all know the comfort of our loving God today, as you commit Gwen into the arms of her loving Saviour Jesus.

Love and prayers,
Denise xx

After a prayer, we sang *Breathe on me, Breath of God*, prayed more, and then there were the eulogies. Gwen's daughter Jennie Coustley said:

Mum was a warm, compassionate and vibrant woman. She was our best friend, but was always one step in front of me.

Our mother taught us many things as young kids: good manners, respect, and sound moral values, which Susan, John and I have carried and always will carry on to our families.

Mum came to the Gold Coast in winter every year to visit with me. She loved going to the beach and just watching the ocean. We would catch up with John's family as well near our birthdays, always having many laughs and good times.

Just recently mum went to the Crown, one week before she went into hospital. Mum had such a fun time with Susan (as she loves to play on the pokies now and then).

I am so happy she got to go and enjoy her time at the Crown with Sue. Mum mentioned this and said, 'Thank God I got to experience the time away with Sue'.

Mum has always been our support, strength and comfort when times have been tough. I don't know how we will cope without our best friend; it leaves a massive void in our lives. But I will draw strength from the

things she has taught me, and be there for Susan and John.

Rest in peace, Mum, with Dad.

Gwen's brother Henry Klopper said:

Gwen was the eldest of seven siblings – myself (Henry), Graeme (dec), Jean, Helen, Marion and David.

Gwen was born on 13-12-1936 in Bairnsdale at Sister Bull's hospital.

Gwen spent her younger years in Bairnsdale; she attended 754 Primary State School, then went on to Bairnsdale High School in Dalmahoy Street.

As our Mum was a very busy lady looking after all of us kids, Gwen was a great help to her working in the orchard picking cherries and milking the cows until I was old enough to milk the cows for her.

When Gwen was old enough to learn to drive, John Comley our local grocer tried to teach her but, in the end, he gave up.

Gwen was a very good hockey player and all through her life she loved her sports, from barracking for her beloved Cats to being a vocal supporter of her son John when he played football.

Gwen's first job was working for Pallot's Jewellers. She worked for them for some time before she moved to Melbourne. She attended the Presbyterian Baby's Home in Camberwell where she studied and worked as a mothercraft nurse. I can remember going to the babies' home to see Gwen and meeting all of the friends she worked with. Some of the nurses came back to Bairnsdale to help Gwen celebrate her 21st birthday.

Gwen met the love of her life, Bruce Matheson, whilst he was working as a policeman in Bairnsdale.

Gwen married her sweetheart Bruce at St John's Church Bairnsdale and had their reception at the Picnic Point Hall. The local hall committee helped Mum with the catering.

I can remember visiting Gwen, Bruce and their kids Susan and John at their first flat in Kooyong. They then moved to 216 Oriel Rd [West Heidelberg] where their family was extended to another child, Jenny. Gwen and Bruce lived at Oriel Rd for the rest of their lives.

Gwen and Bruce had a great and wonderful life together with their three kids.

I can remember many camping trips with them and Jean and Lin to Ocean Grange Beach where we all camped in tents and had a great time.

Gwen was happy in her garden, she loved to spend time in it, just like her sisters and myself.

Gwen was involved in a lot of charity work and also got involved in club activities, as Gwen loved to dance.

Gwen was a great mother to Susan, John and Jenny. Mother in-law to Roger, Michelle and Jim. Grandmother to Joshua, Stephanie, Jarrod, Jade, Ben, Bradley and Bree. Great-grandmother to Matilda and Henry.

* I presume this is a reference to Sr Alice Bull, born Bairnsdale 1881, served from July 1915 with the Australian Army Nursing Service on the Hospital Ship *Kanowna* in England and France. Discharged medically unfit 1 June 1919, died on a visit to a nephew in Perth 24 July 1951.

She was very proud of you and loved you all very much.

Gwen was a very caring big sister.

We will miss you Gwen but you certainly will not be forgotten.

Gwen's grandchildren Ben and Jade Matheson said:

Hi everyone, for those who are not aware, my name is Ben and this is Jade, we are grandchildren of Gwen and Bruce Matheson and children of John and Michele. We stand here in front of you today on behalf of all the grandchildren and great-grandchildren to celebrate grandma's life and reflect on the impact she had on us all.

When deciding how to start or figure out what to say, I found it incredibly difficult. I struggled to write something that truly reflected what grandma meant to us all. No matter what I tried or who I spoke to, there was nothing said that could express how important she was to us and how loved she made us all feel. I started to think of the things that reminded me of Grandma and I was drawn back to a video Aunty Susan shared with me. This video was of Grandma at the footy watching her beloved Geelong cats. Now for those of you who haven't seen this video or do not know what I'm talking about, just picture our well-respected, well-mannered, polite and caring grandmother swinging her navy-and-white scarf around like a helicopter belting the Geelong theme song with a smile from ear to ear after a big win.

So I had come to the realisation of what better way to reflect and celebrate grandma's life than like she did that night at the G with a reflection based around the lyrics of the Geelong Team Song.

We are Geelong the greatest team of all.

She was our grandmother, one of the greatest of them all.

A grandmother so kind and caring. A grandmother whose hugs were as tight and warm as the sheets she tucked you into. A grandmother who sat and listened to whatever you needed her to. Whether it was jumping on the bed in the morning between her and papa to interrupt the morning news, out in her beautiful garden whilst she was trying to water and care for papa's beloved bonsais, in the kitchen distracting her whilst she attempts to measure quantities of ingredients for her famous mint balls, pav or sponge kisses, or even whilst her Cats were playing Friday night footy, she always found time to stop, listen and provide guidance or support where required.

We are Geelong we're always on the ball

Boy was Grandma always on the ball, especially when it came to sport. Whether it was keeping up with the footy and her beloved Cats through the winter; or the cricket, basketball and tennis in the summer. If it had a ball and it was televised no doubt Grandma was watching it up in the stands, courtside or at home watching it on the TV. This love of sport is a legacy that has been passed on through us grandkids.

The next line of the song reads: *We play the game, as it should be played At home or far away*

Boy did our grandma live her life how it should be lived. I'm not too sure Grandma could have got too much more out of her life. She took every opportunity to get to the footy,

basketball or tennis. She was forever volunteering her time at the church, loved spending time in her garden, taking on the enormous task of looking after Papa's bonsais, and of course how could I not mention her love of having a cheeky little play on the pokies. Something she was doing right up until a couple of weeks ago, where she even had one last win!

What was even more impressive was that Grandma continued to do this even through her challenges with her health. No matter how many times she was knocked down or made to endure things that no one should, she just kept coming back, stronger than ever before. She just kept loving us, letting us know that she was there and if we ever needed her, we could count on her to listen and comfort.

The second part of the lyric where it references home and away really resonated with me as it did not matter whether we were at her home in Melbourne or far away in QLD or WA, Grandma's love and compassion was felt. It didn't take much to make her happy – a phone call, a card, a visit, or a kiss before saying goodbye. She lived to make our lives better and was proud of each and every one of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

The final part of the song states
*Our banners fly high, from dawn to dark.
 Down at Kardinia Park*

Grandma's banner definitely flew high from dawn to dark, but this wasn't at Kardinia Park, this was at Oriel Road. The love we received from Grandma will never fade. The memories with her are forever embedded into our mind as some of our favourites. Grandma left traces in everyone and every second that was spent with you made us all stronger. We will miss sitting in your beautiful garden with you in the sun but now you're tasked with looking after God's garden, and surely after looking after Papa's bonsais that should be child's play.

To finish, I want to share with you some words from a wise little boy, Grandma's great-grandchild and my son Henry. In Grandma's last moments I didn't have any words to explain. It was Henry who explained to me what was going to happen. He began explaining that Grandma would not be going up to the stairs by herself, but in fact Papa would be coming down to collect her to go to the stairs together. He explained that Grandma would be telling Papa stories of Henry and Tilly, as Papa had not had the chance to meet them. He also reassured me that even though Papa hadn't met his great-grandchildren he had been watching, and now Grandma and Papa would be forever watching over all of us together.

She was a special lady, a proud grandmother and great-grandmother, a loving mother, devoted wife, dependable sister and aunt as well as a valued friend. Whether you sit here

today as family or friends, there will be memories much like ours. They are good memories, something we'll always have to cherish. It isn't often in our lives that we come across someone so special that stays with you forever. Grandma was that kind of person.

We love you, Grandma.

We heard Psalm 23, and John 14:1-6. Helen pointed out that Jesus, facing death on a cruel cross, shortly to ascend to heaven, wanted to assure his disciples that there is a heaven. His death on the cross makes it possible for us to go there, something we are free to accept or reject. Helen was glad Gwen had made the decision to accept.

Heaven seems distant to us, but Helen told a story of a four-year-old child who nearly died on the operating table, for whom heaven was an ordinary memory. He recognised his grandfather, whom he had never met, in a young photo but not an old one.

Like children on a car journey with their parents, we need to trust Jesus that he knows the Way.

Psalm 23 shows God's comforting presence. God has provided a beautiful home for those who love him.

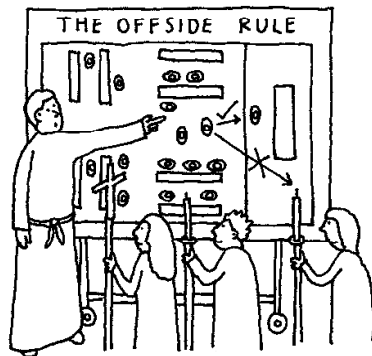
We prayed more, sang *Abide with me*, and farewelled Gwen.

FOOTBALL

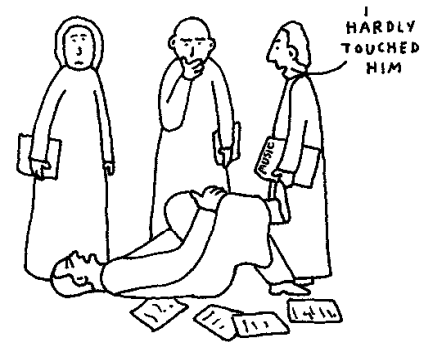
LESSONS THE CHURCH COULD LEARN



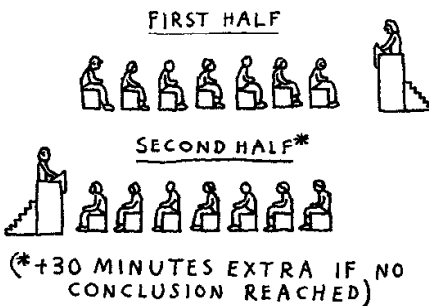
TRY TO AVOID OWN GOALS



IT IS IMPORTANT TO EXPLAIN THE REGULATIONS



IT IS ACCEPTABLE TO EXAGGERATE INJURIES



CHANGING ENDS AT HALF TIME ADDS VARIETY



PUNDITS DON'T ALWAYS KNOW WHAT THEY ARE TALKING ABOUT



CHANTING



TRAVELLING GREAT DISTANCES



WEARING THE KIT



STICKER ALBUMS

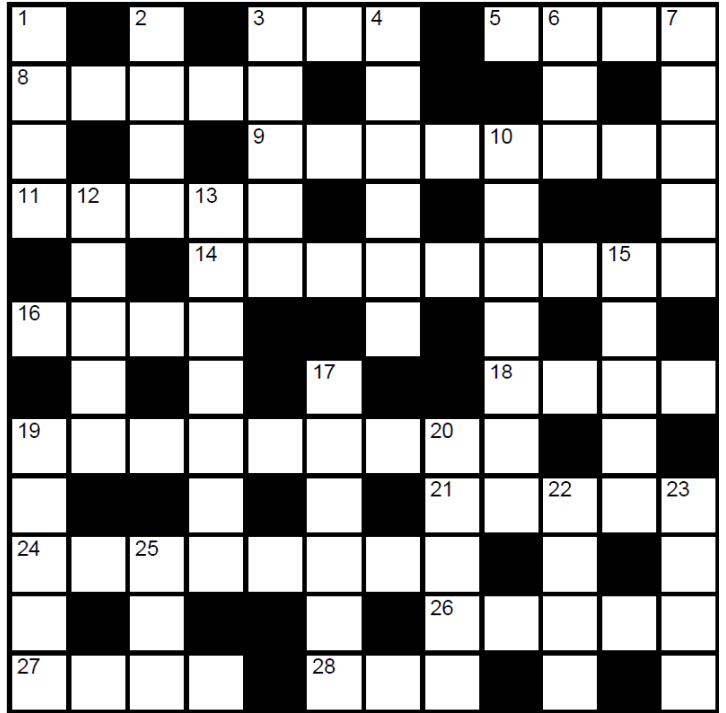
IT IS GOOD TO DEMONSTRATE ENTHUSIASM

Across

- 3 Jewel (3)
- 5 Birthright owner (4)
- 8 City of the Philistines (5)
- 9 Like Trophimus (8)
- 11 Fruit of the vine (5)
- 14 Purity (9)
- 16 Cast to make decisions (4)
- 18 Like the curtain of the temple (4)
- 19 A Mary present at the crucifixion (9)
- 21 Hunting weapon (5)
- 24 Tribe from the line of Joseph (8)
- 26 Marriage (5)
- 27 Latter part of the day (4)
- 28 Male sheep (3)

Down

- 1 King of the Amalekites (4)
- 2 Region (4)
- 3 Vegetation colour (5)
- 4 Husband of Ruth (6)
- 6 Judge of Israel (3)
- 7 Wash lightly (5)
- 10 Part of Samson's riddle (7)
- 12 Maid in Mary's house (5)
- 13 Province in Asia visited by Paul (7)
- 15 Ship's freight (5)
- 17 Nearer (6)
- 19 Plain near Hebron (5)
- 20 Prophet foretelling the destruction of Nineveh (5)
- 22 Weather experienced by Noah (4)
- 23 This drove away the plague of locusts (4)
- 25 Noah, alternative spelling (3)



by Philologus

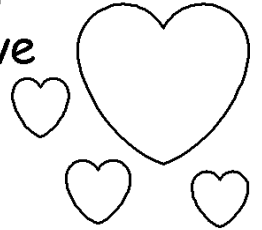
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Unscramble the letters to find the words in our

Valentines & Love Anagram

(Apologies for American spelling)

www.dltk-kids.com



- aalswy _____
- acdiilnnootu _____
- dgo _____
- aceilps _____
- aaegp _____
- corss _____
- eeeimns _____
- ceprst _____
- beghinor _____
- efgiory _____

L F K R H B S N A I C I S U M
 U L O E C O V E N A N T E P E
 F O O W I T N E S S E S S A C
 I W B O R E C E P T I O N R I
 T E T H I S H L Y S S S E E R
 U R S S N E U S G M U E C N Y
 A S E T G V R L G O O P I T N
 E N U S B I C I I N S O L S O
 B A G I E T H G C E I O N V M
 O M N N A A I A G H V R B O I
 U T I A R L K A A E E E O W R
 Q S C G E E S L L Y T R O S T
 U E N R R R T S A T G R N I A
 E B A O O A I R E T S I N I M
 T S D C R A P R I E S T F I G

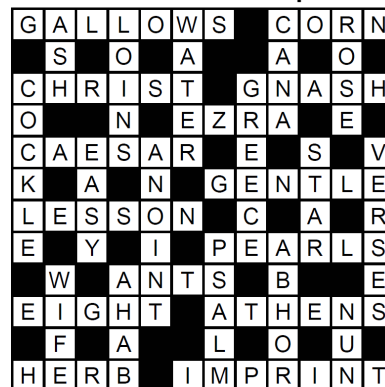
Bible Word Search – The Wedding Ceremony

All the words listed below are in the puzzle – left, right, up, down or diagonally. Find each word and circle each letter of the words you find. After you have found all the words, the leftover letters form the **mystery answer**.

https://www.christianbiblereference.org/ws_WeddingCeremony_0.htm

- Aisle, Altar, Beautiful, Best man, Better, Bouquet, Cake, Church,
- Corsages, Covenant, Dancing, Flowers, Gifts, Groom, Guest
- book, Honeymoon, License, Love, Matrimony, Minister,
- Musicians, Organist, Parents, Poorer, Prayer, Priest, Reception,
- Relatives, Religious, Rice, Richer, Ring Bearer, Rings, Shower,
- Veil, Vows, Witnesses, Worse

Answers to last month's puzzles



Bible Word Search mystery answer:
SWALLOWED

Last month's anagram:

hidden word:

LIKENESS



- a d e k n r s s DARKNESS
- a a i l m n s ANIMALS
- a e e h n v HEAVEN
- a e h r t EARTH
- a r s s t STARS
- b d i s r BIRDS
- f h i s FISH
- g h i t LIGHT

Baby Jesus – Our Wonderful Saviour

Advent 4, Christmas Eve

9.30 am Holy Spirit all-age service

Nine lessons and carols

Sermon by Helen McAlley

Has anyone had a new baby in the family recently?

It can be a most wonderful time. And we have to think about what name we will give the baby.

Many years ago, I was expecting my 4th baby. We had three older children and we decided to sit down with them and ask what name we should give the baby. We had a family meeting. Our daughter Sophie was going to kindergarten at the time and she had a friend called Lucie. Our son had a friend called Lucille. I remembered that my grandmother's name was Lucy and that is the name we gave to our precious new baby girl.

Many, many years ago, another very precious little baby was born. Angels told shepherds that he had been born. The shepherds were doing their job out in the fields one night, looking after their sheep, because that is what shepherds do, and suddenly an angel was with them. They had never seen an angel before and the Bible says that they were really afraid. So the first thing that the angel said to them was, 'Don't be afraid.' God never wants us to be afraid. He loves us and is always with us caring for us so that we never need to be afraid.

The angel went on to explain that he was bringing good news – good news that would bring great joy to everyone in the whole world. He went on to explain that in the town of Bethlehem a special baby had been born. God had long promised to send this baby and, when He grew up, this little baby would have a special job to do. He would save people from their sins.

We all do wrong things called sin, but this baby Jesus grew up and took the punishment for the wrong things that everyone has ever done by dying on a cross for us. And He rose again from the dead. He was the eternal Son of God who had always lived in heaven with God the Father. But now He came to earth as a tiny baby with this special job to do.

The angel said to the shepherds, 'You'll know I have been telling the truth when you find this new little baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger'. A manger is where the animals would feed.

Then suddenly there was with the angel a whole lot of other angels, praising God. Wouldn't it have been wonderful to have been there with them that night? They would have been filled with awe and wonder.

When the angels had gone the shepherds said to each other, 'Let's go to Bethlehem straightaway to see this wonderful thing that has happened'. So they went immediately and found Mary and Joseph, and Baby Jesus lying in a manger or feeding trough, just as the angels had said. They would have worshipped Him and then they went out and told everyone that they could about this wonderful thing that had happened, this wonderful baby sent from God the Father.

My new baby girl was called Lucy. The baby in the manger was called Jesus which means 'God saves us'. Can we come with open hearts to Jesus who is alive today and ask Him to forgive our sins or those wrong things we have done and also ask Him to be with us forever. Jesus has a home in heaven prepared for those who love Him and He loves each of us very much.

All babies are special but this baby was extra special, our Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God.

The Word Became Flesh

Christmas Day

9.30 am Holy Spirit

Isaiah 52:7–10; John 1:1–14

Sermon by Helen McAlley

John 1:1–14

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. 8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

PREPARING FOR CHRISTMAS

A very merry Christmas to everyone. It's always a busy time leading up to Christmas and it's so easy for us in that busyness to forget the 'reason for the season' which of course is to remember the birth of our wonderful Lord Jesus. We have had to do Christmas shopping, getting just the right presents for our loved ones, the cards, the tree, the cooking etc. We are very conscious at times like this that we only have so much time to do everything and we may have even had moments of despair that that we were not going to get through all those things that we deemed necessary. In such moments, I sometimes affirm that text of Paul from Philippians, 'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me' (Phil 4:13). It doesn't mean we can do everything, but it means that we can do all those things that the Lord has called us to do. Sometimes He shows us that there are things that we do not need to do. At other times, He seems to expand the time so that we can fit everything in including those things that are unexpected.

A DIFFERENT CHRISTMAS STORY

Our gospel reading today is from the gospel of John, who tells the Christmas story in a different way from the other evangelists. John does not write about Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus, about the stable smelling of the animals, the manger and the swaddling clothes

or the visit of the shepherds to the newborn Jesus, to Mary and Joseph. Nor is there mention of the wise men from the East.

IN THE BEGINNING

Rather, John begins his gospel with the words 'In the beginning' just as the writer of Genesis does. And both writers seek to go back before time began. With our constant consciousness of time, it's difficult for us to understand a time when time was not, and even that phrase does not really make sense, 'a time when there was no time'. In a similar way, it's very difficult for us to think of a future when there will be no more time, when we will not need watches, clocks or calendars. But before time as we know it, there was God and it was God who gave us the gift of time way back when He said, 'Let there be ...'. It was at the moment of creation that time began. And John tells us that way back there, before the beginning of creation, was 'the Word'.

THE WORD OF GOD

John refers to Jesus as 'the Word'. He says, 'The Word was with God and He was God'. The words 'with God' suggest to us that Jesus was distinct from God the Father and the words 'was God' show us that like God the Father, Jesus was also God in the fullest sense. The Father and the Son are two members of the Holy Trinity, the third member being the Holy Spirit who is also equal to the Father and the Son.

THE PRE-EXISTENCE OF JESUS

Jesus did not just come into existence as that tiny baby in Bethlehem. He had always existed with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and John tells us that through Him all things were made. We affirm these ideas when we recite the Nicene Creed and we say:

*'We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
The only Son of God,
Eternally begotten of the Father,
God for God, Light from Light,
Of one being with the Father;
Through Him all things were made.
For us and our salvation
He came down from heaven,
Was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the
Virgin Mary
And became truly human'.*

'FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH'

John explains the Christian message with the words, 'And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.' The point of this verse is that, in the midst of our human frailty, God chose in infinite grace to enter our flesh and share with us the reality of being human in our world which is so corrupt and sinful. Into a world of pain, broken dreams, failures, sin and loss, God came to give us hope and an eternal future.

God did this of His own grace and free will. Grace means undeserved favour. We do not deserve God's grace or His favour. God would have been perfectly just had He simply allowed us to take the penalty or the consequences of our sins. But instead, He sent Jesus who emptied Himself of all His heavenly glory, became fully human and was obedient to God the Father even to death on the cross. And He did this so that we could go free. Jesus has taken the penalty for our sins and given us the gift of eternal life. Jesus died so that we might have an eternal home in heaven. Surely our response should be amazement, adoration, obedience and acceptance of the wonderful gift that we are offered.

'HIS OWN RECEIVED HIM NOT'

Is that how people respond to Jesus? Some of us do and our presence here today testifies that we love Jesus and are grateful for what He offers us. But not everyone wants to receive salvation. As we continue to read the passage in John's gospel, we find the words, *'He was in the world, and the world did not know Him. He came to what was His own and His own people did not accept Him.'* How can this be? The Lord of Glory is with His own people and they reject Him. It's like rejecting an invitation to have an audience with the king. And Jesus is so much more than any king or queen. He is King of kings and Lord of lords.

Why do people reject Jesus? Maybe they want to be in charge of their own lives rather than serving Jesus. Maybe don't want to change their lives to be obedient to Him. We should pray for those who reject Jesus and ask Him to soften their hearts towards Him.

BORN ANEW AS GOD'S OWN CHILDREN

The wonderful Christmas message is that to all who receive Jesus, who believe on His name, He gives the power to become the very children of God. When we become God's children, it is not a physical birth. Rather it is something the Holy Spirit does within us. We sometimes describe it as being born again or born anew, because that is how Jesus described it when speaking to Nicodemus. It is a radical change in our lives. When we say a simple prayer asking the Lord Jesus to come into our lives, then we are born anew. And this is why our Lord Jesus Christ left His home in heaven and was born as that tiny baby in Bethlehem, to save us when we were helpless in our sins. He became poor that we might become rich.

PRAYER

Shall we pray: *Lord Jesus how gracious, kind and loving you are! We love you and want to receive all that you have for us. We pray that you would soften the hearts of those who have rejected you. Along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, may you be worshipped and glorified forever. Amen!*

Psalm 22:1–11

Christmas 1, 31st December

Is 61:10–62:3; Ps 22:1–11; Gal 4:4–7

Last sermon by Jonathan Lopez

Psalm 22:1–11

For the director of music. To the tune of 'The Doe of the Morning'. A psalm of David.

¹ *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

*Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?*

² *My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, but I find no rest.*

³ *Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the one Israel praises.*

⁴ *In you our ancestors put their trust;
they trusted and you delivered them.*

⁵ *To you they cried out and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.*

⁶ *But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by everyone, despised by the people.*

⁷ *All who see me mock me;
they hurl insults, shaking their heads.*

⁸ *'He trusts in the LORD,' they say,
'let the LORD rescue him.'*

*Let him deliver him,
since he delights in him.'*

⁹ *Yet you brought me out of the womb;*

you made me trust in you, even at my mother's breast.

¹⁰ *From birth I was cast on you;*

from my mother's womb you have been my God.

¹¹ *Do not be far from me,*

for trouble is near

and there is no one to help.

INTRO: Why Psalm 22?

— **We need to be constantly reminded where our trust should lie**

The Isaiah reading states we will be vindicated in the end as his people, and Galatians tells us we are a people who are redeemed. God faithfully accomplishes this. A God in whom we can trust.

My trust of God has been put to the test this year. As you all know I have been praying for and searching for a job and it has not been easy.

Today there is a lot of uncertainty, and the church is not immune to the surrounding circumstances of the economy: as there are businesses shutting down, so we also see church buildings doing the same. Church leaders have been signalling this for some time: some churches may not survive.

When hearing this forecast, even from our own bishops, it did not give me a lot of hope, to say the least. I really started to worry. I asked myself: will I have a job in ministry? What will I do if I don't? How will I provide for my family? Should have I taken up the opportunities offered last year?

These are similar expressions given to us by the Psalmist in Ps 22 today: feeling forsaken. The first part of this Psalm is said to read like a prayer, and the second part of Ps 22 is a declaration of praise.

Part 1: Deepening our trust

Has God rescued you? Ask yourself, has he?

We might think of action films like *Taken* or *Fargo* or some classics: *Alice in Wonderland*, *Chronicles of Narnia* and *Saving Private Ryan*, when thinking about stories of 'rescue': a quest, a mission—the lengths people go to save and rescue someone they love, a people who are oppressed.

I want us to think a bit deeper as to what is being conveyed by the psalm writer about God in this psalm:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

— the famous word of Jesus on the cross: *Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?* (Matt 27:46) Why would Jesus choose to repeat such words? They are desperate words. A desperate prayer. Very real and human emotions.

We can read this psalm and easily scratch this psalm off too: ah, a psalm for us to remember to trust God! But I challenge you: it is a call to go deeper with God: to know the great lengths God has gone to rescue you and he is ever-present and not distant.

I can identify, especially this year, with God feeling distant despite constant prayer. Can you?

It is easy to tell someone to trust God but we should do this with a deep conviction. Can we trust him when he seems distant? Have you?

Can we trust him when there seems to be no response to prayer? Have you yourself experienced this?

I must say that despite the wait for a job and what seemed to be no answers to prayer my faith in God has deepened. In the feeling of

being forsaken he was at work, which shows me he hears my prayers and knows what is best.

Which leads us to the question: why trust God?

Part 2: Why trust?

Ps 22 vv 3–5 says:

³ *Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the one Israel praises.*

⁴ *In you our ancestors put their trust;
they trusted and you delivered them.*

⁵ *To you they cried out and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.*

As his people we must remember who God is: our rescuer and King.

There have been faithful believers before you! This is evidenced by the simple fact that God sent someone to you to tell you about Jesus. Whoever shared the good news of Jesus with you trusted in God, right? They saw God at work just like Israel did in the Exodus.

Our testimonies of God are precious and important and we need to tell another generation (Ps 78:4). These are precious moments when God gives you a opportunity to share your very real experiences of God. Take that opportunity to tell them the truth of how he has been at work in your life.

Our trust will be tested. As I earlier expressed the process of praying, searching for a job – you start to question. The Psalmist expresses this very same in vv 6–8: our faith can be mocked and subjected to ridicule.

Have you been mocked for your trust in God? I had close friends mock me too about the predicament I was in this year. It's not a sector that has much growth: what future do you really see in churches?

So why did I choose to trust God rather than the wisdom of friends and the state of the economy? God kept reminding me of all the times he was faithful. All the times he had placed me in a stage of life in which *I did not have a clear answer about where he'd send me next*. He reminded me when I heard his call to leave the church I had been part of for 17 years, into a time of discerning, that I did not know where I was going but I needed to trust him as Lord and King of my life.

But.. Lord I have a family this time! But Lord what if _____? (I would have numerous questions in my mind.)

Why trust? He has been faithful, he has provided. IT IS PROVEN.

CONCLUSION:

Have we lost trust? Have we trusted in other things?

A very interesting statement made in this psalm is v 9: *'You made me trust in you'*.

The Psalmist seems to suggest that God's people are created and conditioned in such a way that trust in God is a part of who they are: baked in. Something that cannot be removed from that person. Unlike some of our earthly relationships where trust can be broken. Relationships might come and go. God's faithfulness and the father/child relationship remains regardless of the ups and downs. It is a relationship that lasts through eternity.

God has proven to be faithful in providing a job for me and has been generous. So generous. God WILL be faithful in providing all that is needed here at Banyule. He is not distant. He is listening to your prayers. Trust in his ways. Will you let God our rescuer, our King, our Father, do it his way?

Epiphany 1

7th January

Genesis 1:1–5; Mark 1:4–11

Sermon by Denise Nicholls

Genesis 1:1–5

¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

³ And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light 'day', and the darkness he called 'night'. And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day.

Mark 1:4–11

⁴ And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the River Jordan. ⁶ John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt round his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And this was his message: 'After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.'

⁹ At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'

New Beginnings! It's lovely, isn't it? The start of the year. An opportunity. If you've been watching any television cricket you'll see there are lots of ads for Weight Watchers, Jenny Craig, Lite n' Easy—all of those things. It's often a time of year when people make a new start. Whether it's on health and well-being—some people make New Year's resolutions. My hero in that is Beth Senn, Patrick's wife, who one year said, 'I think I'm going to moisturise more'—and that was her New Year's resolution.

Mine, one year, was to visit every café in Burgundy Street. [*Laughter*] I thought, 'Well done there! I did that!'

But it's lovely at new things. New school year: kids get so excited—'I get a new lunch box! I get a new pencil case! I get new things, new shoes! (Because their feet have grown by this much over the summer holidays.) And if you're ever one of those people who are up at sunrise—it's very, very rare for me, but I have done it a couple of times in my life—it's pretty amazing, isn't it? A fresh new day, and the sun bursting out.

Every day is a new beginning. But at the very beginning, God was there.

Our readings today from the lectionary are about Jesus' baptism with water, and the Holy Spirit coming down and hovering over him. But our Genesis reading reminds us that God was always there. The images that we have from the Genesis story speak about our God who has been beyond time and space, outside of time and space, and in fact the creator of time and space, of light and dark. And the image we have in Genesis is of the Spirit of God moving upon the face of the waters, even before the earth was formed.

We have this beautiful image about the God who creates and loves the world, and all the people in it.

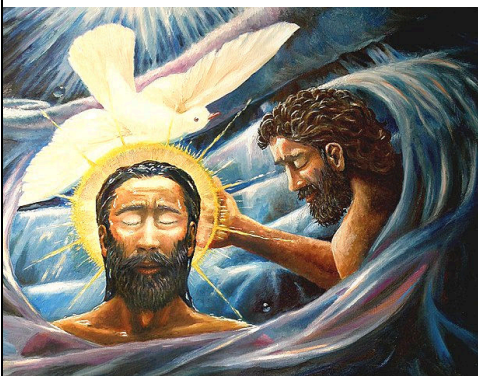
Of course just at Christmas we've had those wonderful images of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the breaking into humanity, in time and space, of God himself, in the person of that tiny babe in Bethlehem. And surrounding that birth, the immense announcement, to the shepherds, to the wise men, of God sending his Messengers to again break into humanity.



Melani Pyke, *Good News of Great Joy (Shepherds and Angels)* (2 Dec 2018); <https://www.pinterest.com.au/pin/167759154860158584/>

I love this image of the angels announcing to the shepherds. I think the artist has captured it well—the enormity and beauty of it: that announcement from Heaven to people of earth of this Messiah, the Saviour.

And so at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry—another beginning—water is there. The Spirit of God is there. The voice of God is there. For the Son of God is there.



David Zelenka, *Baptism of Christ (2005)*; <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Baptism-of-Christ.jpg>

We have this beautiful image, this appearing of God in the form of a dove, at the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry, as he is baptised by John the baptiser. We might think, why was Jesus baptised? In fact in the other gospel accounts, John says to him, 'I shouldn't be baptising you, you should be baptising me.' And yet Jesus, in this true act of humility, we see him being willing to be counted with sinners; and like the true Israelite, the true person of God, he too undergoes that repentance baptism, that water baptism, and he is counted with sinners.

And what happens in that account? Yes we have Jesus being baptised, and as he comes out of the water we have that wonderful account Mark tells us about—as *Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'* So in this act of humility, this beginning of his public ministry to proclaim the good news of forgiveness through him by God, God says of Jesus, 'You are my son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'

Just as God hovered by the Spirit over the face of the waters, and spoke love and creation into being, here at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, in the water: that refreshing water, symbolically washing away the sin of the world—as Jesus says he comes to do—as John prophesied that he will do: *Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.* And God says, as Jesus begins his public ministry, *with you I am well pleased. You are my son, whom I love.*

That beautiful image struck me this week, as I was reading and rereading these accounts in Genesis and at the beginning of Mark: that presence of water, of refreshment, of new beginning, of the very beginning of time with God—that beginning of Jesus' public ministry; and the new beginning that we can have every day.

So what does this mean for us? As God's people living in 2024—have you got used to writing that yet, or typing that? What does this mean for us? Well, if you're like me, and you love a refreshing dip in the ocean at this time of year—how refreshing it can be, to have just that pouring of the water over us in the sea. Even if you do it in the shower, how wonderful we feel! If you're someone who showers in the morning, it's that new day, it's the fresh feeling. If you're someone who showers at night, it's that sloughing off everything of the day, and feeling refreshed and cleansed. That refreshing water, that new beginning every day that we can have with God.

Jesus' baptism indicates to us that he is with us every day. Jesus so identifies with us, that he goes through human life: birth, baptism, death, like we all will; and resurrection, as we who trust him will as well. Jesus is with us every day, and so every day can be a new beginning. Because every day is a new beginning: a fresh start, every day.

Our creator is with us. Our redeemer, our brother, in Christ, Our Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour, is with us every day. It's a new beginning.



<https://www.edgeofchange.com/a-new-beginning/>

One of the things I love to do on holidays is to take, not one, but usually a few books too many—and then we go invariably go to a bookshop and buy another book. But the start

of a new book: isn't that wonderful, as you delve into something totally different. I've got one on my shelf that I'm taking with me, that Jan loaned me: Julia Baird's latest one called *Bright Shining*. I'm so tempted to just open it and start—but I'm not, I'm waiting till I'm on holidays, because I want that fresh feeling, that new beginning, that refreshment.

A new year! We don't know what the year holds before us, do we? We don't know what today or tomorrow will bring. But what we can know is that our God is with us, in everything. Every day is a new beginning with our God. Every day we wake up: 'Thank you God, that you are with me today. Thank you that you will be with me throughout the day, and into eternity'. The Creator who began the beginnings, who began everything, is with us every day. Be with us right to the end.

For me that's a great comfort, and I hope it is for you as well. So let's give thanks to God, that he is with us all the time.

Let's pray: *Our great God and loving Heavenly Father, we give you thanks and praise for this new day, that you have given us to enjoy. We thank you, our Creator, that you are with us every day. We thank you, Lord Jesus, that you sustain us every day by the power of your Spirit, and that you refresh us every day. We pray for refreshment this year: this day, and each day of this year. Lord, we pray that we would give thanks to you, every day we open our eyes; and ask that you would continue to be with us. Thank you for your promise. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

Turn your eyes upon God

Epiphany 2, 14th January

Isaiah 40:12–14, 21–31; Psalm 93;
Colossians 1:9–20, 28–29

Last sermon by Sarah Coe

Isaiah 40:12–14

¹² Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand,
or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens?
Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket,
or weighed the mountains on the scales
and the hills in a balance?

¹³ Who can fathom the Spirit of the LORD,
or instruct the LORD as his counsellor?

¹⁴ Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him,
and who taught him the right way?

Who was it that taught him knowledge,
or showed him the path of understanding?

Isaiah 40:21–31

²¹ Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

Has it not been told you from the beginning?

Have you not understood since the earth was founded?

²² He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth,
and its people are like grasshoppers.

He stretches out the heavens like a canopy,
and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

²³ He brings princes to naught
and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.

²⁴ No sooner are they planted,
no sooner are they sown,
no sooner do they take root in the ground,
than he blows on them and they wither,
and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.

²⁵ 'To whom will you compare me?

Or who is my equal?' says the Holy One.

²⁶ Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens:
who created all these?

*He who brings out the starry host one by one
and calls forth each of them by name.*

*Because of his great power and mighty strength,
not one of them is missing.*

²⁷ Why do you complain, Jacob?

Why do you say, Israel,

'My way is hidden from the LORD;
my cause is disregarded by my God'?

²⁸ Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.

²⁹ He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.

³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;

³¹ but those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.

Psalm 93

¹ The LORD reigns, he is robed in majesty;
the LORD is robed in majesty and armed with strength;
indeed, the world is established, firm and secure.

² Your throne was established long ago;
you are from all eternity.

³ The seas have lifted up, LORD,
the seas have lifted up their voice;
the seas have lifted up their pounding waves.

⁴ Mightier than the thunder of the great waters,
mightier than the breakers of the sea –
the LORD on high is mighty.

⁵ Your statutes, LORD, stand firm;
holiness adorns your house
for endless days.

Colossians 1:9–20

⁹ For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives,¹⁰ so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,¹¹ being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience,¹² and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.

¹³ For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.

¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Colossians 1:28–29

²⁸ He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. ²⁹ To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

Let's start with the passage in Isaiah. In Isaiah chapter 40, God is addressing Israel and calling on the people to look to him.

God begins by saying, '*Comfort, comfort my people. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.*' And then in verse 27 God asks: '*Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel, 'My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God?'*

The people of Israel feel abandoned. They think God isn't hearing them. They are struggling, they have been suffering, and they need comfort.

God is a God of comfort, a God who helps. And if we look earlier in chapter 40, we also find promises that speak of Jesus' coming: the Gospels of Luke and John both reference this chapter – 'A voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the Lord."'

But this time God's way of comfort is actually a challenge to them – and us – to focus on **who He is**. He doesn't provide answers. He doesn't even state clearly that in a few hundred years Jesus will come, nor does he say exactly when Jesus will return to judge the world. Look to God and trust in who he is, as he has revealed himself.

In poetic language God asks in verse 12:

¹² Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand,
or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens?
Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket,
or weighed the mountains on the scales
and the hills in a balance?

God himself is incredibly vast. He cares about the details, measuring and weighing. Remember that God knows how many hairs you have on your head? Remember that he knows when a sparrow falls? (*Matthew 10:29–31, Luke 12:6–7*)

Verses 13–14:

¹³ Who can fathom the Spirit of the LORD,
or instruct the LORD as his counsellor?
¹⁴ Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him,
and who taught him the right way?
Who was it that taught him knowledge,
or showed him the path of understanding?

Here God is asking rhetorical questions. He's pointing out that He is the ultimate source of knowledge and understanding. He is all-knowing.

Verses 22–23:

²² He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth,
and its people are like grasshoppers.
He stretches out the heavens like a canopy,
and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

²³ He brings princes to naught
and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.

This vast God rules over the earth.

Verses 25–26, 28:

²⁵ 'To whom will you compare me?
Or who is my equal?' says the Holy One.

²⁶ Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens:
who created all these?

*He who brings out the starry host one by one
and calls forth each of them by name.*

*Because of his great power and mighty strength,
not one of them is missing.*

²⁸ Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.

God is the creator of heaven and earth. He rules over the world from the beginning to the end of all history and watches as nations rise and fall and people live and die. He cares about the details, large and small. He is incredibly knowledgeable, incredibly vast in being, and incredibly powerful. He sustains all of creation, including us.

God is challenging the whole community, the nation of Israel, and calling them to focus on him and who he is, much like God challenges Job, if you remember Job's story, which we won't cover today.

Sometimes, for reasons we often do not understand at the time, God calls us to focus on him and let our circumstances and all the world's problems fade out for a bit. Sometimes we need a fresh view of God. Sometimes God knows we need to see the big picture, to know that no matter what we're going through, whether grief or chronic pain, struggling finances, anxiety over wars and disasters around the world – He knows, and He reigns over it all. Trust Him.

Now, this doesn't necessarily calm our anxieties, save us from our struggles, heal us, or take away our doubts and frustrations.

However, it is vital that we learn to trust God because of who he is. Even though it can feel very abstract and we don't really understand. We can't see him, for God is spirit. Unlike the apostle Thomas, we can't touch Jesus – at least, not now. But neither could the Israelites of Isaiah's time, several hundred years before Jesus came. Yet God asks them to focus on him.

Sometimes we need a big picture view of what is going on – and that big picture view is God. Sometimes, instead of God coming beside us, comforting and helping us and sympathising with our troubles – sometimes we need the big superhero God who says: 'Your problem? I know, but it's going to be OK! I've seen empires rise and fall. Focus on me and trust that I know what I'm doing! You will get through this – just look to me.'

We might say with the writer of Psalm 121: *I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.*

In Isaiah 40 and in Psalm 93, we see a God who is steadfast and faithful, incredibly powerful, holy, all-knowing and wise. We see a God who creates a universe, who watches over it and keeps it running. We see a majestic, almighty, strong God who reigns in power and authority over all other powers and authorities for all of time and space and eternity. With whom will you compare God?

When we say we believe, and we trust in the Lord Jesus, **who** are we trusting?

Let's explore that in Colossians, chapter one.

The apostle Paul is writing to the church at Colossae, a city in the region of what is now Turkey. He has never visited Colossae, but he has heard from a fellow worker, Epaphras, about the faith and love of the Colossian church and how the gospel, the good news of God's grace, is spreading. Well done, Colossians! We always thank God when we pray for you.

Now one reason why this letter is useful for us is because the people of Isaiah's time did not yet have Jesus. Paul and the other apostles all build on the writings of Old Testament Scripture even though it is Scripture,

because Jesus – in his coming, in his life, in his death, in his resurrection and reign, in and through his very identity – redefines and deepens our understanding of the Old Testament – including the passage in Isaiah.

So in verses 9–12, Paul tells the Colossians that he and his coworkers pray for them.

In summary, this is what they pray, and it is useful for us too:

God, fill the church with the knowledge of your will, through all the wisdom and understanding that the Holy Spirit gives.

So that: all Christians will live lives that please the Lord, by

1. bearing fruit in good works
2. growing in the knowledge of God
3. being strengthened by God's power for endurance and patience, and
4. giving joyful thanks that God has rescued them/us, and given us an inheritance in his kingdom.

That's a lot, but did you notice how much of that prayer depends on who God is? God, fill the church with the knowledge of your will. That we will please you. That we will know you, God, and grow in the knowledge you give to us. That you will strengthen us. That you, God, rescue us.

God, may we grow in our knowledge of you.

And then Paul starts telling us about God – and particularly about Jesus.

¹⁵*The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*

Now, I'll just clarify that in the Bible the word 'firstborn' is used in two different ways. One, your firstborn is your first child; two, firstborn is an expression to say that this person is pre-eminent or superior. In this case, Jesus is described as the firstborn of all creation and the firstborn from among the dead to say that he is superior over all creation, and superior over death and resurrection.

Paul tells us that Jesus, with God the Father, is creator, the maker of the universe. In Jesus all things were created. All things. The whole earth and all of heaven. Through Jesus all things were created, and for Jesus all things were created. Jesus is more than a human man, a wise teacher, or a prophet. Jesus is clearly identified with God. At least twice in the letter, Paul states that the fullness of God lives in Jesus. In Jesus, all things were created, and all things hold together in him – he sustains the world. There's a hint of the vastness of God that you get in Isaiah 40: the God who measures and weighs the world, the God who rules over the world and watches nations rise and fall and people live and die.

But Jesus is more than the mighty creator God who reigns in power for eternity. He is now and forever the head of the church. We, who once were God's enemies, are at peace and reconciled to God through Jesus, through his blood that was shed on the cross.

In Isaiah God is hinting to his people of the future coming of Jesus. And then He challenges Israel to think on Him, to realise how little they know, and how much he knows. He is the creator, the maker of the universe. He knows all that goes on, all has ever happened, and ever will happen. He watches nations rise and fall, He sees people live and die.

In Paul's prayer for the Colossians, he asks that they (and that we) may grow in the knowledge of God. And in Isaiah, God himself wants us to know him.

So my challenge for you today: is to look to God and meditate on who He is, as He has revealed himself to us.

Ask him to reveal himself to you. Read through the Bible and notice all the ways God meets human beings and reveals himself, including through Jesus. Notice the ways God reveals himself in relationship to us humans. Today we've seen glimpses of his vastness, his creative power, his attention to detail in measuring and weighing, his intelligence and knowledge, and how much he cares for us, even when we are his enemies.

See how God reveals himself as a husband. As a shepherd. As a warrior. As an avenger and a judge. As a healer. As the source of life. Look out for all the titles and names of God, and see what they tell you about him. What is God telling us?

The more we know about God, and the more we know God, the more we love him and trust him and become like him, as his adopted children. The more we know him, the better we pray and worship and praise him. And we grow more confident to ask for his help and to share the gospel of God's grace with others.

Turn your eyes upon God.

Total Commitment

Epiphany 3, 21st January

Jonah 3:1–10; Mark 1:14–20

Sermon by Helen McAlley

Jonah 3:1–10

3 Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: ²'Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.'

³*Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. ⁴Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, 'Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown.'* ⁵*The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.*

⁶*When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. ⁷This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh:*

'By the decree of the king and his nobles:

Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. ⁸But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. ⁹Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.'

¹⁰*When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.*

Mark 1:14–20

¹⁴ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God.

¹⁵ 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!'

¹⁶ As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.

¹⁷ 'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will send you out to fish for people.'¹⁸ At once they left their nets and followed him.

¹⁹ When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets.²⁰ Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

ADONIRAM AND ANN JUDSON

In 1812, a young American couple were married and soon after, travelled to India to work as missionaries. Their names were Adoniram and Ann Judson. As a teenager, Ann had prayed, 'Direct me in Thy service and I ask no more. I would not choose my position of work or labour. Only let me know Thy will and I will readily comply.'

The young couple's plan to work in India was soon thwarted. The government was against any missionary activity and they were ordered to leave. They decided to go to Burma – a country of 15 million people who had never heard that there was a cure for the problem of sin and that there was a loving merciful God.

With hard work, the Judsons soon got the hang of the Burmese language and began working towards translating the Bible. Within three years, they had translated the gospel of Matthew.

However, in 1823, war broke out between the United Kingdom and Burma. Although America was not involved, the Burmese assumed the Judsons were on the side of the enemy. Adoniram was thrown into what was called 'the death prison' and Ann, two months pregnant, was placed under house arrest. A while later, when Adoniram fell sick with a tropical fever, Ann was forced to take on his complete care as well as caring for her new baby and protecting the translation they had completed. A portion of the manuscript was buried for safety. Later, Ann dug it up to protect it from decay, sewed it into a pillow slip and gave it to her husband to look after.

However, the authorities decided to move Adoniram to another prison. Ann followed him there but fell victim to smallpox. She soon discovered that the manuscript was missing. A jailor had searched through Adoniram's belongings and thrown it out on a rubbish heap.

Thankfully, and by God's hand, a faithful friend of the Judsons found the missing manuscript and returned it to the mission house where it was kept in safety.

In December 1825, Adoniram was finally released from prison and the couple were joyfully reunited until Ann died from a fever in October 1826. She was 37 years old and, sadly, her infant daughter died several months later.

Adoniram remained in Burma to complete the work that he and Ann had begun together. It was 24 years before he completed the translation of the entire Bible into Burmese, but by the time of his death in 1850, there were 63 churches in the country with many more

missionaries working there. Adoniram could have become bitter with God about all that had happened, but he made that decision to love and trust the Lord in very difficult circumstances and God was able to use him in a remarkable way. We too need to be careful that our griefs and sorrows do not prevent us from doing the work God has called us to do.

A WASTED LIFE?

But let's go back to thinking about Ann for a moment. What do we think when we consider her life? Was it a wasted life? Many might think so in these days when comfort, luxury and material possessions are considered to be so important.

If this world were all there is, Ann Judson's life would indeed be a sad wasted life. But the fact is that this world is not all there is and that is the message that Jesus taught.

JESUS' MINISTRY IN GALILEE

Jesus began His ministry in Galilee, an area that was stubbornly nationalistic, maybe because it was always the first target for any invader from the north. And of course the whole area was under Roman rule in Jesus' day. Galilee symbolised God's people in bondage to whom the light of salvation would come. Isaiah prophesied that in the future, God would honour Galilee, writing, '*In the latter time (God) will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations*' (Is. 9:1). That prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus began His ministry in Galilee.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Mark tells us that Jesus began to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God after John the Baptist had been put into prison. If this world were all there is, John's life would certainly have been one of misery and futility – a wasted life. He lived out in the desert eating locusts and wild honey and wearing clothes similar to those worn by the prophet Elijah. In the very final verse of the Old Testament, the coming of John the Baptist was prophesied, and because of the similarity he would have to Elijah, he was given the name Elijah. At an early age, he was imprisoned and executed. Was his a wasted life? If this life were all there is, it would have seemed so.

LEAVING SECURITY BEHIND AND FOLLOWING JESUS

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus called two sets of brothers, Simon and Andrew and James and John. All were fisherman and the call of Jesus meant they had to abandon all they held dear, including the earthly security of having a job. Our world values jobs and status and material comfort so much. Were these brothers being foolish in leaving all this behind them to follow Jesus? Even at that early stage of Jesus' ministry, they must have had an idea that Jesus offered something even greater than security.

We are told that Jesus proclaimed the good news of God saying, '*The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news.*' The good news that Jesus referred to was that God's hour had come – the time to which the whole of the Old Testament had looked forward. God's reign on earth – a concept familiar to the prophets – was about to begin. When Jesus said the Kingdom of God was near, He meant that His coming to earth brought God's kingdom near to the people –

to ordinary people, to everyone who would receive His message. People were called to a change of heart and an acceptance of the good news for which John the Baptist had prepared the way. What people had yet to learn, and what proved to be perhaps the hardest lesson for the disciples, was that the reign of God was not to be a cataclysmic triumph by an earthly Messiah, but something far better – His rule in the hearts of His people – a kingdom not of this world. They eventually got the message. At the end of their lives, how glad they would have been that they left everything to follow Jesus.

JONAH

Hundreds of years before Jesus came, the prophet Jonah was faced with a similar challenge to the disciples, in that he was called by God to set aside his own desires and be obedient to what God showed him. His commission was to go to the city of Nineveh and warn the people that unless they repented of their wickedness, the city would be destroyed. We all know the story of how Jonah was unwilling to go to Nineveh, how he got on a ship going in the opposite direction, how a storm came up and Jonah volunteered to be thrown into the sea because he perceived his disobedience had caused the storm to come upon them, how he was swallowed by a fish and vomited by the fish on to dry land. Then he was finally ready to be obedient to God and prophesy to the people of Nineveh who repented in sackcloth and ashes and the city was saved.

Jonah did not do everything right, but he knew one thing. He knew that it was important to obey the Lord beyond what he wanted to do himself, and he finally obeyed God even though He did not feel like it. It is important for us to learn that lesson too.

WE TOO ARE CALLED TO BE SACRIFICIAL

In the minds of those who do not know the Lord, this world and the things in it are everything. In contrast, we are called to be sacrificial and not always thinking of ourselves. Nothing we do for God is ever wasted. We live in the light of eternity. Death is not the end but the beginning of a wonderful new life with the Lord where we will have indescribable joy. And our beloved sister in Christ, Gwen, is experiencing that joy and happiness right now.

In this life, we are called to take up our cross daily and nothing we do for the Lord will ever be wasted. In the light of eternity, Ann and Adoniram Judsons' lives were not wasted. They were fruitful for God and their work had lasting value. John the Baptist's life was not wasted. He too was fruitful for God and his work had lasting value. Jonah too in finally obeying God is an example to us in doing God's work even we do not feel like it. The disciples left earthly security for the joy and blessing of working in God's kingdom.

The Lord may not call us to serve in Burma (or Myanmar as it is now called) as He called the Judsons. He may not call us to a ministry of prophecy like John the Baptist had. We may not have a ministry like that of Jonah. He may not call us to leave our possessions and security behind in the way He called the apostles. But like all these faithful saints of God, we also each have a calling on our lives. He has prepared good works for each of us who love Him to do (Eph 2:10). He calls us

every day to serve Him, to be available in whatever He would show us. We need to make the decision every day to be obedient to Jesus, to ask that we might show love and be a blessing to others, to ask Him to set up divine appointments so that we might share our faith when He gives us the opportunity, to know that, as our hearts are right before Him, that He is always leading and guiding us. We can be patient in God's strength with someone who is not easy to get on with. We can be honest and people of integrity who are reliable. We can be kind to others. We can be constantly prayerful and trusting the Lord in difficult situations. We dedicate our whole lives to Jesus, but we give up our lives daily just as the Judsons and the Biblical saints were called to do. As we are obedient to the Lord each day, our lives will bear fruit for God's kingdom. Just as Jesus used the loaves and fishes of a young boy and multiplied them, so He uses what we give Him and multiplies it so that His kingdom is furthered. If we are still here, God has work for us to do.

Shall we pray the prayer that Ann Judson prayed as a teenager. *'Lord, direct me in your service and I ask no more. I would not choose my position of work or place of labour. Only let me know your will and I will readily comply. Amen.'*

Helen McAlley



Top: Adoniram Judson; below: Ann Judson

In the shark-infested waters of the Caribbean, two prawns called Justin and Christian are discussing the pressures of being a preyed-upon prawn.

"I hate being a prawn," says Justin. "I wish I were a shark."

Suddenly, a mysterious Cod appears. "Your wish is granted," he says. Instantly, Justin becomes a shark.

Horrified, Christian swims away, afraid his former friend might eat him.

As time passes, Christian continues to avoid Justin, leaving the shrimp-turned-maneater lonely and frustrated.

One day he bumps into the Cod again and he begs the mysterious fish to change him back. Lo and behold, Justin is turned back into a prawn.

With tears of joy in his tiny little eyes, he swims back to the reef to seek out his friend Christian.

As he approaches, he shouts out:

"It's me, Justin, your old friend. Don't be scared, I've changed. I've found Cod and I'm a prawn again Christian."

Submitted by Glen Farrington

LENT

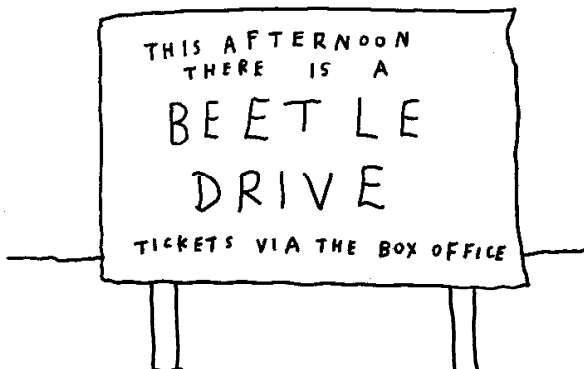
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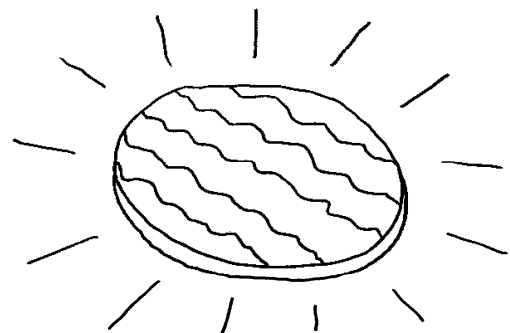
PARISH BREWERY TRIPS



FOUL LANGUAGE ANYWHERE IN THE DEANERY



HAVING TOO MUCH FUN



CHOCOLATE BISCUITS AFTER THE 10 A.M.