

# BANYULE BABBLE

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ANGLICAN PARISH OF BANYULE

HOLY SPIRIT WATSONIA ❄️ ST ANDREW'S ROSANNA ❄️ ST JOHN'S HEIDELBERG

**FEBRUARY  
2021**

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## DENISE'S DATELINE

### Dealing with disappointment

**W**E all experience disappointments in life.

Some we can laugh about, and get over quickly: a carefully chosen gift for a much loved toddler is thrown into a corner while she plays gleefully with the box; or a 'special buy' at Aldi is quickly sold out. Others we don't feel too deeply: a concert or movie doesn't live up to our expectations.

Other disappointments impact upon us more personally: the impact of COVID on all our plans, or we feel let down by those whom we know and love. Longing to see our loved ones following the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord – and yet they do not. Our expectations are not met, and we feel hurt, let down, sometimes even hopeless. Even our life as we are experiencing it now can be a disappointment – this is NOT what we envisaged for ourselves at this stage of our lives!

So, how do we as God's children deal with disappointment in our lives?

We could:

**DENY** that we are disappointed – that our personality or our theology simply does not allow this – and try to overcome our feelings with will power – this rarely works long term AND Jesus expressed HIS disappointment (*Mark 7:18; Matthew 26:40; Luke 13:34*)

**REPLY** to disappointment with anger or retribution – but this is not the way of Christ, and only causes further hurt – again, not a great way to deal with our feelings! (*Romans 12:21*)

**RELY** on the fact that God knows us, knows how we are feeling, and so rely on the fatherly comfort of our God.

Psalm 62:5–6 reads:

***Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him. Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I shall not be shaken.***

We need to know that our feelings of disappointment are real. We don't need to shy away from them and hide them

from God; we can come to our heavenly Father and pour out our feelings to him. We CAN be real with God, as the Scriptures show us across the whole story of the Bible that life can be hard at times for us all!

We can also be real with trusted friends and sisters and brothers in Christ, so that they can help share our burden and we theirs, by showing love to one another and praying for each other. But beware of becoming an 'over-sharer' or a whinger – the idea is to SHARE each other's burdens, NOT become a burden to each other!

At times we also may need to speak to a professional counsellor or psychologist who can assist us with coping with our disappointments, hurts and challenges in life – a wise person will never neglect the help that is available to us, and this in no way discounts or 'shakes' our faith in Christ!

Disappointments in our lives are to be expected – but they are never welcome.

We can be real with God and bring our hurt and longing to our God in prayer, knowing that he always hears his children, that Jesus our brother knows what we are enduring and the Holy Spirit will comfort us.

***Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him.***

Denise



### Catriona, our new student minister

**Catriona Johnson** (pictured below at a concert at St Paul's) will join us from 31st January as our new student minister. Please introduce yourselves to her, and note that 'Catriona' is pronounced as 'Katrina'.

Catriona's introductory article about herself is on page 2. Lots of other parishes wanted her too, so we have done well.



## This Month – February

**Tuesday 2nd** *Presentation of Jesus in the Temple / Purification of Mary:* 9.45 am Baptism of Phoebe Senn at St John's

**Saturday 6th:** 8 am Blokes Helping Blokes breakfast at Macleod Community Hall

**Sunday 7th** *Epiphany 5:* 10.15 am Commissioning Service at St John's, including farewell to Sue Ellen Smith, welcome to Catriona Johnson, and featuring the Rev'd Peter Carolane of Merri Creek

*1 Corinthians 12:12–31a*

**Sunday 14th** *Epiphany Last:* 9 am St Andrew's; 10.15 am St John's; 5 pm Holy Spirit

*1 Corinthians 13:1–13*

**Wednesday 17th** *Ash Wednesday:* 7 pm Holy Spirit

*Isaiah 58; Matthew 6:1–8*

**Thursday 18th:** 1.30 pm Bible study restarts, Holy Spirit

**Sunday 21st** *Lent 1:* 10.15 am Combined at St John's

*Galatians 1:1–10*

**Wednesday 24th:** 10 am Holy Spirit Mothers' Union

**Thursday 25th:** 1.30 pm Bible study at Holy Spirit

**Sunday 28th** *Lent 2:* 9 am St Andrew's; 10.15 am St John's; 5 pm Holy Spirit;

*Galatians 1:11–24*

## Wanted

- Volunteers for *mainly music*
- A representative for the local ecumenical group (p. 4)

## mainly music: February 2021

Please continue your prayers for the *mainly music* teams, particularly Heidelberg, which is desperately in need of 2 or 3 new members. I am trying to remain positive – we WILL get people – but it is hard when I know there is no-one in our parish who feels able to volunteer.

I have worked to devise program where we can have fun but keep everyone safe by remaining in their 'family bubble' – this as much for the safety of the team members as for the safety of the families. One of the first new songs we will try will make use of toilet-roll centres – I thought the children would *love* that!

We also intend to lend each family a set of props to be kept in a bag along with the children's drink bottle and the family name-tags (and the toilet-roll centres), and brought to *mainly music* each week. This means we will only have to clean the props once, at the end of the year.

Fortunately, there are a few new songs to replace those which require a lot of movement around the room. Most are eminently suitable to be used in church – if we get to the stage of having a *mainly music* church service. **THINK POSITIVE!**

Rosemary Bellair (9459 5394)

## Thursday Bible study

Denise runs a Bible study group 1.30–3.00 pm on Thursdays. Last year it mainly met on Zoom, but it will be re-starting in real life on *Thursday 18th February* at Holy Spirit Watsonia, and then at Watsonia every Thursday in school term. Anyone is invited to come and join in. You don't need to have come before. If you miss the 18th you can still come on the 25th. Denise is very good at letting everyone have a say!

## Catriona's catechism

Hi Everyone!

I never thought that I would be writing these words. I never expected that I would be a follower of Jesus, let alone an ordination candidate. But our amazing God works in our lives in ways that we could never expect.

I grew up in Devonport, on the north west coast of Tasmania and although I was confirmed, my family was not Christian and so I did not develop a faith. And, as I grew up and went to university, I actively rejected Christianity and became a firm atheist.

The death of my parents, started me questioning my understanding of how the world works and I found that I had no answers. But through this experience, God wasn't going to leave me alone. I started to explore Christianity under the patient guidance of the Dean of St David's Cathedral, Hobart, Richard Humphrey.

It was a twisty path, but I committed to Christ on 21/7/2016 on a park bench in West Hobart with a chip in one hand and a burger in the other. I couldn't resist God's call and it still amazes me how God had been working in my life.

So now, I'm in Melbourne, studying fulltime at Ridley Theological College as part of my journey to ordination in the Tasmanian Diocese. It is both exciting and humbling for me to explore where God is leading me. I am so filled with the joy of the gift that I have received that it is impossible to keep it to myself! I have a passion for helping people grow in their faith and mentoring/enabling them to develop their skills to be better followers of Christ.

I'm hoping that I can offer lots of things to the parish of Banyule. I came to Christianity older in life, but in hindsight recognise that God was there every step of the way.

I am looking forward to meeting you all.

Catriona



## News of Emmi

You will recall that our esteemed Treasurer, Emmi Godau, who is a nurse, contracted COVID-19 and had to be hospitalised. Since then, she slowly recovered and went back to both of her jobs of nursing (paid) and treasuring (unpaid). The coronavirus is a very nasty virus, however, and can do a lot of damage. On 17th January she was telling me her lungs would never be the same. Later that week she was back in hospital.

I am pleased to report that Emmi is back home now. She says: "I am back home to recuperate and feeling much better than on Friday last week. Still a bit tired but happy to make my own food and sleep in my own bed. Hospital food is a bit bland and not enough green vegetables and fruit, and sometimes there is no vegetables at all just the meat dish".

Emmi has to take lots of rest at present but she expects to write on her experiences in March's *Babble*.

## Holy Spirit Mothers' Union

The first meeting for 2021 will meet on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> February at 10 am in the Holy Spirit Church or the garden. It will continue on from the February 2020 meeting: Elsie to give a short talk on James Holden of Holden Cars.

Elsie Storr

## Blokes Helping Blokes

January's *Blokes Helping Blokes* had to be cancelled because of the new outbreak of the virus, so the Blokes will have to wait until 8 am on 6th February to inspect our new meeting-place at Macleod, just opposite the station, on the east (shops) side, where a medical centre used to be. Please let Glenn know if you are coming, to help with catering: 0487 852 808. All blokes are welcome!

Peter McKay

## The Mothers' Union

**Mary Elizabeth Heywood** was born on 31st December 1828 at Swinton near Manchester in the UK, the second of three children, two daughters and a son.

Childhood days were spent at the beautiful estate Hope End in Herefordshire, the property her parents purchased from Mr Barrett, father of Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

Mary and her siblings were educated at home by several foreign governesses and by their father. They enjoyed a comfortable childhood in a home-centred atmosphere.

In the winter of 1846, Mary, accompanied by her mother and sister, were visiting Rome, relishing the fun and excitement of 'growing up'.

At her 'coming out' ball on New Year's Day 1847 she met her future husband, George Sumner, the commencement of a romance that lasted over 60 years.

The young couple married on 26th July 1848, and moved to Farnham Castle after the death of George's mother, to be company for his father. At this location their two daughters were born.

During 1851 the family moved to Alresford in Hampshire where they remained for thirty-four years, and which was the birthplace of their son.

Still in her early twenties, Mary was active in the parish, well aware of the struggles young mothers experienced, just as she did, raising a family, a vocation with no training!

Mary invited a group of young mothers to her home to share her vision of a union of mothers meeting together to share and encourage each other as they met the challenge set before them.

From this small parochial group the Mothers' Union grew rapidly and spread across the UK, each group firmly bound in the guidelines of the *Purpose*, the *Aim* and the *Five Objects*.

The **Purpose** of Mothers' Union is to be specially concerned with all that strengthens and preserves marriage and Christian family life.

The **Aim** is the advancement of the Christian religion in the sphere of marriage and Christian life.

### The Five Objects

1. To uphold Christ's teaching on the nature of marriage and to promote its wider understanding.
2. To encourage parents to bring up their children in the faith and life of the Church.
3. To maintain a world-wide fellowship of Christians united in prayer, worship and service.
4. To promote conditions in society favourable to stable family life and the protection of children.
5. To help those whose family life has met with adversity.

The Mothers' Union (MU) spread world-wide, and the first Australian branch was formed in Tasmania's north-east at Cullenswood, where Christ Church in the Parish of St Mary's was built in 1847 by Robert Legge, on the family property. The first meeting of the Mothers' Union was held there in 1892. From this small beginning, MU spread rapidly throughout Australia.

The second branch to open was Holy Spirit Balaclava in 1897.

The Centenary Celebration featured a re-enactment of the first meeting of Mothers' Union held at the home of Mary Sumner in 1867. This was a superb rendition of that special day, with the MU members dressed in fashions of the day, for which they were given acclamation.

The Melbourne Diocese of Mothers' Union organises a wide range of programs, seminars of topical interest to family life. Diocesan Council meetings give opportunity for members to receive up-to-date reviews



on current affairs, and much, much more, even brief time to catch up with a friend! Branch delegates collect updated information to report back to branch meetings to keep members informed.

Branch meetings, whatever the topic, are always a place of warm fellowship, and a time to embrace the bonds of prayer, worship and service.

### MU Australia Mission Statement

Sharing Christ's love by encouraging, strengthening and supporting marriage and family life.

### St Andrew's Mothers' Union

The inaugural meeting was held on 20th April 1948. Mrs Strickland was elected President, Mrs Mitchell Secretary, and Mrs Kruegar Treasurer.

'Fellowship of Marriage' was the chosen name for some years, until the group adopted the title of the 'Young Wives' Department' (YWD), remaining as such for many more years.

During the 1950s the 'Young Wives' became the Mothers' Union, for members to embrace family and church life.

Membership grew rapidly, with most meetings of forty, later forming two groups, one during afternoons and another in the evening, thus enabling husbands to mind the children.

Garden parties were popular venues for social gatherings to meet and greet.

Throughout the years Mothers' Union worked tirelessly to grow the church, taking part in Sunday School, kindergarten, and youth groups.

Over a period of many years MU were the organisers of the men's breakfast and the parish luncheon. With the assistance of the Ladies' Auxiliary, refreshments were readily provided following a funeral service.

The roster called for church cleaning, church flowers, gardening, the Memorial Garden, parish picnics, St Andrew's Day luncheons . . .

Mothering Sunday, the fourth Sunday in Lent, was celebrated annually with Simnel cake and a sprig of rosemary. The cake was baked by a member of MU, cut and wrapped into tasty slices, which were blessed and handed to each person at the conclusion of the service.

The members of the parish family shared many hours planning so many functions, then working together to build strong bonds of fellowship, worship and service at St Andrew's.

Lady Day at St Paul's Cathedral, always a joyous day of celebration of the Annunciation of Christ, a spiritual uplifting and great fellowship.

Over the years, yes all of those 72 years, MU have been quietly active in church, home and community life, keeping true to the Purpose, Aim and Objects of MU as set by Mary Sumner.

The group at Church of the Ascension Macleod also enjoyed an active, close fellowship until the church closed in 1974, with some of the congregation moving to St Andrew's and others to St Stephen's Viewbank.

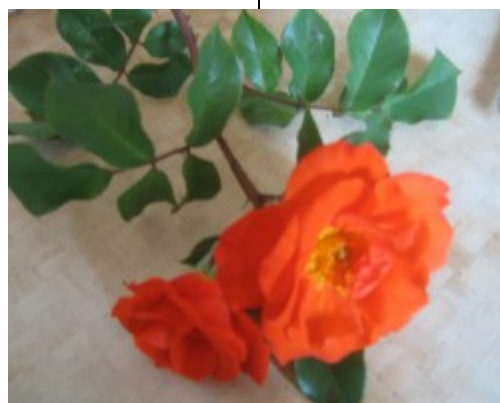
April 2003 brought change to three churches as they amalgamated to the Parish of Banyule, which now had two groups of MU in the parish.

The membership of St Andrew's MU in 2015 was eighteen, but in 2020 it was only five. After widespread, heartfelt research, the decision was made to close St Andrew's Mothers' Union, after 72 years of commitment to God, church, family, and community.

We give thanks to God for 72 years of service in honour of marriage and Christian family life.

*A Mary Sumner rose was planted in St Andrew's Remembrance Garden.*

*Mavis Lean*



# We need you to represent us

The churches of East Ivanhoe and Heidelberg have formed, since 1994, a group, linked with the Australian Council of Churches, that organises ecumenical activities such as talks by speakers, and other presentations of the Christian message to the community. Maureen Shand has been our representative in this group, but is now looking for someone younger to take on the job. There is no special title or uniform or medal, just the satisfaction of presenting the Word of Christ in another way.

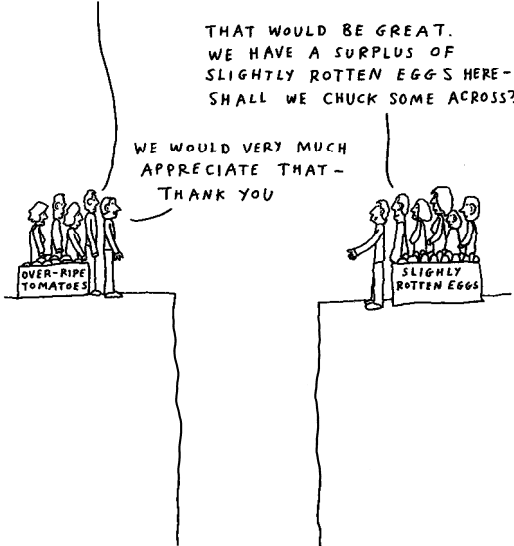
The group, which goes by names such as *East Ivanhoe/Heidelberg Ecumenical*, or *Heidelberg-East Ivanhoe InterChurch Council*, meets monthly. If you think you can help, please contact Denise (0438 856 376).

## HOW CHRISTIANS CAN WORK TOGETHER ACROSS THE DIVIDE

WE'VE GOT SOME OVER-RIPE TOMATOES HERE - WOULD YOU LIKE US TO THROW SOME OVER?

THAT WOULD BE GREAT. WE HAVE A SURPLUS OF SLIGHTLY ROTTEN EGGS HERE - SHALL WE CHUCK SOME ACROSS?

WE WOULD VERY MUCH APPRECIATE THAT - THANK YOU



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# Lent is coming

Lent starts this year on 17th February. We shall have a service that day at 7 pm at Holy Spirit, though the traditional Imposition of Ashes might not be COVID-safe.

It was Lent when we, and many around the world, first went into lockdown, and the similarity was remarked on by many commentators. Carol Zimmermann: "Many have pointed out that the penitential qualities tied to this health crisis — suffering, giving up and solitude — are in fact symbolic of Lent's spiritual practice of self-denial". Someone else compared life under lockdown with the life of an anchorite in a cell attached to the church, with a hole in the wall for food to be passed in, a hole to see out into the street, and a hole to look into the church and join in the services.

Kenneth Craycraft: "Some of us voluntarily give up pleasures and vices for Lent. But is it really a sacrifice to eat lobster on Friday instead of steak? To eliminate chocolate, but not cheesecake? To give up scotch, but not wine? This is the first time that many of us have experienced a Lent in which we don't claim the deprivation, but the deprivation claims us."

Timothy O'Malley wrote in *Lent in the time of COVID-19: Attaining holiness in the midst of a pandemic*:—

"Lent in the time of COVID-19 . . . is necessarily connected to the suffering of Jesus Christ. It forces us to re-examine the practices we committed ourselves to, asking ourselves how these practices enable us to unite ourselves to the suffering of Our Lord and thus to the suffering of our neighbour.

In fact, it forces us to re-examine the meaning of Lent as a whole.

For many, Lent has become exercises for spiritual self-improvement, a committed effort to find the best version of ourselves through fasting, almsgiving and prayer. It often has more in common with a diet than a recommitment to pursue holiness . . . Our individualised program of fasting, almsgiving and prayer will get us into spiritual shape, able to better celebrate the festivities of Easter.

That's not the orientation of Lent in any year, especially this year. In this Lent (and hopefully future ones), we'll come to see that the meaning of the traditional practices of fasting, almsgiving and prayer is to conform ourselves to Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. It is to make of our bodies a living

sacrifice to God, as St. Paul exhorts us to do in Romans 12.

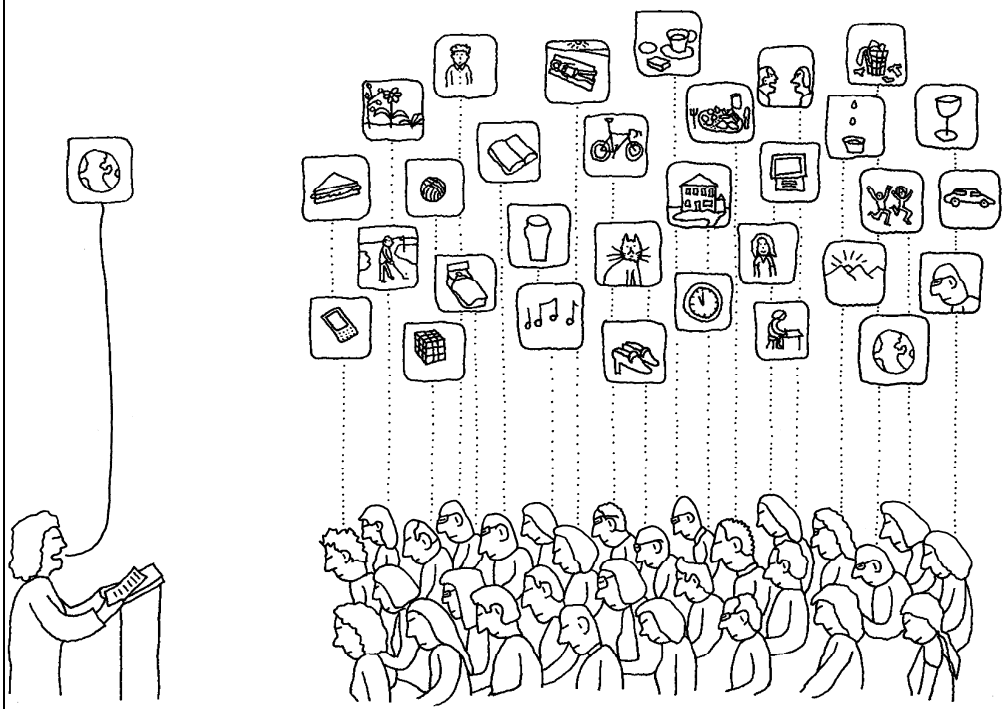
Fasting is integral to the Christian life because we human beings construct idols that obstruct us from offering our whole selves back to God. COVID-19 has revealed what some of these idols are. At first, it seemed impossible that we could cancel college and professional sports. The very economy that is crashing has been built on a narrative that human beings are made for infinite consumption and productivity. Many of us, including our politicians, have adored an idol of individualism, that what happens to me (or my family) is really the only thing that matters . . .

COVID-19 has revealed that all these things are idols . . . This idolatry has done damage to the created order. And this is one of the purposes of almsgiving. It's not enough to see that we have adored idols; we must give everything back to God through the hands of our neighbour . . .

Of course, we do none of these practices on our own. Lent is about conforming ourselves to the suffering love of Jesus Christ. Christ is the Son of the Father, the one who is obedient to the Father's will even unto death. If we don't regularly enter a posture of prayer, of adoring love before the face of God, then we're likely to confuse our practices of fasting and almsgiving as personal victories. Prayer keeps us from this . . ."

O'Malley goes on to urge us to pray the psalms, because they "take up the entirety of the human condition", including lamentation, and because in doing so we pray with the whole Church, and we don't pray alone.

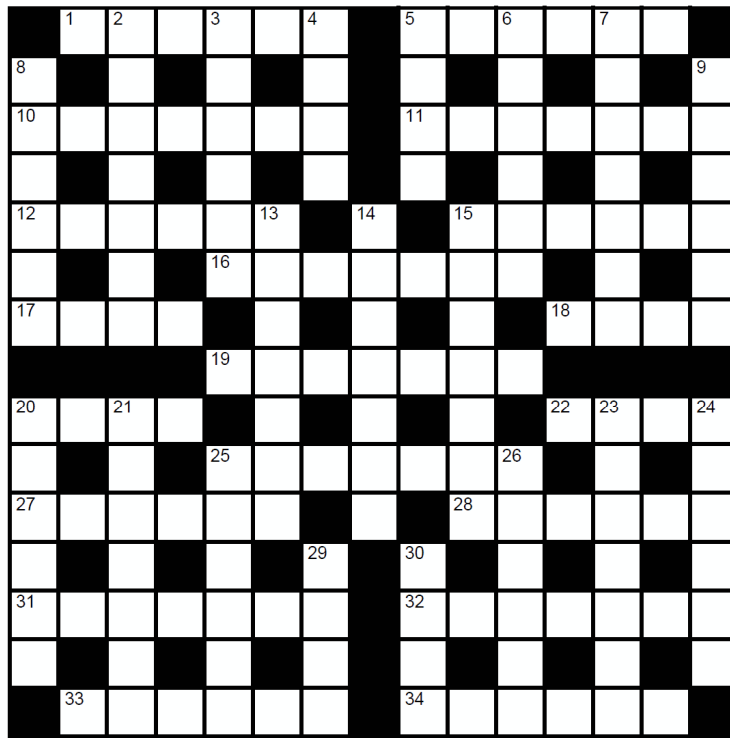
# THE INTERCESSIONS



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Across

- 1 Air (6)
- 5 Town where Timothy lived (6)
- 10 Sets up shelter (7)
- 11 Promised one (7)
- 12 Welcome season (6)
- 15 Aaron, for example (6)
- 16 Site of scrolls (4,3)
- 17 Flower (4)
- 18 Magi guide (4)
- 19 Roman army divisions (7)
- 20 Way (4)
- 22 Blemish (4)
- 25 The resurrected boy did this seven times (7)
- 27 Old Testament prophet (6)
- 28 Female relative (6)
- 31 Storm (7)
- 32 Insanity (7)
- 33 Follow closely (6)
- 34 Distant (6)



by Philologus

© BiblePuzzles.org.uk

- 5 Light (4)
- 6 Jabin's army captain (6)
- 7 Clothing (7)
- 8 Thurible (6)
- 9 More towards spotless (6)
- 13 Place of torment (7)
- 14 Counsellor (7)
- 15 Coins (7)
- 20 Enough (6)
- 21 Victory (7)
- 23 Long-suffering (7)
- 24 Remove the chaff (6)
- 25 Soldier's guard (6)
- 26 Crown (6)
- 29 One-pot meal (4)
- 30 One-tenth of an ephah (4)

Down

- 2 Writes down (7)
- 3 Nut (6)
- 4 Multitude (4)

**Bible Word Search – Growing in Wisdom & Faith**

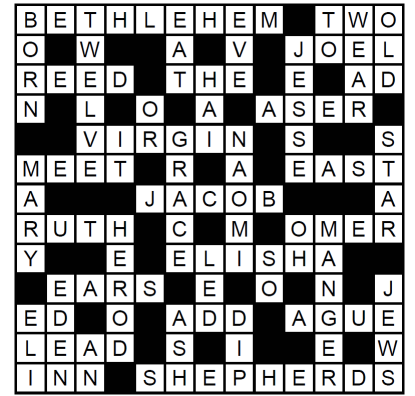
All the words listed below are in the puzzle – left, right, up, down or diagonally. Find each word and circle each letter of the words you find. After you have found all the words, the leftover letters form the **mystery answer**.

[https://www.christianbiblereference.org/ws\\_Growing\\_0.htm](https://www.christianbiblereference.org/ws_Growing_0.htm)

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

- Ask, Character, Complete, Doer, Endurance, Faith, Give, Growing, Heart, Heir, Humility, James, Joy, Kindness, Knowledge, Love, Maturity, Meekness, Mercy, Obedience, Partiality, Patience, Perseverance, Read the word, Seek, Share the word, Slow to anger, Slow to speak, Suffering, Temptation, Thankfulness, Tongue, Trials, Warnings

Answers to last month's puzzles:



Bible Word Search mystery answer: **BETHLEHEM**

Last month's anagram:

bennorw \_\_\_\_\_ newborn

ghiinns arst \_\_\_\_\_ shining star

deehhprss \_\_\_\_\_ shepherds

aceefiknnrrs \_\_\_\_\_ frankincense

aiinttv \_\_\_\_\_ nativity

aeglms \_\_\_\_\_ angels

abelst \_\_\_\_\_ stable

aegmnr \_\_\_\_\_ manger

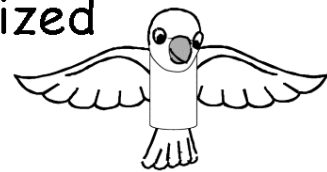
aailmns \_\_\_\_\_ animals

ejssu \_\_\_\_\_ Jesus

Unscramble the letters to find the words in our

**Jesus is Baptized Anagram**

[www.dltk-bible.com](http://www.dltk-bible.com)



aertw \_\_\_\_\_

aceghinpr \_\_\_\_\_

closstu \_\_\_\_\_

ehnoy \_\_\_\_\_

iiprst \_\_\_\_\_

deov \_\_\_\_\_

ahsw \_\_\_\_\_

beeieily \_\_\_\_\_

blmosy \_\_\_\_\_

aceeenpr \_\_\_\_\_

## 'Grace was Born'

Christmas Eve/Day 2020

Hebrews 1:1–12; John 1:1–14

by Patrick Senn

### Introduction: To dob or not to dob?

It is perhaps the Golden Rule of Australia that everybody—young and old—can agree on: "Do not dob". Children sing "dibber dobbers wear nappies" to shame anyone on the playground that dares to report something to the teacher. At the workplace, your colleagues will shun you and make social dynamics unbearable if you spill anything to the boss. And even on the streets between different gangs, and in prisons amongst inmates, the code still stands: "Do not snitch." It is the one code, it seems, that separates rapists, murderers, thieves, and criminals, from animals. It is the one law nobody breaks.

This year changed all of this, and the Golden Rule was abandoned. When the coronavirus started spreading locally and lockdowns were introduced, already in April more than 100,000 calls were made to our state's crime reporting hotline. As one Olivia Doolan, 26 from Fitzroy North, told The Age: "If someone's having a loud party next door, pre-pandemic [I] could not care less. Do what you want. But why should some people flout the rules in front of others when everyone is trying to do the right thing?"

### From Grace to Law

What is interesting is how quickly we got here, how quickly we moved from grace and not telling on others, to reporting on them and dobbing them in. You might remember early on in the pandemic the fundamental message was 'We're all in this together.' The song was played on loop over and again. Solidarity and team play were the ways to move forward through the crisis. And yet, how quickly we moved from this and the law not to dob, to not tolerating any rule-breakers. Once the second wave started flaring up again, there were reports of people visiting regional areas, and because of their metropolitan license plates, getting told to go back home. After reports about this, some visitors to regional areas would display their postcodes on their windscreen to show they were not from the suburbs with active cases.

Early on in the pandemic, we judged as silly those who were wearing masks. Neither our federal and state governments, nor the WHO recommended their use. Maybe like me, when you saw someone wear a mask in public you chuckled at their paranoia and alarmism. And then masks became compulsory, and almost overnight, we as a society denounced as 'Karens' and 'Covidiot's' those who did not wear masks, or those who wore them wrongly with their noses sticking out. 'We're all in this together' and 'Do not dob', quickly changed to "Everyone for themselves", "Report the law-breakers", and "Look at those idiots!".

### The Sting of the Law

As a result of the pandemic, and our desperate desire to get through it, we started defining our relationships around Law. What I mean is that in every encounter with someone we put up the condition: 'If this ... then that.' "If you do not obey the restrictions, then I will dob you in to the police." "If you do not wear a mask, then I will denounce you as a 'Karen' on Twitter." "If you do not change these habits,

then I will leave you." We started putting conditions, the 'if', upon people, and this law defined our relationships. 'If this ... then that.'

All this is perfectly fine until the moment you realise you fall short of the law yourself. It is one of the worst feelings to know that despite your best efforts you failed to reach that 'if'. If you study and work very hard for an exam, but get bad results, it is crushing. If you do your best at your work and give it your all, but that still affects the whole team and inconveniences them, it feels horrible. If your best is not good enough, then what else can you give?

Before God, our own consciences dob us in all the time. [We read the Ten Commandments earlier, and it stings to do this.] It stings because we know all too well in how many ways we have failed to uphold them as he commands. Putting up the law for others, the conditional 'if', works well for us until we realise that we all stand before God and under his law. We can hide from others and condemn them, but we cannot hide from God to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden. He knows the things we hope no one ever will find out. And if we do not let others flout the rules and get away with doing the wrong thing, why should God let us get away with breaking his commandments?

### Grace was born

The joy of Christmas is that with the birth of Jesus, our relationship with God changes from a relationship of law, to a relationship of grace. "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**." No longer is it 'If this...then that'; instead, it is 'Because of ... therefore.' "Because there are no community transmissions, I will go outside without fear." "Because I have Medicare, I will get treated for my illness." "Because Jesus was born, died for my sins and rose again to new life, I will not be condemned by God." In a relationship of grace, the 'if' is removed, and we no longer have to try and live up to the conditions. A relationship of "Because of ... therefore" makes the reward a gift. No longer do we have to fear falling short of the conditional 'if', of failing to live up to God's commandments many times in the past. Instead, "Because God loves me and gave Jesus for me, I will accept his love and trust in him." No longer do we have a relation of law with God; instead, we have a relation of grace.

And this is firm, final, and cannot be changed. Instead of the law and its condemnation being the last word, God sends us Jesus Christ, the eternal Word. "In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son". Although we might feel guilty, inadequate, and ashamed, Christ was born to save us from our sins, and that is the end of the matter for God.

### Grace after a Difficult Year

The birth of Jesus and this message of grace is good news for those who are burdened and wearied by this difficult year. In so many ways, life crushed us. Jobs were lost, grades at school were not as good we might have hoped, relationships were broken, plans and dreams cancelled. And most of us probably are not too proud of how we tried to cope with it at all times. In so many places we have made a mess. But before God we are

accepted despite our messes. We do not have to clean ourselves up before we approach God: God already came close to us in Jesus.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, we as a society used to live simply by one rule: Do not dob. But, the pressures and hardships of the pandemic restrictions have changed all of this. We started ordering all our relationships around law, around the principle "If this ... then that." We quickly moved from grace and tolerance—"We're all in this together"—to denouncing and condemning the law-breakers. This works for us until we realise that we are guilty before God. Under God's law, none of us can fulfil that conditional 'if'. Christmas, the birth of Jesus, means we do not have to. Jesus was born to change our relationship from one based on law to one based upon grace. Because God embraced the human race in the birth of Jesus, we no longer have to earn his acceptance. This is good, this is joy, this is merry.

"[The Word] came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." AMEN.



## 'The Light that Wakens'

The First Sunday after the Epiphany,  
10 January 2021

*Isaiah 51:1–23*

by Patrick Senn

### Introduction

It's wonderful to see that you all managed to wake up this morning and come to worship God. The past few months, according to a number of different people, we failed to wake up in important ways. While we were still in the lockdown, COVID and lockdown sceptics were telling the rule-abiding sheeple to 'wake up', to not be made prisoners by putting on a mask, and to see the massive conspiracy that was behind everything. In the week leading up to Christmas, as Sydney was dealing with a very inconvenient and badly-timed outbreak, my social media feed was full of Melburnians telling Sydneysiders to 'wake up', put on a mask, and take the situation seriously before it is too late. This language of waking up is of course nothing new. In the history of western civilisations, the modern and ancient world is separated by the 'Enlightenment'. After casting off the shackles of the church, society became governed by the light of reason, and so escaped what is so arrogantly called the 'Dark Ages'.

At Christmas, the Saviour was born. The light of the world came into creation, and the darkness has not overcome it. On Epiphany, the light has drawn us Gentiles or non-Jews into the story of Israel, and we also are included in God's plan to heal the world from sin and evil. And now in the Sundays after Epiphany we continue to behold the light of Christ that shines in the world. It is a light that rouses us from our slumber, that wakes us up, and that casts aside the fears we have and the burdens that weigh us down.

We need this light. There are many fears going around in our nation at the moment: trade wars with China, the ongoing pandemic, border closures, and the availability of a vaccine. The future is uncertain, people are in distress. Our situation is not much different from Israel's in Isaiah's day. As we read through Isaiah in Advent, we heard how judgement was imminent. A foreign nation will arise, Jerusalem will be conquered, and the people exiled as prisoners into foreign nations. What will happen? Will God's promises to Israel be left unanswered? Will fear and destruction have the last word? Will hope ultimately be vain?

### Look to God, not Circumstances (Is 51:1–8)

The first thing God tells his people is to look to him, and not to their circumstances. In particular, God says "look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. When I called him he was only one man, and I blessed him and made him many." The story of Israel began with Abraham, who was an old and lifeless man. His wife Sarah likewise was old and barren. Despite their circumstances and old age, God promised that a great nation will come from them. While appearances may be hopeless, God is not limited by them. Just as God can bring life out of death, great offspring from barrenness, so he can restore Israel, making a wasteland like the garden of Eden.

God continues: "Listen to me, my people; hear me, my nation: Instruction will go out from me; my justice will become a light to the nations. My righteousness draws near speedily,

my salvation is on the way, and my arm will bring justice to the nations." God's salvation, his rescue of Israel is certainly on the way. But it is not just for Israel, it is for the whole world. God's action will be a 'light to the nations', cosmic and universal in scope. While the earth and the universe may vanish away and dissolve, God's salvation will last forever, and his righteousness will never fail.

God's light for the world has come in the child of Bethlehem. Jesus was born to save us sinners and to renew the world. As we begin a new year God reminds us today to put our hope in him. Not in humanity, not in institutions, not in ourselves, but in Christ alone. God says the heavens vanish like smoke, the earth wears out like a garment, and its inhabitants die like flies. Given last year, it should be obvious that creation passes away. Only Jesus is strong. He was born for us and lived in every way like us except for sin. He was crucified, died, and was buried. On the third day he rose from the dead, and defeated its power. The light of Christ has overcome the darkest abyss—death, and it is his light alone that shines for all ages. This is why God declares, "my salvation will last forever; my righteousness will never fail."

### Can God do it? (Isaiah 51:9–16)

Isaiah looked forward to God's promises. What God has said so far is great, but the present is still bleak. In verses 9–11 Isaiah prays and asks God himself to wake up: "Awake, awake, arm of the LORD, clothe yourself with strength! Awake, as in days gone by, as in generations of old." Isaiah reminds God of the exodus, that great moment of salvation where God freed the Jews from slavery in Egypt. It was God who dried up the waters of the sea, who pierced the monster (Egypt) to pieces. God acted in space and time to rescue his people from evil. But will he do it again? Yes, he will; and in verse 12 God answers why: "I, even I, am he who comforts you. Who are you that you fear mere mortals, human beings who are but grass, that you forget the LORD your Maker, who stretches out the heavens and who lays the foundations of the earth" God is not just a being that has done some good in the past. He is not like us, just a tad bit bigger. God alone is the one, absolute, and infinite God. And as such, he alone is able to comfort his people. It is because of who God is that he will rescue his people.

A week ago the ABC featured the story of John Quinn, an Australian coach for sprinters. In particular, he trains athletes who have come to Australia as refugees. Asim is one of his athletes who came from Gambia to Australia for the 2018 Commonwealth Games. He sought asylum since as a Christian who converted from Islam he no longer was safe at home. Asim slept rough in Sydney, and suffered from constant nightmares. But after meeting John Quinn and training with him his life has turned around. He told the ABC: "Those worries [have gone] since I met these people ... I feel like I'm home." All the other athletes as well described John as a coach, counsellor, friend, and father-figure. And similarly to Asim, their lives also turned around because of who John is.

In the same way, God will rescue Israel because of who he is. "I am the LORD your God, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the LORD Almighty is his name." Because of who God is, because of his nature and being, he cannot but be faithful to

his promises and rescue his people. It is just who he is.

### Drunkards, Wake Up! (Isaiah 51:17–23)

This assurance from God thoroughly answers Isaiah's prayer that God wake up. In fact, God's answer is so certain that it is us humans who need to wake up. God responds in verse 17, "Awake, awake! Rise up, Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath, you who have drained to its dregs the goblet that makes people stagger."

If we think of someone who needs to wake up, perhaps the hardest person to awake is someone who is completely drunk. Even harder to awake than a teenager, someone passed out from drunkenness is beyond hope. This is the picture God gives of Israel's situation. Israel has become unfaithful to God, broken his commandments, and the judgement of exile is imminent. Even more than being asleep in drunkenness, Israel is like a widowed mother with no children to help her home. Verse 28: "Among all the children she bore there was none to guide her; among all the children she reared there was none to take her by the hand." The situation is hopeless.

But, God is the one who gives hope. While Israel had no children to guide her or take her by the hand, at Christmas a child was born onto us. God has given us Jesus, the light of the world. Jesus is the only light that can safely guide us through our time on earth. The events of last year have left so many disillusioned and disappointed after the things our society values, and the things that give us light, have come crushing down. Career, travel, money, a future full of possibilities and opportunities, all of these have been shrouded in darkness, and left people hopeless like a drunk man fast asleep. As a new year lies open before us, Jesus is the only light that shines and that can awaken us from our slumbers. Only in Jesus can our hopes not be dashed, our trust be vindicated, our joy be secure.

### Conclusion

Many of us feel tired, fearful, empty, or scared. We just managed to make it through last year, and mostly because time just went on apart from us. Now, suddenly we are in a year, and looking forward is daunting. If you are anything like me, you would rather be asleep than awake. But God calls us to wake up, and he provides a light bright enough that can rouse us even from our deepest slumbers: Jesus is the light of the world, the only light that shines in the darkness. This is good news if we feel empty and like nothing. God brings fullness out of nothing, a garden out of wilderness, life from death. If we put our trust in Jesus, if we listen to him, look to him, and live our lives for him, we will have a light to guide us through the uncertainties of this world, and a hope that will not be snuffed out.

"Listen to me, my people; hear me, my nation: Instruction will go out from me; my justice will become a light to the nations. My righteousness draws near speedily, my salvation is on the way, and my arm will bring justice to the nations. The islands will look to me and wait in hope for my arm. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath; the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies. But my salvation will last forever, my righteousness will never fail."

AMEN

