

Cupar Old Parish Church

Where Everyone Matters

Newsletter 10 December 2021

Dear Friends:

In addition to all of the activities that have been in our church calendar, I'm happy to announce that we're able to have our informal, ecumenical carolling at the Cupar Farmers' Market at 11:00am on Saturday 18 December. Please do feel free to come along. We'll keep ourselves at a physical distance so we can belt out those carols with full voice, but, as we've learned over the last 21 months, we can still affirm our connection to one another even when we're apart, whether we're separated by a single metre or many miles.

Warm regards,
Jeff

From Our Prayer Team

Janice: janice.geddes2@btinternet.com

Please pray for persecuted Christians throughout the world who are often imprisoned or killed for their faith and who do not have the luxury of being able to worship freely.

Please pray for the food banks in our community and in this area. This is a busy time leading up to Christmas. Please pray that no family goes hungry.

The prayer group continues to meet weekly through Zoom. If you have a prayer request, or would like to join us or would like one of our team to pray with you then please contact either Jeff Martin or Janice Geddes.

Life and Work Magazine

Jean: jeansmartin1968@gmail.com

Life and Work magazine, the monthly publication of the Church of Scotland, provides news about the work of the church, reflections for study and meditation, and features about local ministries. It is available in both print and digital versions. If you would like a print version, please speak with Jean Martin. If you would like to receive it online, you may subscribe at: <https://www.lifeandwork.org/subscribe>

10 December: Choir Rehearsal

Douglas: suebrown65@hotmail.co.uk

Everyone who would like to join a one-off choir for our Lessons and Carols service on 22nd December is invited to come along for an hour-long rehearsal at 6:00pm on Friday 10th December. Nothing too difficult; just some good singing with friends. Please contact Douglas Clark for more information..

10, 17 December: The Chosen

Gloria: gloriamcferguson@yahoo.co.uk

Movie nights continue for the first three Fridays in December. Come along to see what became of that baby born in Bethlehem! Fellowship begins in the lounge at 7:30pm before moving into the hall for viewing.

11-12 December: St John's Christmas Open Doors

St John's church will be decorated and open to all on Saturday 11th December from 10am to 3pm, with carol singing between 2-2.30pm; and on Sunday 12th December from 2-4pm, with carol singing between 3-3.30pm.

Please consider supporting our friends and partners for this event, a great opportunity to meet together, after having had many months of isolation. Maybe this is a time when you can invite friends and neighbours to a 'church' event which will have at its heart, the birth of Jesus, the Light of the World, which is what we celebrate at Christmastime.

12 December: Worship

Please join us for worship at 11:00 in the sanctuary or at 4:00 in the Old Parish Centre. Both services include the sacrament of Holy Communion, using prepackaged, all-in-one cups for hygiene. Sunday Club meets during the afternoon service.

On this week's leg of our Journey to Bethlehem, we come seeking home. The reading is Zephaniah 3: 14-20.

The morning service will be available for viewing online on Sunday afternoon at our YouTube channel:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCdOxFrZ_kg94DYogyIFAVEQ

12 December: Families First Gift Collection

Jean: jeansmartin1968@gmail.com

Families First is an organisation based in St Andrews that supports vulnerable families throughout Northeast Fife. As in past years, we're inviting the congregation to provide Christmas gifts for Families First to distribute among these families to help make Christmas special.

If you are able to donate gifts, please do not wrap them so they can be matched to the proper recipient. They would be grateful, though, if you would place the gift in a gift bag or provide wrapping paper and tape.

Please bring your gifts to both worship services on Sunday 12th December. Morag, the office manager of Families First, will be with us that day at the afternoon service to receive the gifts.

15 December: Guild Lunch

Eileen: eileenjspurr@icloud.com

The Guild will go to the Village Inn, Pitlessie for a festive lunch together on 15 December. Please contact Eileen for details.

16 December: Fellowship and Carols

Jill: 01334 655 528

This time last year we couldn't meet together in large numbers, so let's never take it for granted when we can. How about coming along to the Old Parish Centre on Thursday 16th December, from 10.15 to 11.15am for coffee and tea, mince pies, shortbread and lots of fun singing carols and chatting. Please invite neighbours and friends to this time of fellowship. Lifts are available. Please contact Jill Logan (01334 655 528) for more details. Looking forward to raising the roof of the big hall!

17-19 December: Fife Nativity

The Fife Nativity returns to Hill of Tarvit for a series of performances, from Friday 17th to Sunday 19th December. Performance times are:

Friday: 7pm

Saturday and Sunday - 4pm and 7pm

Each performance is expected to last 1 hour 10 minutes. Doors open for audiences one hour before each performance. Catering and refreshments are being arranged on-site. All performances will be subject to current COVID-19 regulations. Performances will take place out of doors, in Northeast Fife, in December. Appropriate clothing will be required!

Tickets cost: £12 (Adult), £8 (Child, up to age 15) £30 (Family: 1/2 adults with 1-3 children).

Tickets are on sale now through the Fife Nativity website:

<https://fifenativity.org.uk/bookings.shtml>

For those people who would like to attend, but cannot book tickets online, arrangements are being made to provide tickets via The Lighthouse Cafe and Bookshop, Cupar.

The Fife Nativity (formerly The Lochiehead Nativity) has been a part of Christmas in Northeast Fife for over 20 years. Amongst the hustle, bustle and commercialism of the Christmas season, it has provided us with a reminder of 'the Reason for the Season'. Continuing the long-established tradition, it will be performed by local adults, children, and animals. We hope that you will be able to support us again this year.

18 December: Carolling at the Cupar Farmers' Market

Shena: shenaporteous@hotmail.com

Come along to the Cupar Farmers' Market for some for a fun and joyful time as we sing Christmas carols with our friends and partners from the Cupar churches. We'll sing for thirty minutes, beginning at 11:00am, on Saturday 18 December. This is an ideal opportunity for adults and children to share the real spirit of Christmas with others. Single use carol sheets will be provided. As we'll be outdoors, mask-wearing is optional, but singers are asked to maintain physical distance from those not in their own household.

25 January: Fife Presbytery Poverty Forum

Poverty in its various forms and its dire consequences are increasing across the board in our county and across Scotland. Jane Barron, the moderator of the presbytery, and Neil Campbell, our mission director, will host an online meeting on Tuesday 25 January from 7:30 to 9:00pm. The meeting will include stories of poverty in our local communities and methods of support. Breakout rooms will allow people to contribute to the discussion and to move toward concrete action.

If you're interested to participate, please register for the event at

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/fife-presbytery-poverty-forum-tickets-221862575937>

'As a new presbytery, surely it is our calling and our mission to find out more about what poverty is, who it's affecting and where, and begin to seed ideas for working against it in Christ's name.'

In the run up to our first Christmas in Hong Kong, our congregation was asked to help SANTA. In this case SANTA stood for Spare A New Toy Appeal. For several ensuing Saturdays, young and old members of the church staffed a collection point in the island's main Mass Transit Railway station and then sorted and wrapped presents in a city centre church hall. The aim was to ensure that every child in the colony's 75 plus children's homes would have the joy of unwrapping at least one new toy on Christmas morning.

Local churches were also asked to aid the Vietnamese Boat People. They had fled the communist regime in their homeland and were now interned in old barracks in Kowloon. Once a week church members went into the camp to run a play scheme for the little children. It was great to see them letting off steam and smiling as if they hadn't a care in the world. If my memory serves me right, the bunks in the accommodation sheds were five tiers high and there were no partitions to allow families a little privacy. Although we couldn't give them a home, we could bring a little love, joy and normality into their situation until, eventually, they found new homes or returned to their old ones.

This Sunday's Bible reading from Zephaniah 3:14-20 speaks about joy, especially the joy of people who have been in exile but are going to be returning home. Precisely at a time when the world seemed to be in a total mess and without hope, the prophet dares to declare that things are going to take a dramatic turn for the better. During their time of exile, many of them had deserted their faith and indulged in a kind of pick and mix religion, assimilating some of the pagan beliefs around them. But that is behind them. They're returning home both physically and spiritually and the prophet urges them to sing and rejoice with all their heart because God has completely forgiven them and is restoring them to a secure place where they need not be paralysed by fear any longer. Isn't that what home's all about?

There's something more that's crucially important here. Even God himself rejoices: 'The Lord, your God... will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival.' We see this in other parts of the Bible too. Think of the story of the Prodigal Son.

There are three stages in that tale: First, the prodigal was sick of home; then he was homesick; and then he was home. All the time he was away, the father, who is taken to represent God, was scanning the horizon, waiting, longing. As soon as he sees the son in the distance, he runs to meet him, embraces him in a rapturous hug and throws a party. The story concludes with this comment: *'Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.'* (Luke 15:10) (One person is still unhappy though, the brother who resents the father's unbounded love for the prodigal.)

This Sunday we have a bonanza of riches. We celebrate the Lord's Supper as we sit around the table with our Christian family in our spiritual home. We share the joy we know and the blessings we have received with children in homes around our area through our gifts of toys. We are mindful of all those who are seeking a place to call home and do what we can to ensure a little joy for them at Christmas time. We pray that our own homes may be places of security, free from fear, filled with peace and joy. Even those who have a shadow of sadness hanging over them because of the loss of a loved one through death or because a loved one is only a shell of their former selves, can enjoy memories of happier times or share vicariously in the joy of others. And over it all we remember a loving God who came to share our lot and whose heart is gladdened as we sing, laugh, rejoice, share and celebrate.

An American Old Testament scholar made this observation when thinking about this passage: *'God sings. God shouts. God rejoices. And we, we who are wondrously and inexplicably God's beloved, join in the celebration.'* (Kathryn Schifferdecker, Professor and Elva B. Lovell Chair of Old Testament, Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota, December 2009)

Reading: Zephaniah 3:14-20

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem! The Lord has taken away the judgements against you, he has turned away your enemies. The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more. On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak. The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival. I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it. I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the Lord.

Hymn

Here is a link to the carol, 'Joy to the World':

<https://youtu.be/MpgaWm2pnNs>

Prayer

The italicised parts of this prayer come from the Vanderbilt Divinity Library and is set for this Sunday. I think it complements what I've been saying:

'God of hope, you call us home from the exile of selfish oppression to the freedom of justice, the balm of healing, and the joy of sharing. Make us strong to join you in your holy work, as friends of strangers and victims, companions of those whom others shun, and as the happiness of those whose hearts are broken. We make our prayer through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.'

'People of God, as we joyfully await the glorious coming of the Christ, we pray for the needs of the church, our community and the world: God of joy and exultation, you strengthen what is weak; you enrich the poor and give hope to those who live in fear. Look upon our needs today. Make us grateful for the good news of salvation and keep us faithful in your service until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives for ever and ever. Amen.'

Lord, today we pray for every home: homes that have been permanent places of love, security, acceptance, support and affirmation: homes of children and young people which lack amenities through poverty although they still overflow with love. Homes that care for children and young people who are at risk in their natural homes: accommodation that houses refugees and displaced persons while permanent homes can be found for them: homes where there is sadness through the loss of a loved one and where this time of families being together highlights the empty space at the table.

'O God of the refugee and the migrant, you promise restoration and wholeness through the power of Jesus Christ. Give us faith to live joyfully, sustained by your promises as we eagerly await the day when they will be fulfilled for all the world to see, through the coming of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.'