

Cupar Old Parish Church

Where Everyone Matters

Newsletter 17 December 2021

Dear Friends:

New guidance from the Scottish Government highlights the rising concerns for the new variant of the Coronavirus. At the church, we are proceeding cautiously, reducing some of our social contacts, but maintaining a robust diet of worship for the celebration of Jesus' birth.

For those not comfortable with in-person gatherings, please note that we'll have a Zoom communion service at 4:00pm on Thursday 23 December. Please contact me if you would like to receive the link:

jmartin@churchofscotland.org.uk.

And on Christmas Day, we will not gather in person, but a prerecorded online worship experience will be available at our YouTube channel.

In the midst of these changing and challenging times, I can only echo some of the words of wisdom Peter has given us this week: 'Father, at this time of continuing anxiety over the burgeoning pandemic, give us your peace and calm to carry on.'

And 'carry on' we do, because we have hope in the One whose love took on human form, to walk with us in our times of darkness, and lead us into light.

Warm regards,
Jeff

From Our Prayer Team

Janice: janice.geddes2@btinternet.com

The Coronavirus pandemic has caused severe disruption to the distribution of bed-nets across sub-Saharan Africa. The nets are a key part of stopping malaria. As a result, deaths caused by malaria went up by twelve per cent in 2020. Pray that all the barriers to the distribution will be removed.

Please pray for all the families in our church and community who have recently been bereaved. Let's pray that they will feel near to God and be comforted.

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.

The Chosen

We will not meet again before Christmas, but in January, we'll continue sharing the story of Jesus' ministry, told in this series with power, creativity, and faith. Regular viewers and those not yet familiar with the series will enjoy this short Christmas episode, "The Shepherd: A Story of the First Christmas".

17 December: Monimail Carol Service

Please join our friends at Monimail for a pre-Christmas service of carols, readings, and prayers. The worship begins at 7:00pm.

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>

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.

19 December: Worship

Please join us for worship at 11:00 in the sanctuary or at 4:00 in the Old Parish Centre.

In the morning service, the Fourth Sunday in Advent brings us closer to Bethlehem, where we discover the joy of seeking great things in unexpected places. The reading is Micah 5: 2-5a.

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

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

Our afternoon service features the Sunday Club Nativity. The children of our congregation will lead us in the story of Jesus' birth through readings and songs. We meet in the Old Parish Centre at 4:00pm

21 December: NO Tuesday Café

Sadly, due to the increasing concerns of the new Covid variant, we've taken the decision to cancel our Tuesday Café gathering for this month. We hope to be able to gather again safely on 18 January.

22 December: Lessons and Carols

We'll have a quiet service of biblical readings, prayer, and Christmas hymns on Wednesday 22 December, beginning at 7:00pm in the sanctuary.

23 December: Zoom Communion

If you would like to join in the celebration of Holy Communion from the comfort of your own home, please contact Jeff for the link.

jmartin@churchofscotland.org.uk

Our service will take place at 4:00pm on Thursday 23 December.

24 December: Christmas Eve

The children will lead worship again with their Nativity. The service begins at 6:30pm on Friday 24 December, in the sanctuary.

25 December: Christmas Day

We will not have gathered worship on Christmas Day owing to the cleaning requirements, but an online service will be available at our YouTube channel, Monimail and Cupar Old:

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

If you want to attend a gathered service on Christmas Day, you're welcome to join in one of these services in Cupar:

8:00am, St James Scottish Episcopal, spoken eucharistic worship

10:00am, St John's United with Dairsie, at St John's, thirty-minute worship

10:30am, St James Scottish Episcopal, sung eucharistic worship

11:15am, St Columba's Catholic Church, festival mass

26 December and 2 January: Worship

We will welcome our friends from St John's for worship in the Old Parish Centre on Boxing Day. On the following Sunday, we're invited to join them for worship. Both of these services are **at 11:15am**. We will not have an afternoon service on these days. Due to the pandemic concerns, we will not be having coffee fellowship before the services.

Reflection from Peter Meager

Peter:

meager52@btinternet.com

Last Saturday I had a look at the TV guide to see if there was anything worth watching. You won't be surprised when I tell you that I counted seven programmes on channels one to five that featured 'celebrities'.

It may be an age thing, but I have to confess that I recognised less than ten percent of the names that were given the accolade, 'celebrity'.

Our society seems to be obsessed with 'celebrity culture'. Much of the media are devoted to sharing what they wear, where they live, what they eat and how we can be like them. It's hard not to get caught up in it. During a funeral I realised that a face in the second pew looked very familiar. After the service I asked someone, 'Do you know who that person who looked like Ronnie Corbett was?' 'Oh,' they replied, 'that was Ronnie Corbett!' At the funeral tea I was so star struck that I didn't even speak to him.

I like to think that modesty and humility are two hallmarks of true celebrity. When we moved to Fife on leaving the Army, I had to open a new bank account. The number on my bank card was 00 007. That took me back to a christening I had conducted many years earlier. The baby's grandparents came out to Germany for the service. Years later I discovered that one grandfather had been a Naval Intelligence Officer, a Commando, a parachutist, a skier, a safe blower, a photographer and a sailor during the war. I didn't hear from him how courageous he had been. He was too self-effacing for that. It was only when I read an article in the Readers' Digest in December 1994, some sixteen years later, that I discovered that he is considered, almost certainly, to be one of the real life inspirations for Ian Fleming's James Bond. Whenever the suggestion was put to him, his response was always that, unlike Bond, he had personally "only ever loved one woman and was not a drinking man."

Is there a Biblical view of celebrity?

The story is told of a student minister who was doing an attachment in a city centre church. One day his mentor said he would take him to meet some celebrities mentioned in the Bible. Intrigued, the student was slightly nonplussed when they arrived at a hostel for people who were living on the streets. They spent several hours doing menial tasks and listening to the often harrowing tales of what had brought the occupants to that place. When they got back to the manse, the supervising minister asked the student, 'Well, did you recognise them?' The student had to admit that he didn't. So, the minister went on, 'The people in that hostel were some of those Jesus mentioned in Matthew 25:40, those whom he called, 'the least of these brothers and sisters of mine.'

The verse comes in the story of the final judgement under the heading of 'The sheep and the goats.' The sheep are those who merited Jesus' approval. They, he said, are people who had fed him, given him a drink, clothed him or taken him in, visited him when ill or in prison.

Those who are praised for their practical response are incredulous because they cannot recall any situation when they had even seen Jesus, never mind helped him. Jesus then explains that in responding to the needs of the lowliest person who is hungry, thirsty, needing clothes, homeless, ill or in prison, they have ministered to him. The Bible turns our idea of celebrity on its head and gives us clear guidance on where true greatness lies.

Jesus wasn't saying something new here. When we go back into the Old Testament, there are many, many instances of what the world would view as insignificant people and off-grid places having great historical or worldwide importance. Think of Ruth. She was a destitute widow and a foreigner when she accompanied her mother-in-law back to Israel seeking refuge in an inconsequential village called Bethlehem. But God had a plan for her. A local landowner called Boaz falls in love with her and, in God's providence, this seeming nobody, in worldly terms, becomes the great-grandmother of King David and, through him, an ancestor of Jesus.

In today's Bible passage from Micah chapter five, Bethlehem crops up again. Since it's so obscure, the writer helps his readers have an idea of where it is by saying, 'It's in the Ephrathah region', which they would have heard of. It was in an unimportant area belonging to one of Israel's lesser clans that was way, way down the pecking order of importance and influence. Yet, it is precisely in this unknown hamlet, belonging to a clan that has neither prestige nor power, that a ruler will be born.

In verse two, when it says his origin 'is of old, from ancient days,' one interpretation is that there is a reference here to one of God's titles, 'The Ancient of Days'. This would emphasise that this ruler comes from God. In verse four we have echoes of the idea of a servant king who will not lord it over his subjects; rather he will care for them as a good shepherd cares for his sheep. Furthermore, his rule will lift God up; reveal his strength; and bring security and peace throughout the world. Jesus has already fulfilled parts of this prophecy. We wait with longing and vibrant hope until all of it comes to pass.

It's sometimes the lowliest, the weakest, the meekest, the poorest, the most anxious, the most fearful, or the most timid, that God can use most effectively and he often puts them in the most inconsequential, remote backwaters that you've never heard of. Once we take this on board we might be pleasantly surprised by how often we have marvellous encounters with wonderful people. More than that, we might discover that we meet Christ himself in them.

In 1865 Phillips Brooks made a nighttime visit on horseback to the village of Bethlehem. This inspired him to write the lyrics to the carol, 'O Little Town of Bethlehem' in 1868. Present day Bethlehem is, of course, far removed from this idyllic depiction. But the carol still has something important to say to us. The poem draws primarily on Luke's story of Jesus' birth and Brooks' own experience. It also resonates with Micah 5:2-5a -- a birth in Bethlehem, the "hopes and fears of all the years," and the joyful proclamation of peace to the ends of the earth - all have their roots in our lectionary reading. Here is a link to the carol:

<https://youtu.be/VJqgspx57C0>

Bible Readings

Matthew 25:37-40

'Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison and go to visit you?" The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

Micah2:2-5a

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labour has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace.

A Prayer

Mysterious God, down through the millennia, you often worked behind the scenes, patiently, quietly prompting people who were sensitive to your leading to work in small and secret ways to contribute to the great master plan that culminated in your arriving in the world at Bethlehem. We wonder that you have often chosen what the world would judge to be insignificant and even inappropriate people to do your work. You used a child like Samuel, women like Rachel, Hannah and Deborah, a youth like David, old folk like Anna and Simeon. We dare to believe that you have a part for us to play too. Lord, give us the courage to put ourselves at your disposal and see what transpires.

Lord of all worlds and galaxies, at Christmas you confront us with so great a wonder that we draw back from believing it for we know that, if it is true, we cannot go on as before.

We knew you were here and everywhere, but it was only when Jesus was born that we found you actually sharing our human existence.

Father, the true colours of the Christmas picture have been overlaid with pious legend and pagan festivity. Aid us to strip away this thick and darkening varnish to behold your glory in all its dazzling clarity and wonder so that you can be as real and relevant to us as you were on that first Christmas Day.

Father, at this time of continuing anxiety over the burgeoning pandemic, give us your peace and calm to carry on. We pray especially for the elderly in care homes that their families may be able to continue to have that loving, face-to-face contact which is so essential for their well being. We pray too for all involved in the heroic campaign to get booster vaccinations administered at an unprecedented rate and prevent our hospitals being overwhelmed.

Amidst it all we pray for some respite to be refreshed by the certainties of the Christmas message. To that end we remember again the 'hopes and fears of all the years' that came together and were fulfilled in Bethlehem. Lord God, may we always carry within us the peace, joy and goodwill of Bethlehem that we may share them with all people in the world you love; famous or anonymous, rich or poor: and may we and everyone we love know his blessing today and every day. Amen

Reflection from Angus Allan

The Word

Christmas is a time for singing carols and in these we are reminded of the shepherds out in the fields being visited by an angel who brings *“good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord”* Luke chapter 2, verse 11.

In both Matthew's and Luke's version Mary conceives *“through the Holy Spirit”* Mathew Chapter 1 verse 18. The child is to be called Jesus *“because he will save his people from their sins”* Matthew chapter 1 verse 21. Mark begins his gospel by reference to the prophet Isaiah. This is followed by John the Baptist preaching a Baptism of repentance and Jews coming to be baptised by John. (Mark chapter 1 -verses 1 -13)

But John in his gospel refers us to a great power, “the Word”. Quite often these days we order things by post by word of mouth, and we are told that they will be with us in 3 -5 days. If they do not come in the stated time we get concerned and may make further enquiries. A person's word does matter!

Three words link the Word of Creation with the word of recreation: *“In the beginning”*. In creation (Genesis chapter 1) the Spirit of God is hovering over the waters bringing order and light into the dark chaos *“through the word of God -----”* and God said-----In John’s Gospel The Word was *“with God in the beginning”* (chapter 1 verse 2) and then *“the word became flesh and lived for a while among us,”* (chapter 1 verse 14). He goes on further to say *“for the law was given through Moses: grace and truth came through Jesus Christ”*. Chapter 1 verse 17. The law has served its purpose. By the grace and goodness of Jesus we are invited to be his disciples and freely follow him. Trinity theology, God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the accepted belief of our traditional churches in this country. However the Unitarian church, believing simply in God as Father, is significant worldwide. Jehovah’s witnesses are unitarians and translate John chapter 1 *“in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the Word a god”* (watch tower bible) It is a legitimate translation as there is no word for “a” in Greek. The witnesses are also against blood transfusions and conscription.

It is right of course that we extend the hand of love and tolerance to people of all beliefs and none at all, at the same time giving careful thought to our own which declares Jesus to be *“the author and perfecter of our faith”* (Hebrews 12 chapter 2).

