

Cupar Old Parish Church

Where Everyone Matters

Newsletter 23 December 2021

Dear Friends:

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, some are truly ready to celebrate with enthusiasm and merriment. Others approach the 'festive season' with hesitance, doubt, hostility, or despair. The year may have been challenging, exhausting, or painful. Perhaps the effects of disappointment, loss, or want have built up over many years, and 'merry' is not a familiar feeling.

In some ways, the modern, public celebrations that mark the last days of each calendar year seem to demand jollity, excess, and exuberance. Sometimes in the church we fall in with this spirit, racing ahead into the delight of boisterous carols, dazzling angels, and 'good news of great joy'.

Perhaps we do so, in the world and in the church, in an attempt to blot out the difficulties: we make the carols so loud and raucous that we cannot hear our cries of pain or confusion; perhaps we make the season so bright and glittery, in the hope that the light will obliterate the difficulties that lurk in our darkness; perhaps we numb ourselves with food and drink so we don't recognise a deeper hunger.

Jesus, the Light of the World, does not enter our lives to simply cover over our difficulties with an excess of brightness.

He comes that we might have healing from pain, order from chaos, new beginnings from dead ends. And by his work in our lives, we become vessels of light as well, that we may offer these gifts to one another and to the world.

May the light of Christ embrace, renew, and empower each of now and in the year to come.

With warm regards,
Jeff

PS Please note that I will be on holiday from 29 December to 12 January. In case of pastoral need, please contact Jean Martin jeansmartin1968@gmail.com or Liz Nelson liznelson48@aol.com. They will be able to direct you to an appropriate resource person.

From Our Prayer Team

Janice: janice.geddes2@btinternet.com

Give thanks to God that here in the UK, we have the opportunity to receive a third booster jab. Yet vaccine inequality continues to be a major problem worldwide. Please continue to pray for the people who are suffering around the world because of this pandemic.

This Christmas, please keep in your prayers the people of Ethiopia. Conflict continues between armed groups and government forces across the country. Millions of people have fled their homes and the violence has caused serious food shortages. Pray for tensions to de-escalate and for peace and reconciliation among all Ethiopians. Pray for safety, and for provision of food and shelter for those in need.

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

The prayer team would like to wish you all a peaceful Christmas and a prayerful new year. Thank you for all your prayer support..

Monetary Donations

We are very grateful for your continued generosity throughout these times. If you would like to set up a standing order, you may speak with David, our treasurer. You're also welcome to make a one-off donation through the secured giving at the Church of Scotland home page:

www.churchofscotland.org.uk

Just click on the red 'Donate' button and follow the instructions to direct your gift toward our congregation.

24 December: Christmas Eve Worship at 6:30pm

The children will lead worship with their Nativity. The service begins at 6:30pm on Friday 24 December, in the sanctuary. Please be mindful of the current regulations and be prepared: doors remain ajar for ventilation, so dress in layers. Face masks are required, except for those under twelve, people who are medically exempt, and worship leaders. Physical distance from those outside your household is encouraged.

25 December: Christmas Day Online

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

<https://youtu.be/6kJNZpumo3E>

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 at 11:15am

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 have coffee fellowship before the services.

Reflection from Peter Meager

Peter: [http://meager52@btinternet.com](mailto:meager52@btinternet.com)

Doctor Billy Graham had just invited those who wanted to give their lives to Christ to come forward at the end of the evangelistic campaign service in a large US city. As the choir began to sing the hymn, 'Just as I Am Without One Plea,' in muted, emotive tones, he went and sat down beside one of the city's church leaders.

As the trickle of people responding turned to a flood in the highly-charged atmosphere, he nudged the local minister and whispered in his ear, 'I had my pair cut yesterday.' The poor man couldn't believe what he was hearing. He thought he had maybe misheard, and decided to ignore it.

Another nudge, another whisper and a little louder, absolutely clear, 'I had my hair cut yesterday!' 'Yes. You look very smart,' he almost grimaced. 'Yes,' said Dr Graham, and pointing to a man arriving in front of the rostrum, he continued, 'and that man there was the barber who cut my hair.' Even while sitting in the barber's chair, Billy Graham had been able to have a conversation that resulted first, in the hairdresser coming to the meeting, and now, in his yielding his life to Jesus.

As we leave another Christmas Day in our wake, our theme for this Sunday is, 'Our journey continues; we share the Good News.'

While I have always been committed to sharing the Good News, I have never been able to engage in the kind of personal evangelism described above. I would love to have seen a transcript of the conversation that had that kind of impact on the barber.

The Gospel passage appointed for this Sunday is three short verses in the second chapter of Luke that contain the story of Anna who, we are told, *'spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem'* (verse 38). She was not, however, the first to tell others of their experience of Jesus. That accolade surely goes to the shepherds. Earlier in the chapter we read that, *'When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.'*

So, who was Anna, and can we learn anything from her about communicating the Good News to a world that is burdened with an awful lot of bad news? In this brief passage, we actually learn a lot about her. Names in those days were very important. When you chose a name for your child you would want them to receive the characteristics of the name and reflect them throughout their life. Her name meant 'grace' or 'favour'. The hope was that Anna would live a gracious life and would put others before herself. Life had not been kind to her. She had been widowed after only seven years of marriage. It sounds as if she was childless and had never remarried, and yet she seems to have borne it all with grace and dignity, and now she is favoured to see the infant Christ soon after his arrival in the world.

Her father was Phanael, whose name meant 'the face of God'. It comes from Jacob's struggle with God, after which he said, *'I have seen God face to face and have survived.'* (see Genesis 32:22-32) It speaks of the nearness, the intimacy and even the accessibility of God which is our privilege. Anna belonged to the tribe of Asher whose name meant 'happy'. Despite the sadness

in her life was she able, I wonder, to display the inner happiness she found in her faith?

Professor Barclay sums her up by saying, 'She had known sorrow, but had not grown bitter; she was old, but she had never ceased to hope. She never ceased to worship. She never ceased to pray'. Luke tells us too that she was a prophetess. This is significant because the voice of prophecy had been silent since the days of Malachi some four hundred years before. Yet, here she is being described as a servant of God who tells it like it is to her generation. She worshipped in the Temple day and night.

Is it reading too much into these verses to say that Anna would have prophesied about the coming of the Messiah over those long decades of her widowhood when, year after year, thousands flocked to Jerusalem for the great Jewish feasts of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles? She would be in the Court of the Women, which all male Jews had to pass through on their way to the Court of the Israelites, where they worshipped. Was she viewed like a modern pod-caster with fans who flocked to hear what she had to say every time they were in the city? At the very least we know she was recognised as having the public ministry of being a prophet.

She had persevered in the good habits of worship (which would include hearing the Scriptures read and explained), prayer and fasting. That equipped her to share her faith. Then the day dawned when Mary and Joseph brought their infant son to be dedicated in the Temple. Anna was there; in precisely the right place at precisely the right time. She could have decided to have a day off from her routine. But she didn't. She was faithful in her devotion to God, and in verse 38 we read that, 'at that very moment' she heard the commotion as the elderly Simeon took the baby in his arms and proclaimed, '*...my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel,*' and Anna herself encountered the little family group.

For decades she has gone every day to the temple to pray for

the coming of the Messiah. And now, the miracle happens. He is here. Right before her very eyes. Her faithfulness is rewarded and she breaks into spontaneous worship and thanksgiving. This is so marvellous she can't help herself. She has to tell others what she has witnessed; that God has fulfilled his promise and come to save his people.

Here is the key to evangelism. It's about sharing our personal faith and backing that up, in our homes, in our work and in our church, with lives that have been touched and are being transformed by Jesus.

But there is one little qualifying phrase that may be important for our mission thinking, found in verse 38. Who did she share the message with '*All who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.*' I understand this to mean, those who had some idea of who the Messiah was and were hoping that he would soon come to set his people right with God.

Do we now need a pre-evangelisation stage of making the story known so that people can see that faith in Jesus is relevant in our contemporary world? If our words are backed up by lives that reflect the changes faith brings, and a community that demonstrates visibly what is possible when Jesus is present, might more become seekers who are amenable to hearing and receiving the Good News?

Anna reminds us that behind all the glitter and glitz of our contemporary Christmas lies the fact that '*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*' (John 3:16) The 'holy day' of Christmas is essentially about rescue and redemption, God restoring his people. Once she had realised that, how could Anna keep from passing on the glad tidings?

Reading: Luke 2:36-38

There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to

them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Prayer

Gracious God, we surrender the year 2021 to you. We give you our failings, our regrets, our missed opportunities, our disappointments, our heartaches and our tears, for we have no more use for them.

We give you our joys, our successes, our celebrations, laughter and fun, asking that they may encourage us on our road as we turn to the blank page of a New Year.

We thank you that you were with us in all of it, bearing us up when the road was hard, rejoicing with us when our hearts were glad. More than that, we are confident that you will be ahead of us, behind us and beside us as we step into 2022.

Father, we know that uncertainties and further restrictions still lie before us. Give us leaders who have wisdom, common sense, integrity and compassion. Give physical and mental stamina to all who are fighting the pandemic on so many levels.

Keep us from ever being embarrassed or ashamed about sharing what you mean to us, so that all may know you love them and have a place for them in your heart and in your family on earth and in heaven. Help us to use all the means at our disposal to communicate your infinite love.

May that love spur all your children to strive for peace, for justice, for nourishment, for health and for wellbeing for all, that your kingdom may come.

Lord, we know that Faith makes all things possible, Love makes all things beautiful, and Hope makes all things work. You gave us all three in the babe of Bethlehem. As we welcome him again this Christmastide, may all three be renewed in our lives.
Amen

(The italicised words are by Dwight L Moody, the 19th century preacher)

Song: Here I Am, Lord

Here is the link to the hymn, 'I the Lord of Land and Sea'

<https://YouTube.be/mgLWH5RdtPk>