

*St Mary's*  *Parish news*

Christmas 2019

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*Meg the Christmas Dog*

*Meg attends the 8am eucharist most Sundays when her friend Sam is Lay Assistant.*

*She is always most attentive and bows her head during prayers.*

*Here she is in her Christmas finery assisting with the preparations for the Carol Service.*

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## From the Vicar

Dear friends,

The Advent season of waiting and watching is now over, and the season of joy is with us. This is such a special time with family and friends as we mark the birth of Jesus. But the real joy of Christmas is that through the baby Jesus we always live in hope, knowing that he is Emmanuel/God with us. I don't mean this in a proprietorial



sense, because God is with his people who ever and wherever they are, but in an abiding sense, knowing that we are created out of love by God and that God loves us each and every day of our lives. This is the best present any of us can ever be given, to be given unconditional love.

I pray that you will feel that love this Christmas and each and every day throughout the coming year.



Christmas Blessings,

Fr Jan

## *Occasional Series: Churches dedicated to our Lady*

### *St Mary's Childwick Green ... and Stanley Kubrick* *Michael Golding*

St Mary's Childwick Green is a small, polished gem of a church in the English countryside just outside St Albans, Hertfordshire. It stands in a delightful village that has a close association with Stanley Kubrick, one of the greatest directors in the history of cinema. Lindy and I last visited it earlier this year on a shimmering summer's day in July when the village art festival was in full swing (think *Midsomer Murders* without the homicide) although I've known of the church for over thirty years, and can even claim to have been its (nominal) churchwarden for a brief period.

In Norman times the Childwick estate (pronounced "Chillick" for some reason) was owned by the Abbot of St Albans and was the site of a Benedictine Abbey of which no trace now remains. After Henry VIII decided that dissolving the monasteries of England would be a good way to raise some cash the land came into private hands. A Jacobean manor house was built and greatly extended in the eighteenth century. Over time an estate community grew up around its corn, stock and stud farms. The estate workers and their families were an hour from the nearest church and so in 1867 the landowner, Henry Joseph Toulmin, a ship owner and mayor of St Albans, built St Mary's as a chapel of ease to save them the walk, even getting himself appointed as a lay reader so he could conduct services himself.

For his architect he chose Sir George Gilbert Scott, who worked in the English Gothic revival style. His best-known work includes the

Albert Memorial in Kensington Gardens, St Pancras Railway Station in London and cathedrals in Glasgow and Edinburgh, both dedicated to St Mary.

Unlike its Scottish namesakes, St Mary's Childwick Green is



constructed on a small scale, well fitted for its purpose. Built of mellow red brick, seemingly faded almost to pale yellow in strong sunlight, it has a matching red-tiled roof, a tiny wooden porch and an even tinier spire (technically “a shingled

spirelet”, I am informed). Surrounded by rolling lawns and some mature trees it faces the village green. It's a lovely setting on any day but in a high English summer it's glorious.

The inside of the church is scaled to match the exterior (unlike, say, Dr Who's Tardis). The single aisle is flanked by a few rows of expertly carved (if rather uncomfortable) wooden stalls, which offer little legroom and a few rather plainer pews, in which you can stretch out a bit! There's an exquisite lectern in the form of a praying angel whose wings spread wide to support the bible that rests upon it. The small pulpit, barely elevated above ground level, is also finely carved with bible scenes. When Lindy and I were last there the sunlight flooded in through the lancet



windows of the chancel, the square headed windows of the nave, and the small but still imposing round plate tracery window above the altar.

The church's most poignant fixture is its beautiful white marble font, dedicated to and featuring Winifred and Dorothy, sisters who died within two years of each other in early childhood. They were the daughters of Sir John and Lady Emily Maple who had acquired the estate from the Toulmin family in 1881. "Not lost but gone before," according to the commemorative plaque above the font and yet their parents' grief must have been heart breaking. In the sculptor's vision both girls have sprouted wings like little angels and their faces bear expressions of calm serenity. One stands behind and the other kneels before offering up a shell that holds the baptismal water. The plinth is inscribed with Matthew 19:14 in the King James translation: "suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for such is the kingdom of heaven". Late Victorian mawkish sentimentality to some - though it never fails to touch me. The family lie together in the Maple crypt in the church grounds. The sculptor is unknown.

After Sir John's death in 1903 the estate was broken up and the church was acquired for a nominal sum by the parish of St Michael, St Albans, who continue to work with the small but thriving local congregation to maintain it in good order, its adjoining old school room being a hub of community activity. There is an evensong at 6.00 pm every Sunday and communion once a month with other services on special occasions. I was churchwarden of St Michael's for a couple of years before moving to Australia and as such had responsibility for St Mary's although in reality two local people served as wardens and caretakers and in my time shouldered all the work.

In 1978 the manor house was bought by Stanley Kubrick, the American film director whose credits include *Dr Strangelove*, *Spartacus*, *Lolita*, *The Shining*, *2001: A Space Odyssey* and ... the list could go on, almost all of them films in the very first rank. In an age of compulsory twenty-four-hour availability anyone who refuses an interview on demand is likely to be described as “reclusive” and that was said of Kubrick too, but it wasn’t true. Recluses can’t make films. He was very hard-working and utterly dedicated to his craft, much of which he conducted from the workplaces he fashioned at Childwick Manor, having the charisma and reputation to ensure that the greatest stars of the film world would stream to this tiny English village for the privilege of working with him.

I’m not sure recluses are allowed to go shopping either, yet a friend once saw Stanley Kubrick in the food hall of Marks & Spencer, St Albans. True, he looked faintly bemused but then I often look like that in supermarkets myself, especially if they have recently “refreshed the retail experience” by moving things around. In my fantasy I approach the great man, tell him I’m such a big fan and offer to help him find where they’ve put the luxury mince pies, but, of course, in reality I did none of these things.

In his film *Paths of Glory*, the best war film ever made in my opinion, Kubrick cast a young German actress, Christiane Harlan, in a small but crucial role. They married in 1958 and remained together until his death in 1999, the new lord and lady of Childwick Manor albeit without the titles. Christiane continues to be the mainstay of the village’s art festival, often involving events at St Mary’s. During our last visit earlier this year she was there again, quietly organising things (including the sale of her own paintings), adding another chapter to the history of an English village with its lovely church in its idyllic setting.

## *Saint Mary's Church at Ephesus*

*Robert Gribben*

This church was the first to be dedicated to Our Lady, though it is unclear whether the dedication came before or after the Third Ecumenical Council of 431 AD, when some 200 bishops assembled within its walls. A ruined Roman *stoa* (basically a shopping mall) was turned into a basilica towards the end of the third century and housed a congregation. Towards the end of the fifth century it was expanded into a cathedral and was the seat of the bishops of Ephesus until the Muslim expansion in the seventh century. It is an impressive ruin, with the apse, some pillars and the lower part of its walls still standing. It is somewhat removed from the usual tourist tracks through that ancient harbour city, whose monuments remain one of the most significant archaeological sites in the world.

Susan and I visited it in 2003 with a small delegation of the NSW Ecumenical Council, under the leadership of the Rev. Dr Ray Williamson, an Anglican priest who was then its General Secretary. It was a Sunday, and our custom was to celebrate a eucharist at some convenient place, alternating between Anglican and Uniting presidency. The lot fell on me. I had a stole with me; we carefully kept half a bottle of Turkish red from the previous night's meal, and we lifted a bread roll from breakfast. The site guards were nervous about a group of tourists leaving the main track, and we convinced them that we were serious Christian pilgrims. At this point we realised that we had no cup for the wine, so we borrowed a glass from the guards' kitchen. Arriving at the semi-circular eastern end of the building, that is, the altar end, we gathered in front of the stepped stone benches which were occupied by the presbyters and deacons around the bishop's throne. There now being no altar, we manhandled a Corinthian capital on top of another one, forming an



altar shaped like an hourglass (see photo); someone offered their scarf as a cloth, and we proceeded with the liturgy, in words and actions familiar to both Anglicans and Uniters. The sun shone; it was quiet. Time stood still. The communion of saints was palpably present.



A group of Australian pilgrims gather in the ruins of the ancient church of St Mary at Ephesus for the eucharist. Behind them in the apse are the stepped benches for the presbyters, surrounding the bishop's seat, now demolished, in the centre.

[The first three people on the left are the Rev. Dr Ray Williamson, the Rev. Dr Erica Mathieson and Susan Gribben.]

Being me, my mind was full of thoughts of that Council in 431 AD. It was a mess. Having, as they thought, sufficiently addressed all the doctrinal issues in orthodox Christianity in the Great and Holy Council of Nicaea back in 325 AD, the cracks had started to appear. The Trinity had been tidied (not solved), and the Christological issues summarised in the Nicene Creed's longest section (We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ...true God from true God...incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human...), the bishops of several important and ancient dioceses found the solution



unsatisfactory. The bishops were, in many cases, learned theologians; and they were also part of the imperial hierarchy – for an emperor, Theodosius II, who was very interested in theology. The issues arose around Mary.

Nestorius, newly consecrated bishop of Constantinople, the emperor's own capital, loved to refer to Mary as the *Theotokos*, in Greek 'the God-bearer', and more crudely in Latin, the 'Mother of God'. To put it simply, Nestorius belonged to the school of theology at Antioch, which specialized in philosophical *distinctions*; the rival school was Alexandria's in Egypt, who preferred to see the *unity* of things. To the ordinary mind, calling Mary God's mother, and then applying that to the life of Jesus – his sufferings and death, seemed to imply that God, Godself, suffered and died. The Alexandrians, represented by Cyril, bishop of Jerusalem, said, a title like 'Christotokos', mother of Jesus the Christ, might be acceptable, otherwise you have a somewhat split-minded Christ, they said – his miracles being performed by his divine side, and the cross suffered by his human side. The opposing parties lined up, met *before* the opening date of the Council, excommunicated Nestorius and condemned his views as heresy. The delegation from Rome was late, and so was the bishop of Antioch who immediately ruled the meeting invalid. On it went. Sometime later, various bishops being detained in prison after the Council, someone came up with a peace formula which tried to represent both sides, but it was lost in the churches' politics. In 449, another Council was held in Ephesus to block any further influence of Nestorius' school, but the bishops, now the successors of those who had led the original debate, called it a 'Robber Council'. In 451 (these things take time) the emperor called what became the universally accepted Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon, across the harbour at Constantinople. Its 'definition' (a kind of addendum to Nicaea) included these words about the Second

Person of the Trinity, 'he was begotten of the Father before all ages according to his divinity and in these latter days, he was born for us and for our salvation of Mary the virgin, the *Theotokos*, according to his humanity'. This sounds like a compromise, but it addresses a mystery well beyond human wisdom's resolution; Chalcedon did what all creeds do – set the markers to the right and to the left which signify we can say so much, but no more. Creeds set a wide stream, not a narrow one; they allow for different opinions and set the limitations of that freedom. Christians could call Mary the God-bearer for the truly human baby she bore.

The issue is not dead in our own time. Many Anglicans and Uniting Church people, indeed most denominations on the 'evangelical' side of the Reformation, have a difficulty – the same difficulty – in calling Mary 'the Mother of God'. It seems illogical, contradictory, yet the idea arises because something truly unique occurred when that young maiden said Yes to the angel's call. There would be no (Divine) incarnation if it were not for this human response; the angel declared Mary 'blessed among women'.

A postscript. A few years ago, I was asked to chair an international conference of Eastern Orthodox (of both families, the 'Eastern' and the 'Oriental' – the two parties that fell out over Chalcedon) and Eastern Catholics. I was nominated as someone with some knowledge of the scope and content of the debates, but neutral - I was under no episcopal jurisdiction. Halfway through the meeting, the Council of Ephesus broke out before my eyes when a Coptic bishop flung condemnations across the lecture hall at an aged and much beloved Metropolitan of the Ancient Church of the East (sometimes called Assyrian) who are followers of Nestorius, but believe he was orthodox. The battle raged for some time before I could call for calm. I talked to both speakers later, but the Copt was

adamant. The Metropolitan, Afrem, whom I had met several times in India, said to me mournfully, 'I sometimes think there must be two Nestorius's: our beloved Patriarch of Constantinople, and someone else who believes all these things my church is accused of!'

Let it not be said that doctrine is dreary. But we were united around that stone table in the apse at St Mary's.

## *Some thoughts about Synod*

### *St Mary's Lay Reps' Reflections on Melbourne Synod 2019 Audrey Statham and Angelica Del Hierro*

Participating for the first time in synod this year was an eye-opening experience for both of us. Particularly memorable moments that have stayed with us are: the beauty of the Eucharist, which the several hundred gathered members from around the diocese celebrated together at the opening of the session, and learning 'the ropes' of church governance – the inner workings of how our diocese manages its budget, staff and assets.

Hearing about the new Diocesan Strategic plan, *Vision and Directions 2019-2025* and the progress in its implementation to date, gave us a more concrete sense of what placing 'mission at the centre' looks like in terms of the role of different diocesan bodies, and the allocation and content of portfolios (for example, church planting) for operationalising the church's mission, growth and sustainability. This provided a 'bigger picture' context for our understanding of St Mary's Mission Action Plan and expanded our awareness to include the wider network of Anglican churches beyond St Mary's, which is one of 204 parishes and eight Authorised Anglican Congregations

operating in our diocese which comprises Melbourne, Geelong and surrounding rural areas.

We were somewhat dismayed, however, by what we perceived as a distinct lack of engagement on the part of many members of synod. Archbishop Freier's following comments on 'church culture' in his opening address to synod offer an apt introduction for what we observed of the prevailing culture of Melbourne Synod:

"We can no longer rely on the culture around us to be a mere projection of our church culture or even to have extensive areas of overlap at the places that may matter to us... This raises the question of the kind of culture we have in the church ... I believe that we are more likely to reach good outcomes if we face challenging times with the confidence that we are resilient and can mutually rely on each other. Debates about human sexuality struggle to be carried out in moderation. It is easy for such discussion to leave some feeling unsafe, others unheard and others left wondering why amongst the many things that urgently press upon us, this debate seems to have claimed such urgency" (p. 5).

The low level of attendance at synod this year was evident from the total number of votes that were counted on the third evening of synod, Friday 18 October, when the controversial Motions 11 ('Church of Confessing Anglicans Aotearoa/New Zealand') and 17 ('Response to Wangaratta Synod') were passed, in both cases, by a small majority of around 235-195 and 226-201 respectively. Of the approximately 750 members entitled to attend this year's session, according to the 2019 diocesan publication, *Synod: A guide for members and prospective members*, only around 430 members attended.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The diocesan guide doesn't state how many of the lay representative positions were not filled for the previous synod term 2016-2018 or the current term.

We also found members' apparent lack of interest in asking questions about the new diocesan plan and its implementation and resourcing, disappointing. There was little inquiry into the reasoning which informs the plan's prioritisation of certain areas and directions for change and resourcing over others in the diocese.

The lack of debate on the floor of synod about legislation and motions, particularly, the lack of opportunity for, or interest in, debating or discussing the positions taken by the range of motions relating to social justice concerns, was troubling. Indigenous reconciliation, protection of the environment, caring for vulnerable citizens struggling to get by on the Newstart allowance, increasing foreign aid, and ensuring access by members of emerging communities to employment positions they might otherwise be locked out of, are all challenges that require our urgent consideration and action in the church and wider society. Yet at the start of synod, all these motions were relegated to the status of formal motions which meant that they were passed without opportunity for debate. Consequently, there was no discussion of how this raft of social justice motions might be taken up and operationalised at the diocesan and parish levels, and there was no consideration given to whether – given resourcing constraints – certain issues ought to be prioritised, initially, over others for addressing and resourcing, or which diocesan bodies ought to be delegated to support parishes to pursue the social justice policies endorsed by synod.

We found especially troubling the restriction of debate at synod to just a few motions, and what we perceived as the absence for the most part of dialogue between different perspectives during debate. Out of a total of 29 motions and legislation passed over the course of synod, only Motions 11, 17 and one other motion were debated. Relevant information that was needed for members to better understand the context and significance of these motions wasn't really provided during debate. This seem liked a major oversight

given our impression that some members weren't well informed about the background to these motions. During the debate on the floor, analysis and critique of the different arguments presented, including the arguments of the movers of those motions, seemed mostly lacking.

In light of this, we believe it might now be wise to apply the following question that Archbishop Freier posed, "what kind of culture [do] we need in order to be fit for ministry in our time" (p. 6) to synod. What kind of synod culture do we need to build so that we can prevent the emergence of the kind of environment at synod that Revd John Baldock, Vicar of St John's Camberwell, described when he proposed that Motion 17 *not* be put (this motion lost by 201-226): "I don't believe that our synods are places where we should create winners and losers on issues [of controversy] like these. I think these issues are too close to the heart of too many people for us to force a decision on others on a matter like this".

By contrast, the type of synod culture we might do well to channel some of our energy towards fostering, was suggested by this point made at synod by Revd Canon Professor Dorothy Lee of Trinity College Theological School and Associate Priest at St Mary's: "[W]e all have in common a love of Scripture, a commitment to Scripture, a love of Christ, a belief in the most Holy Trinity, and yet we are dividing ourselves ... surely we can disagree on these matters, surely the bishops themselves can disagree on these matters, and yet hold our unity in Christ".

In order to contribute in a small way to this task of building a more open, inclusive synod culture, we've prepared a written Lay Representatives' report which our Churchwardens requested, that gives an account of:

- key processes of synod
- the new diocesan strategic plan



- motions and legislation formally moved and passed at Synod 2019
- details of debate on controversial motions that were passed
- background information that is needed to better understand those controversial motions
- suggestions for what we can do between now and Synod 2020

Synod is the key forum for decision-making about our corporate life as Anglicans in Melbourne and our relationships with the Anglican Church generally and with wider society. We need, surely, to take action now to safeguard it from the emergence of a culture of ‘us and them’ and ‘winners and losers’ where some members force decisions on others, through exercising responsibility for our times by working together to build up a more participatory, engaged and inclusive synod culture in which it’s possible to disagree on matters and yet hold our unity in Christ.

### *The Duty of the Christian Citizen* *Chips Sowerwine*

I don’t come to St Mary’s for political struggle. I’ve always assumed that competent people were taking care of the diocese for me. The increasingly strident pronouncements from Sydney, particularly since the ‘postal ballot’ on same-sex marriage, worried me, but I assumed that this was a Sydney phenomenon, even when Archbishop Davies said that supporters of same-sex marriage ‘should start a new church’, adding ‘Please leave us.’

The resolutions passed recently in Synod upset my comfortable view of the church world. In the Anglican tradition, we have long been in dialogue if not dispute with each other, but we have assumed that

our disputes took place within our common commitment to the Anglican communion. Tim Jones' *Sexual Politics in the Church of England, 1857-1957* (OUP, 2013) gives a fascinating and hopeful (perhaps too hopeful?) analysis of the way this dialogue worked in the past.

The motions passed at our recent synod, however, went beyond dialogue. Our synod representatives have prepared an excellent short report on the context of these motions (which I urge everyone to get from Angelica and Audrey), but I'll give a summary here.

The first motion (Motion 11) 'welcomes the newly formed Church of Confessing Anglicans, Aotearoa/New Zealand.' This is a sect composed of Anglicans who left the Anglican Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia to build a new church. Our synod is now formally on record as supporting a schism. We are implicated because our synod represents us.

It gets worse when you consider why these Anglican Kiwis broke with their church. It is because the New Zealand Anglican Church voted to permit the blessing of same-sex relationships, using texts already in the approved liturgy. They voted only to allow bishops to bless or to refuse to bless, so there was no pressure on any bishop to violate his or her conscience. But even this was too much for the opposition. They decided to start a new church.

The new church joined the movement known as GAFCON (Global Anglican Future CONference). GAFCON is a world union of similar, schismatic former Anglicans. The biggest single motive behind the creation of GAFCON was the consecration in 2003 of Bishop Gene Robinson by the Episcopal Church in the US, to which the schismatics objected solely because Bishop Gene was (and is) openly

gay. GAFCON is also opposed to women bishops. A report dated 14 June 2019 recommended that it should 'retain the historic practice of the consecration only of men as bishops', though it allows 'input from the various ministries of women, such as bishops' wives, Mothers Union and ordained women'. So ordained women come after bishops' wives and the Mothers Union...

At its formation in 2008, GAFCON called for schism in the Episcopal Church in the US and in the Anglican Church of Canada and thumbed their noses at the Archbishop of Canterbury, declaring that one can be an Anglican without recognising the Archbishop.

So in endorsing the schismatic Kiwis, our Synod endorsed schism in the Church in favour of an avowedly anti-gay and anti-women movement. But Synod went further and 'expressed its sorrow' that the Diocese of Wangaratta had endorsed the blessing of same-sex relationships (Motion 17). Archbishop Freier had already referred this decision to the Church's Appellate Tribunal, but without even waiting for a judgment, our Synod has pre-emptively condemned the blessing of married persons of the same sex.

Can we just wring our hands and let our Church speak this way? Or do we try to take action, as the proponents of discrimination have done? That means being activists. It's not always comfortable but it's our duty if we believe in an open and inclusive church.

Audrey pointed out in her verbal report that while the margin on the votes was around 40, there were perhaps 100 representatives who didn't show. Fr Craig made a similar point in a talk he gave after the Synod (see <http://humanecatholic.blogspot.com/2019/10/melbourne-synod-2019-and-beyond.html>). We can presume that many of the

absent representatives were from churches that are inclusive or at least not exclusive.

We need to speak to all our Anglican friends in other parishes and ask them to ensure that for the next Synod they elect active, engaged representatives committed to equality and inclusion. We need to find every channel to organise and help bend Synod back to an inclusive view more in tune with the evolution of our society.

We need also to join the group Prayerful and Proactive Anglicans formed in response to Synod at St Stephen's Richmond 18 November 2019. Write to the convenor, Rev Sophie Watkins, at [vicar@parishoftheparks.com.au](mailto:vicar@parishoftheparks.com.au), and ask to be put on the mailing list.

The next Archbishop of Melbourne will be elected in five years. Sydney Archbishop Davies' supporters here are obviously organising effectively, counting numbers and getting out their people.

If we don't act effectively, the next Archbishop of Melbourne may say 'Please leave us.'

## *Other Interesting Matters*

### *Participating in the Psalms*

*Anne Sunderland*

Two years ago, after a series of misadventures on the internet I found myself enrolled in a Master of Theological Studies studying mostly through Trinity College. As I currently work full-time, I embraced the opportunity to study part-time and online and I was especially pleased this year to find a unit offered on the book of Psalms. Many

years ago, I began a post-graduate study of the Syriac versions of the Psalter and I hoped this unit might help me re-engage with this uncompleted research.

A major focus of the course, brilliantly and insightfully taught by Dr Rachelle Gilmour, was to consider how in *reading* the Psalms we are *participating* in them, not only as texts but also as acts of worship. We are thus, as individuals and as a worshipping community, consequently *formed* by them. I found this approach extremely enlightening as we confronted the various experiences that might have inspired these compositions.

An early tutorial task was to nominate and reflect on my favourite psalm! As I began to ponder, I became aware of how closely psalmody and hymnody are aligned. It becomes hard to think of Psalm 23 apart from the settings of *Crimond* or *Dominus Regit Me* and for this particular text the music of Gelineau, John Rutter, Howard Goodall and even Paul Kelly take the beauty of imagery and the overwhelming message of consolation and hope of the words to a higher level.

Two further psalms on my list of favourites were Psalms 42 and 84 and again I associate both of these psalms with their musical settings and especially with my days in the choir. The 'bluesy' version of Psalm 42 (in a minor key!) we used to sing at our Easter Vigil liturgy and the beautiful Vaughan Williams anthem based on Psalms 84 and 90 particularly come to mind.

I was able to study these two texts more closely choosing one as my tutorial topic and the other as an exegetical essay. This helped me to appreciate them even more and certainly emphasises how a close and more informed reading of the text forms the reader. In this case

my sensory response, already highlighted by my musical relationship with the text was enhanced by my greater understanding of why, when, where and possibly by whom these words were written.

Psalm 121 was the fourth text on my early short list and it especially speaks to me as it affirms the Lord of creation as my help and keeper and reassures that I am truly protected from “the sun... by day” and “the moon by night”. I didn’t know about the Songs of Ascent at that stage but I have a greater appreciation of Psalm 121 now and am encouraged to think that when I return to these verses I am part of a tradition of pilgrimage, if not to Jerusalem then to the centre of my worship life.

This year I have been able to join the small group here at St Mary’s who read Morning Prayer together each day. I can only be there on one day each week but even that has given me a greater sense of the daily offices and the central role the Psalter plays in our liturgy. I like to think I am able to make more sense of the psalm we read each morning and approach it through context as well as through poetry. The Psalms stand as the prayers of the ancient people of God but are still wholly relevant for today and the future.

## *The Acts of Thecla, with Paul, and the Ministry of Women in the Early Church*

*Geoff Jenkins*

Until recently I suppose most of us had never heard of (St) Thecla. Now, however, together with the rather better known St Paul, she has received two mentions in our most recent series of St Mary's BETA studies, so it seems appropriate to present here some detail about her.



Our Orthodox friends, and even Roman Catholics and Episcopalians, might be surprised that Thecla is not well known to Anglicans, for they celebrate her saint's day (Sept 23/24) and have been naming churches, chapels and towns after her since the fourth century. Her story, written in Greek, is retold in Syriac, in Latin, in Armenian and in Arabic, before a dozen modern languages. I say 'retold in' rather than 'translated into', for no translator seems to have demurred from adjusting the story to suit his or her theological preferences, and that for which translators set the precedent is continued with enthusiasm by subsequent copyists.

Thecla, so it would seem from the evidence, has always been a contentious character, and probably already for the original author of the story. Tertullian, a prominent Christian writer and leader of the Latin-speaking church of North Africa, is famous for his explicit attack on Thecla and her Acts, which he rejects as a poor invention. We do not for a moment intend to give Tertullian the last word on Thecla and women's ministry in general. As a trained practitioner of Roman law, he was bound to regard women as inferior contributors to public discourse. Stories about women such as Thecla, from wealthy and important families, whose education and independence of opinion he thought a risk to good order, in society and in the church, must not be allowed to set a precedent for the contemporary church.

Later in his life, Tertullian embraced the Montanist Movement, in which women prophets were especially prominent, so it may have been that he did not persist in his opposition to women's ministry throughout his life. Alternatively, and more likely in my view, is the suggestion that Tertullian objected to such ministries if performed outside the authority of the church, and that he accepted prophecy

more readily than teaching or preaching, especially when men were present. Whatever else, it is clear that Tertullian's view about Thecla resonates closely with certain contemporary views on women's ministry.

It is well worth reflecting on the possibility that some modern opposition to women's ministry follows a path defined for Latin Christianity by a second century Roman lawyer! To be specific, take for example what Tertullian says of Thecla's role as teacher and baptizer: But if the writings which wrongly go under Paul's name, claim Thecla's example as a licence for women's teaching and baptizing, let them know that, in Asia, the presbyter who composed that writing, as if he were augmenting Paul's fame from his own store, after being convicted, and confessing that he had done it from love of Paul, was removed from his office. For how credible it would seem, that he who has not permitted a woman even to learn with over-boldness, should give a female the power of teaching and of baptizing! "Let them be silent," he says, "and at home consult their own husbands." (1 Corinthians 14:34-35)

Before we move on, it may be worth noting that The Acts of Paul & Thecla does not read like an homage to Paul, as Tertullian insinuates. If anything, it is an homage to Thecla, distinguished from a most unexciting Paul. Even so, to the best of my knowledge this is the only example from patristic literature of a convicted forger. Quite what we imagine that the Acts of Paul & Thecla tells us about Paul's view of women in church is an intriguing issue to which we will return shortly.

But what of "augmenting Paul's fame from his own store" (quasi titulo Pauli de suo cumulans)? Most scholars date the present (Greek) text to about 180 CE, based on attitudes to marriage of the

time and the persecution of the church, among other indications. However, it could not be clearer that the events narrated are set in Paul's lifetime. It is well recognised that the work is independent of The Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament. No one called Thecla appears in the New Testament, and Paul is not said to have visited the cities of Iconium, nor Myra. Perhaps the ordeals to which Thecla was subjected were anachronistic to First Century Asia Minor, though it is notable that Thecla is persecuted for her attitude to marriage and, perhaps, her refusal to obey her mother. All this adds up to the modern consensus that the story is based on oral tradition beginning in Paul's own time. And it is reasonable to add that if the author of the Acts of the Apostles was an eyewitness to the events there described, remembrances of visits by Paul to other towns might have been passed down through independent tradition.

Now what can we say of Thecla, and of Paul, from the text of the Acts? We tend to think of Paul as a lively debater, passionate about ideas, a man both of thought and action, courageous in his pursuit of the ministry to which he is called by God. Strangely, in the Acts of Paul & Thecla, this is the picture not of Paul but of Thecla! She is courageous and passionate, while Paul seems wooden, nervous and almost devoid of emotion. Paul preaches the avoidance of marriage; Thecla hears his message by accident, seems ironically to fall deeply in love with Paul and rejects her fiancé and pursues Paul from place to place. When she finally meets the real Paul, she seems disappointed, and departs to engage in her own ministry.

And from our point of view and in our ecclesiastical context it is the ministry of Thecla, especially its deeply rooted independence from Paul's, which intrigues us. In Myra, where they meet, Paul is surprised (with a tinge of consternation) to see Thecla and her entourage of young men and young women arrive. As the narrative

evolves, these are turned into servants of the Queen, especially the women, but the original stress seems clearly to have been on Thecla as a leader of a group of men and women. She dresses like a man, apparently because she is concerned to be valued more for her opinions than her beauty, or her wealth and privilege. She does not display much deference to Paul. O Paul, she addresses him in the vocative case of familiarity, with no honorifics in sight. But Paul seems only concerned that he will land once again in prison and be flogged on account of Thecla. Paul's surprise is a recurrent theme here. He seems not to anticipate how events will play out. He has more or less left Thecla to her own devices, and clearly does not expect that she will have survived the ordeal(s) in the theatre.

There are, incidentally, overtones of the Lord's Prayer here. The Greek *peirasmos* = trial, examination, is here translated by the Latin *temptatio*, which also means trial, examination, rather than "temptation". We have an example where the Latin Vulgate influenced the English translation of NT Greek, and it took hundreds of years to undo the damage.

Remarkably, Thecla says to Paul: I baptised myself. The remark is telling, for Thecla had, rather like the Ethiopian eunuch, asked Paul to baptise her. For whatever reason, Paul defers her baptism, so she is forced to baptise herself in a pool of man-eating seals!

The specifics of this text deserve careful reading. God works together with Paul to preach, as Thecla acknowledges, but then she claims that God does the same for her ministry of baptism. Her ministry, just like his, is ordained by God. I use 'ordained' advisedly, to draw out the point of this statement. Thecla's is an ordained ministry, and I think both when she is preaching as well as baptising. That her ministry is not mediated through a man, be it Paul or any other, is

clear from the directness of the balanced clauses so constructed. She is not subservient. She answers God's call to ministry in her own right, based on the own education, knowledge and convictions.

Thecla narrates, clearly to a congregation of mixed gender, how God has preserved her life, and those listening are strengthened in their faith--not so much Paul, who is just surprised--and they fall to prayer on behalf of the prominent woman (Queen Trappeira) who has risked her reputation to preserve the reputation of Thecla. Then, as though taking her own initiative and entirely in control of her own agenda, Thecla arises and without so much as a by-your-leave, Paul, she announces that she is returning to Iconium.

There is, however, one more intriguing reversal of the tables here to note, and again it is one that later translators and transmitters have struggled with. Apparently Thecla has brought with her not only an entourage but also many valuable garments and much money, so that the poor might be ministered to. One readily imagines that this would be a suitable ministry for Thecla, such a well-connected woman, but the earliest (original?) form of our text has her passing over this wherewithall to Paul so that he can undertake this diaconal ministry. No wonder that Tertullian found this text an inversion of good order in the church and in society.

What can we say then of Paul and Thecla? We can perhaps ignore the presentation of Paul, and certainly for the present purpose. As for Thecla, her story was important in the ante-Nicean church. She was a prominent thinker, important not just because God delivered her from death in the theatre, but because as a well educated, intelligent and independently minded woman she knew herself to be called by God to a ministry of teaching (men and women) and initiating (men and women) into the church.

There is a particularly intriguing depiction of Thecla in a ceiling of the necropolis of Bagawat near Kharga in SW Egypt. (See back cover of newsletter) Paul is there too, and I agree with Fr Brady that he is shown preaching, as Thecla listens at a distance. But what is that in Thecla's hand, if not a pen of sorts, and is she not nursing a book (wooden board perhaps?) and not only reading but writing herself onto a separate sheet of papyrus or parchment. This would have been a letter, such as Thecla would have written often.

We know that "Thecla-nuns" were exiled from Alexandria to Kharga in the Fourth Century. Probably this beautiful work of such women (notice Eve in the next frame). Likely as not the movement among women that thrived in later Egypt was inspired by the articulate, intelligent and courageous Thecla of Iconium, who didn't need Paul to inform her, nor validate her ministry.



Century. Probably image was the women (notice Eve). Likely as not the movement among women that thrived in later Egypt was inspired by the articulate, courageous Thecla



## A page from the translated text.

those who do not believe on him, shall not live, but suffer eternal death.

20 When the governor heard these things, he ordered her clothes to be brought, and said to her, Put on your clothes.

21 Thecla replied: May that God who clothed me when I was naked among the beasts, in the day of judgment clothe your soul with the robe of salvation. Then she took her clothes, and put them on; and the governor immediately published an order in these words: I release to you Thecla the servant of God.

22 Upon which the women cried out together with a loud voice, and with one accord gave praise unto God, and said; There is but one God, who is the God of Thecla; the one God who hath delivered Thecla.

23 So loud were their voices, that the whole city seemed to be shaken; and Trifina herself heard the glad tidings, and arose again, and ran with the multitude to meet Thecla; and embracing her, said: Now I believe there shall be a resurrection of the dead; now I am persuaded that my daughter is alive. Come therefore home with me, my daughter Thecla, and I will make all over that I have to you.

24 So Thecla went with Trifina, and was entertained there a few days, teaching her the word of the Lord, whereby many young women were converted; and there was great joy in the family of Trifina.

25 But Thecla longed to see Paul, and inquired and sent every where to find him; and when at length she was informed that he was at Myra, in Lycia, she took with her many young men and women; and putting on a girdle, and dressing herself in the habit of a man, she went to him to

Myra in Lycia, and there found Paul preaching the word of God; and she stood by him among the throng.

### CHAPTER X.

*1 Thecla visits Paul; 6 visits Onesiphorus; 8 and visits her Mother 9 who repulses her. 14 Is tempted by the devil. 16 Works miracles.*

BUT it was no small surprise to Paul when he saw her and the people with her; for he imagined some fresh trial was coming upon them;

2 Which when Thecla perceived, she said to him: I have been baptized, O Paul; for he who assists you in preaching, has assisted me to baptize.

3 Then Paul took her, and led her to the house of Hermes; and Thecla related to Paul all that had befallen her in Antioch, insomuch that Paul exceedingly wondered, and all who heard were confirmed in the faith, and prayed for Trifina's happiness.

4 Then Thecla arose, and said to Paul, I am going to Iconium. Paul replied to her: Go and teach the word of the Lord.

5 But Trifina had sent large sums of money to Paul, and also clothing by the hands of Thecla, for the relief of the poor.

6 So Thecla went to Iconium. And when she came to the house of Onesiphorus, she fell down upon the floor where Paul had sat and preached, and, mixing tears with her prayers, she praised and glorified God in the following words:

7 O Lord the God of this house, in which I was first enlightened by thee; O Jesus, son of the living God, who wast my helper before the governor, my helper in the fire, and my helper among the beasts; thou alone art God for ever and ever, Amen.

8 Thecla now (on her return) found

## *'Ave ex fit Eva'*

*Marina Connelly*

On December the 22<sup>nd</sup>, the choir will sing a setting by Bob Chilcott of the anonymous English carol, 'Nova! Nova!' It gives an account of the Annunciation. The carol's refrain, 'Nova! Nova! Ave ex fit Eva!' is translated, 'News! News! Ave has been made out of Eva!', invoking the ancient literary-religious motif of the palindrome Eva/Ave. Eva the tempted was the woman who brought all ill in the world; 'Ave' is the imperative form of the Latin 'avere' ('to be or fare well'). The greeting, then, is an order, 'be well', and is applied to Mary, the woman who brings a restoration of wellbeing.

There is some debate over its true historical significance, but the palindrome was invoked quite widely as a cult figure, a shorthand for a particular idea in medieval Mariology. Counterpart to the pairing of Adam and Christ, (Corinthians 15:21 reads, 'since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.') Eve and Mary are placed as antithetical images of womanhood—the one who brought sin, and the other (Ave is literally 'made out of' a reversal of E-V-A) who bore salvation. For some, including the mystic Hildegard of Bingen, Mary's mothering of Christ was seen as an exoneration and purification of womankind after Eve's misstep, and she would use the palindrome in much of her Marian poetry:

Ave Maria,  
o auctrix vite,  
reedificando salute,  
que mortem conturbasti  
et serpentem contrivisti,  
ad quem se Eva erexit  
erecta cervice  
cum sufflatu superbie.  
hunc conculcasti  
dum de celo Filium Dei genuisti.

Ave Maria,  
o authoress of life,  
rebuilding health  
for you have confounded death  
and crushed the serpent  
to whom Eve offered herself  
with neck outstretched  
and puffed up with pride.  
You trampled that serpent  
when you bore the heaven's Son of God.

Later writers, such as Robert Southwell, did too:

Spell Eva backe and Ave shall yowe finde,  
The first beganne, the last reversd our harmes;  
An angell's witching wordes did Eva blynde,  
An angell's Ave disinchauntes the charmes:  
Death first by woeman's weakenes entred in,  
In woeman's vertue life doth nowe beginn.

At St Mary's North Melbourne, perhaps the figure gives us another way to think of our patron.

*Occasional Series –Poems and a Quotation for  
Christmastide.*

**THE COMING**

And God held in his hand  
A small globe. Look he said.  
The son looked. Far off,  
As through water, he saw  
A scorched land of fierce  
Colour. The light burned  
There; crusted buildings  
Cast their shadows: a bright  
Serpent, a river  
Uncoiled itself, radiant  
With slime.  
On a bare  
Hill a bare tree saddened  
The sky. Many People  
Held out their thin arms  
To it, as though waiting  
For a vanished April  
To return to its crossed  
Boughs. The son watched  
Them. Let me go there, he said.

**R. S. Thomas**

## **The House of Christmas**

There fared a mother driven forth  
Out of an inn to roam; his  
In the place where she was homeless  
All men are at home.  
The crazy stable close at hand,  
With shaking timber and shifting sand,  
Grew a stronger thing to abide and stand  
Than the square stones of Rome.

For men are homesick in their homes,  
And strangers under the sun,  
And they lay on their heads in a foreign land  
Whenever the day is done.  
Here we have battle and blazing eyes,  
And chance and honour and high surprise,  
But our homes are under miraculous skies  
Where the yule tale was begun.

A Child in a foul stable,  
Where the beasts feed and foam;  
Only where He was homeless  
Are you and I at home;  
We have hands that fashion and heads that  
know,  
But our hearts we lost - how long ago!  
In a place no chart nor ship can show  
Under the sky's dome.

This world is wild as an old wives' tale,  
And strange the plain things are,  
The earth is enough and the air is enough

For our wonder and our war;  
But our rest is as far as the fire-drake swings  
And our peace is put in impossible things  
Where clashed and thundered unthinkable  
wings  
Round an incredible star.

To an open house in the evening  
Home shall men come,  
To an older place than Eden  
And a taller town than Rome.  
To the end of the way of the wandering star,  
To the things that cannot be and that are,  
To the place where God was homeless  
And all men are at home."

**G.K. Chesterton**

"And so the Word was made flesh and God's joy lived among us. Jesus a man overflowing with attractiveness of Divine joy. He lived a life that we are called to imitate so that we may become sharers in the Divine nature.

Joy is the most infallible sign of the presence of God. God is joy, and those who abide in joy abide in God and God abides in them."

**From "Balaam's Donkey", Michael Casey**

**Following the post-service morning tea each Sunday, St Mary's offers a weekly education programme. All are welcome.**

*On the first Sunday of each month:*

Congregational lunch at 12.15pm, sometimes with a pre-lunch talk

*On other Sundays of each month:*

Lecture/study groups from c.11.30am-12.15pm

## *St Mary's BETA studies*

We are working through a series of studies on Women in the Bible.

Planned in the new year are these sessions:

- \* Women in the Hebrew Bible Rachelle Gilmour (Trinity Theological School) in late January

## CONTACT ST MARY'S

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Parish Administrator &  
Child Safe Officer  
Regular Office Hours:

Kerry Dehring  
Monday 9.30am-3.30pm  
Tuesday 9.30am-3.30pm  
Thursday 9.30am-3.30pm

**KOOYOORA**  
PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS  
DIOCESE OF MELBOURNE

The Anglican Diocese in conjunction with St Mary's Anglican Church North Melbourne does not tolerate abuse, harassment or other misconduct within our communities. If any person has concerns about behavior of a church worker, past or present.

The Diocese of Melbourne is committed to doing all that is possible to ensure that abuse does not occur. All complaints of abuse are taken very seriously, and we do all we can to lessen harm. We offer respect, pastoral care and ongoing long-term support to anyone who makes a complaint. St Mary's Statement of Commitment to Child Safety is on our noticeboard and can be downloaded from our website [www.stmarys.org.au](http://www.stmarys.org.au).

**PLEASE REPORT ABUSE CALL 1800 135 246**



# MISSION AND VISION STATEMENT

*St Mary's Anglican Church, North Melbourne is an inner-city Christian community that strives to be faithful, inclusive and sacramental.*

*God inspires us to worship in daily celebration; to be caring, thoughtful and inviting.*

*In response to God's call, in the next three to five years we aim:*

- *To grow substantially in faith and numbers*
- *To create an inter-generational culture that values all age groups - children and adults - equally*
- *To express our faith in active engagement within and beyond our own community*
- *To deploy our property and financial assets in strategic support of the ministry needs of the parish for the long term*
- *To become more open to change as we learn to grow*



Thecla with Paul in the ceiling of the Necropolis of Bagawat.

