

AVE

Advent Christmas 2023



Some of the nativity sets lent by parish families displayed in the baptistery during Advent. See story and more photos inside.

Ave is available for download via the St Mary's Parish Website:

<https://www.stmarys.org.au/wp/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/2023-Ave-Advent-Edition-FINAL.pdf>

Christmas and January services:

December 24:

4th Sunday of Advent **10AM** service only

Kids Christmas **5PM**

Midnight Mass **11.30PM**

December 25: FAMILY CHRISTMAS SERVICE 9AM

December 31: First Sunday after Christmas

January 5: Epiphany Service **6pm** (There will be a eucharist followed by a barbeque. Please bring what you would like to barbecue and to drink. Salads and bread will be provided.)

January 7: Baptism of Our Lord

January 14th: Second Sunday after Epiphany

January 21st: Third Sunday after Epiphany

January 28th: Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

February 4th: Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

TABLE OF CONTENTS

.....	3
An Advent Beginning	4
Christmas 2023 Nativity Set Display at St Mary's	7
Advent Wreath? What's That?	10
Advent Fundraising: A Guide to Organising a Christmas Stall	13
An Advent Recipe: Jackie Webber's Spicy Plum Chutney	14
An Advent Sermon	16
An Advent Saint: Nicholas of Myra.....	19
Behind Nicaea.....	20
The Crisis Under Caligula and the Earliest Jerusalem Church	22
The Launch of the Book of the Year:	25
The Kingdom of Heaven	27
A Journey in Faith: Churches where we have worshipped	27
Prayer and Charity:.....	30
A White Christmas in Scotland	34
A Christmas Cartoon	36

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We meet on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri people of the great Kulin nation. We acknowledge their leaders past present and emerging and offer them our respects.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of the parish of St Marys, the Anglican Church, or its members.

An Advent Beginning

Year B: The Gospel of Mark

Dorothy A. Lee



Figure 1 St Mark, Lindisfarne Gospels, 8th century CE

Study of the Gospel according to Mark has blossomed in the last few decades — in a way that has been much to our advantage!

For the early church, Mark was the second Gospel to be written. Partly because Mark is so short (16 chapters), it was considered an abbreviation of Matthew's Gospel. For that reason, it remained in the shadows for many centuries and few commentaries were written on it. Why, after all, would you read a Gospel that has no birth stories, no Sermon on the Mount, and no resurrection appearances, when you can have the whole thing by reading Matthew?

In the nineteenth century all that changed, after careful and critical study of the first three ('Synoptic') Gospels and their close inter-relationship. We call this the 'Synoptic problem'

and it is created by the Gospel of John which is so very different in structure, themes and characters. Scholars came to realise that Mark was in fact the first Gospel to be written and that both Matthew and Luke had made use of Mark in the writing (and expanding) of their Gospels. For the first time, Mark came into the spotlight and was seen in his own right. The view of Markan priority originated in Lutheran scholarship in Germany, was accepted in the UK and elsewhere in the English-speaking world, and was confirmed by Roman Catholic scholars once they were permitted to engage in critical study of the Gospels.

For a time after that, Mark was viewed as the kind of biographical bedrock which told the story of Jesus in plain fashion, while the theological implications were drawn out by the more sophisticated Gospels of Matthew and Luke. John was regarded as a late Gospel and the opposite of Mark: all theology and not much history.

All that changed in the twentieth century when Mark's theological intentions became clear, along with his careful structuring of the narrative, as more and more they were studied. Mark's Greek might be plain and his Gospel may have a hurried, compact air, but it is no less theological than any of the others. Similarly, John's Gospel became recognised as making a real contribution to our historical understanding of Jesus. So all the Gospels are now seen alike as re-shaping the historical events of Jesus' life and death to suit their own

theological agenda; at the same time, that is precisely what makes them so wonderfully different from each other.

Mark's story of Jesus begins with a prologue which sets out the early events of Jesus' life and proclamation, including his baptism and the epiphany it evokes (1:1-15). It is then followed by the narrative of Jesus' ministry, portraying the signs of the kingdom or reign of God (1:16-8:21): the calling of disciples, welcoming of 'sinners' (outsiders), healings, exorcisms, raising of the dead, feeding of the hungry, teaching. These signs indicate for Mark the shape of God's final reign which brings wholeness and healing to human beings, overcoming the powers of evil, sin and death.

At the same time, the signs of the kingdom in these chapters also lead to conflict with the authorities who find Jesus' teaching threatening and fear his popularity; they even accuse him of being motivated by evil powers (3:22). Alongside the conflict lies also the misunderstanding of the inner group of disciples: particularly the twelve whose lack of understanding Jesus finds increasingly frustrating (8:17-21).

The middle section of the Gospel is framed on either side by the healing of a blind man (8:22-26; 10:46-52). This becomes the central metaphor for the narrative it encloses. Here Jesus begins his journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, revealing on the way his impending suffering, death and resurrection. The first of these revelations of the cross is followed immediately by the transfiguration, where Jesus' true identity as the divine, beloved Son is revealed (9:2-8).

All three 'passion predictions' lead directly to an incident that displays the disciples' incomprehension and rejection of Jesus' message: Peter tries to turn Jesus away from the way of the cross (8:27-33), the disciples argue about which of them is the greatest (9:30-37), and James and John ask for the two places of honour in the new kingdom (10:32-40). By contrast, Jesus' own ministry, in life and death, is one of servanthood and it is that model which the church is to follow, not one of prestige, status and domination (10:42-45). Clearly, a miracle of faith is required to open blind eyes!

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is well-acclaimed by many of the people, but the week which ensues is one of increasing conflict with the temple authorities; it climaxes in Jesus' final discourse, in which he speaks in strongly apocalyptic language of the impending distress and persecution as the End draws near and the joyful hope of his own future Coming (11:1-13:37).

All the events so far have set us up for the Passion narrative, the climax of this Gospel. It begins and ends with the faithfulness and insight of women disciples (14:3-9, 15:40-41, 47), and the betrayal, denial or flight of the twelve (14:10-11, 50, 66-72). At his last, celebratory meal with his disciples Jesus institutes the Eucharist as a re-framing of Passover; while at

Gethsemane, he struggles with his fate in great distress, handing over his whole life to God in prayer, while the disciples (full of illusions about themselves) fall asleep (14:22-42).

The story of the crucifixion is shaped by Mark's theology. Jesus hands over his life to his enemies, both temple authorities and Romans, embracing powerlessness, self-denial and suffering for the sake of others (15:31). As a narrative, it works ironically as a kind of enthronement: the more Jesus is mocked as king, the more the story reveals him as precisely that. His last words — a quotation from Psalm 22:1 (15:33)— expresses a profound paradox: Jesus experiences the cross as that of dereliction and abandonment, yet the Roman centurion recognises precisely in that death the vibrant presence of God: 'truly this was God's Son' (15:39). For Mark, God in Jesus descends into the lowest depths of human suffering, rejection and violence in order to bring about new life and lasting peace, with the overcoming of suffering and death.

The ending of this Gospel is perhaps its strangest feature (16:1-8). The three holy women visit the tomb, encounter the angel and the empty tomb, receive the message of the resurrection and their commission, and run from it: 'they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid' (16:8). This is where the original Gospel ended. The other endings (in double square brackets in our English translations) were both added later, probably some time in the second century CE.

So what is Mark saying by ending his Gospel on this note of fear and silence? Some argue that the women disciples are portrayed as being on a par with the twelve who likewise flee in terror (14:50). According to this view, Mark leaves us with the incapacity of all human beings to grasp the good news, both the cross and the resurrection, challenging us as readers with the question of how we will respond.

The other view is that the response of the women disciples is entirely appropriate. It is holy fear or awe that overcomes them and their silence is temporary: they have just witnessed an ineffable event, the signs of the resurrection, an event for which there have, at least at first, no words! To my mind, this view makes more sense of the Gospel and its mysterious ending.

We do not know who wrote this Gospel or where from or why, as the text itself does not give us any of these details. All we have is later legends. The vast majority of scholars place it around the time of the Jewish War, either just before or just after (between 65 and 75 CE), in a period of persecution and suffering. A later tradition places it in Rome, with Peter's name behind the writing of it, and that is possible, even likely. Others argue for a venue in northern Palestine by an unknown author, while for the Orthodox Mark was the first Bishop of Alexandria and wrote the Gospel there.

In the end, these questions of authorship and dating do not matter much. The early church associated St Mark with the lion, roaring its word of hope to the world. What matters is this

urgent and passionate Gospel, the first to be written, which has created a whole new genre of literature. What matters is Mark's profound theology, with its simple prose and its hope-filled message of God entering radically into the human situation: embracing suffering and death in order to liberate us from them.

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Christmas 2023 Nativity Set Display at St Mary's

Christine Storey



Our thanks to Mother Robyn for her inspired idea for our parish to share our family Nativity Sets this year, and to Darrell, our Parish Administrator for carefully unwrapping the copious amounts of tissue paper surrounding all the pieces brought in various boxes, (which have been stored for the most of the year in otherwise unaccessed storage cupboards) and

arranging these Nativity Sets with their respective acknowledgement cards, in the baptistry. Darrell cleverly used the “peg” Nativity set to support the note of general thanks: “The sets on display here have been kindly loaned by parishioners who have enjoyed displaying them in their own homes for many a year. We are very thankful that they have been entrusted to us this season, so that others may delight in them too.” Indeed, what a delight this display has been during the Advent Season. As may be seen in some of the photographs, the display has been set up fittingly in the baptistry, where some of our parishioners themselves have been baptised as babies, and celebrates the birth of our Lord Jesus, born in a humble stable. Many of our parish family have contributed to this very personal display, and remarkably each is unique. There are simple yet imaginative sets such as the clothes pegs and finger puppets. There are sets made out of straw, wood, stone, glass, fabric and various other materials, some hand-made, some mass produced, and from all around the world, including a late arrival, a fabric Nativity Set from Palestine brought by Susan Brennan, and set up with help from Isaiah and Billy. To me, this rich collection of Nativity Scenes are a symbol of the enduring message of Christmas – the birth of our Jesus giving the gift of love to all people, from all corners of our fragile world, young and old, poor and wealthy, educated and uneducated. Yet, as we pack away our Nativity Sets after Epiphany, may the love of Christmas stay with us all, all year, and not just stored away like our Christmas decorations, ready to be unpacked again next Advent!

Thank you once again to all those who made this display possible.







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Advent Wreath? What's That?

Robyn Boyd



I came late to the whole Advent thing. Growing up in a non-church going family, with only the 1950-60's socially compulsory Sunday school attendance – and that in an evangelical church – Advent was not a word I ever heard. Let alone a Season, or making a wreath! Even after I came into a serious faith in my 20's, the first 20 or so years of that was within a Sydney Anglican reformed evangelical setting. None of that catholic-tinged eventing or symbolism, thank you very much!

Obviously that's changed for me!

Right now, I'm gearing up for this year's Advent wreath to adorn my front door. I've sadly neglected this since I moved back to Melbourne four years ago. In those four years, my front door looked out onto a rather lacklustre tall fence.

No passers-by; only myself to enjoy any Advent wreath sadly hanging. Now, with my recent move, my new open setting invites a fresh era of front door Advent wreaths.

In my last parish, in the Atherton Tablelands (far north Queensland), a few years ago we had a wonderful parish/community morning of making our own household Advent wreath. Using a basic round frame, we used all sorts of nature's own gifts to make our individual wreaths. Flowers, leaves, nuts some of us made these with our front doors in mind; others made them as a table decoration, with traditional candles.

So – this year I've already started my gleaning of potential wreath additions. In my wreath there'll be gumnuts and leaves of different sorts, perhaps a flower here and there. Yes, I'll need to refresh and replace bits that won't go the distance of four weeks, but that's part of the creative pleasure. No candles, just the green circle of everlasting life and eternal love, saying that something special is afoot.

This Advent, if it's not already part of your personal custom, try making your own wreath. It's a lovely custom, and it does invite questions about the season, and becomes a pointer towards that "God of Christmas" who came to be with us in human form.

Advent Customs:

The Advent Wreath - Nativity Sets

The Advent Wreath

It's believed that the concept of the Advent wreath originated in family settings among German Lutherans in the 16th century. However, it was not until three centuries later that the modern Advent wreath that we know in public worship took shape.

Advent wreaths are circular, representing God's infinite love, and are usually made of evergreen leaves, which "represent the hope of eternal life brought by Jesus Christ". Within church custom, the wreaths have candles that generally represent the four weeks of the Advent season as well as "the light of God coming into the world through the birth of Jesus Christ".

These candles are lit subsequently throughout each week of the Advent season. Meanings attributed to the candle of each week vary; in some churches following the lectionary theme of the week, in other churches reflecting hope, peace, joy and love, and in yet others, each week may stand for different characters of the nativity.

In many churches, the most popular colours for the candles are violet (or blue) and rose (on Advent 3), corresponding with the colours of the liturgical vestments for the Sundays of

Advent. Some may use red candles for each week; others may have white. Many Advent wreaths also have a white candle in the centre to symbolize the arrival of Christmastide, which is known as the 'Christ candle'. This candle is lit as part of Christmas Day liturgy.

Within the Anglican Church, there's no prescribed meaning or colour attached to the candles. If you want a more-than robust debate, try asserting your convictions about the Advent wreath!

Nativity sets

Whilst depictions of Jesus' birth stories had been incorporated into church adornments for several centuries, tradition has it that the first nativity scene was created by St Francis of Assisi in Italy eight hundred years ago, in 1223. St Francis used real people and animals. "By setting the scene in a real environment, Francis intended to provide the ordinary person with access to the divine in the created world," says Felicity Harley-McGowan, an art historian at Yale University. "The divine did not have to be inside a structured church."

In the years after this, it is said that people in that region of Italy began making nativity sets out of pottery, to display in churches all year round.

In the mid 1500s, rich people began to display their own small nativity sets in their homes. Over the years, nativity sets appeared in nearly all Christmas countries, in churches and homes - made from every sort of material - pottery, wax, straw, wool, metal, chalkware, paper mache.....

In most of these scenes, the birth accounts of Jesus from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke are merged: the divine child lies on a bed of straw, watched over by Mary, Joseph and a few reclining animals. Shepherds arrive, and three Magi (usually with camels), approach.

After the Reformation in the 16th century, there was pushback from the emerging Protestant churches. Protestants "stressed a direct relationship with God," rejecting religious icons and art—including depictions of Jesus's birth—as idolatrous distractions.

"Crèches would have existed in medieval English and German churches but were often destroyed where Protestantism became ascendant," McGowan explains. "The 17th-century Puritans were the most extreme in this regard."

As Puritans and other religious exiles settled in the American colonies in the 17th and 18th centuries, however, attitudes toward the crèche softened. "The origins of Nativity figures for [early colonists] were as domestic decorations, not [religious] devotional objects," McGowan says.

The Moravians, a Protestant denomination from what is now the Czech Republic, founded the city of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, on Christmas Eve in 1741. Like its namesake in the

West Bank, Bethlehem is closely associated with Christmas celebrations. Early residents brought Nativity scenes known as *putz*, from the German word *putzen*, meaning to decorate, over from their home country. These tableaux included not just figures associated with the birth of Christ, but also recreations of the local landscape and elements of rural life.

Nativities also took on new forms outside of the United States, reflecting Indigenous, Spanish and African influences across Latin America.

Information largely from [A Brief History of Nativity Scenes / What Is a Christmas Crèche? / History / Smithsonian Magazine](#)

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Advent Fundraising: A Guide to Organising a Christmas Stall

Marion Poynter

It was decided that our Christmas stall this year would take place at the start of Advent. The date was fixed for Sunday, December 3 with the stall to be open following the 10 AM Advent service, and also after the 7 PM Advent Carol Service.

About a month before this a call went out to the congregation for helpers to prepare stock for the stall. Several people volunteered to make at home such items as lavender bags and hanging Christmas decorations, while others said they would make cakes and biscuits, jams and chutneys.

I gathered a number of others to come to working bees at my house to help make such items as Christmas cakes and puddings, Seville orange marmalade (from the oranges in my garden), mango chutney and lemon cordial. An appeal for garden lemons for the cordial was finally successful.

Between cups of tea and conversation this working together sped the process and lightened the load, and was also most satisfying and enjoyable. We got to know each other better, and there was a great sense of camaraderie as we shared various creative tasks. Other jobs included washing and sterilising all jars and bottles for preserves.



Of course, things didn't always go smoothly. I overcooked the first batch of cakes; then the mint jelly just wouldn't set (until Jam Setta was resorted to!). Working from home someone knocked to the floor a whole batch of berry jam.



Then there was the wrapping, labelling and pricing to be attended to. The lids of jams were covered with Christmas paper. St. Mary's labels were printed by Darrell in the Office. Most items were labelled with the initials of the maker, and the date of making. Cakes and biscuits listed all the ingredients used.

A number of helpers were called upon to serve on the stall at both times. A cash float was organised by another parishioner, and arrangements made to use the parish's Eftpos Square for payment.

The events were publicised in the Parish News, by a notice at the Centre in Errol Street, and by private contact with friends of parishioners.

On the Friday before the Sunday a few of us set up tables with red cloths for the stall in the area around the font. Also in this area a number of parishioner's Nativity Sets which had been gathered up by Robyn, were arranged on tables. All looked very festive, and most suitable for heralding the start of Advent.

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An Advent Recipe: Jackie Webber's Spicy Plum Chutney

Andrew Barnard

In 1988, Stephanie Alexander published a collection of recipes under the title of "Stephanie's Feasts and Stories". The collection arose from the fortnightly column Stephanie had written for the "Good Weekend" supplement to the Melbourne Age and the Sydney Morning Herald newspapers over a two-year period. When asked to collect the pieces in book form, the stories remained. Stephanie Alexander notes in the introduction to her book that stories change in the re-telling, as dishes do in the re-cooking. Her observation also applies in this case.

For many years, Jackie Webber's homemade Spicy Plum Chutney and Tomato Kasaundi were reliable additions to the Jams and Preserves stall of the Parish Fair. They were also very popular. So popular that a younger parishioner asked whether Jackie would share the recipe. The abrupt and unexpected answer was a firm no. But what followed was an invitation to become an apprentice and learn (or was it earn?) the ways and means.

The plum chutney is a curious product. Typical of the Indian subcontinent, the plum chutney is a blend of fruit, in this case plums, with vinegar, sugar and spices. Spicy, salty and sweet - the three flavours robustly holding each other in balance. Not runny, but also not the consistency of a jam.

As is typical of many experienced cooks, there was no precise scientific process to observe in the kitchen. 10 – 12 - 15 large plums, a bag of sugar, a pint of malt vinegar and the spices. After lots of peeling and chopping, into the pot it went. Extended bubbling and boiling, and lots of stirring, and lots of conversation about things St Mary's.

After several long afternoons, the recipe book was revealed. The title is now lost to my memory. It was a tattered book with stitched but loose pages, published in India around the 1950s. I was permitted to photograph the page and thereafter, I never saw the book again. Here is the recipe.

Jackie Webber's Plum Chutney

4 oz. green ginger
2 oz. garlic
2 oz. onion seed
1 oz. mustard seed
2 lb. plums
1 oz. chilli powder
2 lb. sugar
2 oz. salt

Grind the ginger, garlic and mustard seed (black or brown but not yellow) to a paste in a little vinegar. Stone the plums. Cook the plums and all the other ingredients in the vinegar until thick and pulpy. Cool and bottle.

Notes:

Those accustomed to making jam, particularly when cooking by feel, might inadvertently let it thicken too much.

Expect to lose about 10% of fruit weight after stoning the fruit.

1 oz. of chilli powder makes a "Vicar Killer" strength. 1/2 oz makes a milder "Tongue Tinger". Omitting the chilli entirely is comparable to a Bach motet with a missing voice.

For metric folk, scale the quantities such that 2 lb becomes 1kg. You get nice round numbers, like a 1kg of sugar and 125g of ginger, 60g of garlic etc.

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An Advent Sermon

Josie Snowden

I don't know about you, but I love receiving good news.

I tend to be a half cup full person ready to give thanks for small wonders and gifts rather than a pessimistic half cup empty person, dragging myself to find the joy in every day. The practice of gratitude is an excellent spiritual practice symbolized to some extent by the Sunflower, which is so happy, so bright and cheery, and as such brings joy.

And it need not be like this for me, because as a child I lived through the ups and downs of the PTSD traumas, evident in my father's life. My father had served as an officer within the British Navy in the Mediterranean Sea and did reconnaissance as an undercover officer into surrounding shores and lands.

My father was a man who suffered great moral injury on account of his naval career. His spiritual life, his artistic creativity as an architect, then led Him onto a stella career, winning an Olympic medal at one point: But behind it all there was a deep conflict of moral injury, that many veterans have lived with.

I have met moral injury through my career as both an Occupational therapist and as a Chaplain. Indeed, I am attuned to psychological trauma and moral injury and the violence that can go with it. Personally, I have experienced depression.

As an aside, one theory about Van Goghs obsession with painting Sunflowers was, that their vivid brightness met a need he had, to lift his depression.

It was when I was 14 years old, that I was introduced to the reality that Jesus Christ was indeed the son of God, and understood for the first time the power of the holy spirit in my life: this occurred as a result of the opportunity to attend a christian youth camp. As a young teenager I loved my father very much and this brought me to read the works of theologians such as Thieliicke, who lived and wrote around the meaning of the WW 11 devastation and lived experience of the Christians at the time.

The questions that arose would be those of suffering and disablement, living with destruction, pain and loss, and amongst this, the question of sin and suffering and blame. He spoke to the very first question that many ask to the question of Why? In short, to Thieliicke, God is a God of ends.

Thieliicke's theology then, was that sin was not the question when considering disablement and suffering, but rather that its meaning would be lived out, that God's gracious provision of Jesus Christ, would be made manifest in each situation.

Now remember my half -filled cup – imagine if you will a glass beaker and you can see clearly the top pf the water level- and marked on the beaker someone has drawn a question mark ?.

In my life narrative, that places us at the beginning of the story of the Gospel of Mark “ the beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, Son of God.” I have told you that this made a big difference to myself.

This Advent we begin the cycle of readings for year B in the church calendar and the gospel we follow is that of Mark . We are forever grateful to the author of Mark, for writing down this Gospel. We are provided with a text for future study that moved the passing on of the Good News from just an oral tradition to a written text that could be sent around the known world, studied, referenced, and could provide a basis for the other two synoptic gospels formalising the Christian faith.

However, today's reading comes from the end of the gospel, at the time when Jesus was revealing to the disciples the impending future, how they must be alert and live carefully, because there would be a destruction of the second temple, persecution of Christians and false Messiahs yet to come.

The message is one of being watchful as a Christian, of being alert and not asleep, reading the times- for at the end of days the elect will be taken up to heaven. I don't believe it was the writer's intention to direct the followers and listeners to become engaged in an end days theology of rapture, but was rather a warning of how they must live careful and mindful lives of faith as a community of believers. How we live, and on our topic for today how we include and care for others, how friendly we are, is important.

Let us go back to the beginning of the Good News bit for a while.

How does this Good News, perhaps symbolised by a Sunflower, shape our views and response to International Day of People with a Disability today?

Basically the good news is for all people, we learn this. It is not a secret for a few chosen people. It is available and meant to be a lived, experienced faith, Jesus , God Incarnate, Image of God, the one that brings God to Human life . God is for all people through Jesus Christ.

Mark's gospel presents us squarely through the miracles with the reality of the divinity of Jesus Christ. The very first readings are about the arrival of the holy spirit at Jesus baptism and the announcement of Jesus divinity as Son of God: there are healings and miracles that reveal his compassionate nature, authority over life and death, over quality of life and over the elements of nature.

Jesus love, God's grace, is made manifest to all people in wondrous ways.

Now the Good News was being given to everyone, not an elite few.

We are shown to expect great things, there is the impossible made possible.

God's compassionate inclusive love is for all people from all walks of life.

As a Christian I am called not to live just according to a list of laws of the land that govern human rights, but to have my heart and mind switched on to the saving Grace of Jesus

Christ for all people, and the potential arrival of the final days of reunion with the creator.

There is to be no racial or genetic cleansing, no discrimination on account of class, gender, disability, God is for everyone through Jesus Christ our Lord. Andall things are possible with God, if we want them to be.

Elsewhere (Matthew 9:14) we are warned that we must not stop any one from coming to faith in Jesus, must not impede bringing the little ones to God, those considered less in society.

There do exist Humanitarian Bills of Rights for people with disabilities. But as Christians we have no excuse for putting ourselves first ahead of someone less able. We have no excuse for thinking our theology or our liturgy is higher than the meaning of the human person. Nothing eradicates the Gospel imperative for Inclusion. We have a responsibility of responding to those less fortunate, considered of lower status, different or of different ability.

We are to provide compassionately and inclusively for people with differences, include all people within the diverse and rich tapestry of those made in the Image of God.

As a Church, St Marys started down this road with its favouring a liberal inclusive theology. It has looked at what it can do for making the premises more physically accessible, but more challenging is to be flexible enough to extend ourselves to consider that our liturgy and perhaps more the habits and preferences in our presentation of the liturgy, might sometimes place barriers to people so that many are unable to be included fully within our services. In the words of someone who was once my supervisor "its not about me." Getting things "correct" according to a predetermined format might in fact be helpful or unhelpful depending on who you are.

One simply needs to be prepared to ask the questions of people we meet after church:

How are you?

How did you personally find your experience of church here today?

Was it accessible to you?

Would there be any thing you might suggest that could help you feel more comfortable and included ?

Now remember those sunflowers referred to, symbols of gratitude, happiness and joy:

Today you are invited to choose to wear a Sunflower Lanyards or button.

If you have a hidden disability or you partner someone with a hidden disability, we have several available.

This symbol and these items are becoming popular today, additional to the wheel -chair symbol.

The sunflower symbol is the next step in becoming more visible if you feel you have unmet needs at church or in travelling to and from church.

These are currently available free in the church porch for your convenience .

We also have “I support hidden disability” yellow sunflower button .

I am happy to share the source of these with you, as is the office manager.

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An Advent Saint: Nicholas of Myra

Rhondda Fahey

December 6 is the feast day of St Nicholas. He is patron saint of children, of sailors, unmarried girls, merchants and pawnbrokers but not much is actually known about him. There are many legends of his generosity and kindness. In one he is said to have given gold marriage dowries to girls who would otherwise have been forced into prostitution. Today thousands of European children receive Christmas presents on St Nicholas' Day. Even more widely, he is represented as Santa Claus or Father Christmas in department stores and Christmas gatherings.

What is better known is that there was a Bishop Nicholas of Myra at the first Council of Nicea, called by the Emperor Constantine in 325 CE to sort out divisive matters of doctrine. One of the greatest of these concerned whether the Father and the Son had been one substance for all time or if there had been a time before the Son was begotten, that is, that the Father and the Son were of very close but not identical substance. The Greek words for the two states differed by only one letter, Homoousion and homoiusion. The latter was taught by Arius and, when the debate was won by the former, became known as the Arian Heresy.

We affirm the winning position each Sunday in the Nicene Creed:

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
The only Son of God,
Eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
True God from true God,
Begotten not made,
Of one being with the Father;

Bishop Nicholas is said to have been on the side of the victors and to have bopped Arius on the head'

This story explains a cartoon circulating at the moment. A child speaking to Santa Claus postulates, 'homooousion or homoiusion'. The man dressed as St Nicholas stares blankly whereupon the child states, 'You aren't the real Santa'.



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Behind Nicaea

Robert Gribben

Nicaea, now Iznik, is a city of some 40,000 souls on the eastern end of a large lake in Türkiye, about 90km southeast of Istanbul but twice that distance by road.

In 1993, I made my second visit to Constantinople (as all Orthodox continue to call Istanbul). Two years before Susan and my visit had been disrupted by the arrival of ex-King Constantine of Greece whose need for the patriarchal limo was judged to be greater than ours. However, Patriarch Bartholomew had not forgotten that he had promised to enable my pilgrimage to Nicaea, to pay my respects to the Creed's founders. On my first morning, he asked me with a grin if I would take another passenger on board? How could I refuse?

Waving from the back seat of the car was His Grace Archbishop Vsevelod of Scopelos (1927-2007), Primate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of America, linked to the

Ecumenical Patriarchate, dressed in suit and tie. It emerged that he was there under an interdict from the Patriarch. He had taken liberties earlier on his episcopal visit to his Head of Church, by going out at night for activities more suited to a tourist than a bishop (nothing serious, but not proper to his rank). The Patriarch had grounded him; Vsevolod had not been permitted to go out by himself. I agreed readily. Vsevolod named me his ‘minder’, but it became something more like a partner in crime.

It was a cloudy and cool day as we crossed the Bosphorus suspension bridge and after nearly two hours came to the fortified town of Iznik. In Roman times, Nicaea/Iznik was the location of the imperial palace to which Constantine retired from the city to enjoy the warm weather. By the early 4th century, he had overcome all his rivals and was now the undisputed ruler of both the previous western (Roman) and eastern (Byzantine) parts of his empire. He believed he owed his power to the Christian God and hoped that the Church – which was spreading empire-wide - would serve as a source of unity (hence his favouring of it above other religions). Issues across the churches needed resolution too, like an agreed date for Easter, structural organization of the church, its bishops and dioceses, the rise of heresy and the pastoral questions that involved. The key one was heresy, especially with the influence of Arius, a firebrand cleric from Alexandria (Egypt). His theological opponents were equally fiery, especially Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, a fine theologian but a leader not to be crossed. The issue arose in the scriptures themselves and might be summed up in the question, ‘Who do you think Jesus is?’ (Luke 9: 18-20). What was the relationship between the he called ‘Abba, Father’ and Jesus himself? Arius pressed this hard and declared that Jesus was inferior to the Father, not equal, not the same in nature. Nicaea was the first attempt to find cohesive answers to all these matters across the empire.

Constantine invited all 1800 of the bishops of the time, and about 300 came and were fed and housed in or around the summer palace; he appointed Hosius, bishop of Cordoba in Spain as his episcopal deputy, and opened proceedings himself in unsubtle imperial power and splendour. His guards were by the doors. Thus, does Holy Church do doctrine?

Archbishop Vsevolod had his priorities right (it was lunchtime) and directed the driver (my driver) to find a good restaurant overlooking the water where we could eat and talk theology. We did. Kebabs, shaslik, french fries, salad, aubergine and the local *Efes* beer which was excellent.

Dorothy L. Sayers wrote a play called *The Emperor Constantine* (1951) in which she has a comic scene in a barber’s shop in Nicaea during the council. There are three barbers and their customers, a Christian deacon, a retired general (military theology), a philosopher with Gnostic leanings (heretical) and a boy who sweeps up the hair. Someone is heard singing outside, a ditty written by Arius, ‘God begat him and before he was begot, he was not’ – and it is true that Arius set his doctrines to sea shanties, later followed by Charles Wesley

(only his were scrupulously orthodox!). It was also said that the theological issues at Nicaea were of such general interest that people did discuss them in the marketplaces!

After lunch, Vsevolod and I walked down to the lake. The archbishop, with an eye to effect, began to walk *on* the water, perhaps thinking to emulate St Peter, but he was more securely treading on the ruined walls of the palace just underneath the surface. The church where the fathers had met in 325 had soon been replaced by a larger one, and it is still there but ten metres under water. This is where the early Church first did doctrine.

We trust the Holy Spirit to guide the Church into all truth and it is to fallible human beings that this gift is given. The First Ecumenical Council at Nicaea produced a creed (from the Latin, *credo*, I believe), a pretty basic one, and the work was not completed¹ until the Second Ecumenical Council which met in Constantinople itself in 381, when the rich section on the Holy Spirit was added. They finally decided on a much-improved text of what is correctly called the ‘Niceno-Constantinopolitan’ Creed, which is the one we all say today, and the world’s churches will celebrate its 1700th anniversary in 2025.²



The Crisis Under Caligula and the Earliest Jerusalem Church

Geoff Jenkins

The years 39-41 CE were rather dramatic for the Jewish people. Caligula was Roman emperor, and from all we know of him he was rather unstable. Not much interested in the well-being of the empire, he seems to have been tremendously seized of his own transcendent importance and personal legacy. As such he might have been a dramatic threat to the Jewish people, because their constitution as the people of God did not readily allow them to acquiesce to the demands of a ruler who seemed only to care about his personal status as a god. But only if they could not just ignore his ravings and keep a polite intellectual distance from Rome.

In fact none of Caligula's self-indulgent musings need have mattered much to the Jews of his empire, were it not for the fact that he was passionate not only about what he thought of himself but also about what his subjects thought of him. Jews must have thought like everyone else that he was a dangerous madman, but they offered sacrifices for his well-being daily in the Jerusalem temple, and diaspora Jews politely refused to comment on his antics.

¹ The creed of Nicaea merely ended with an abrupt phrase, ‘and in the Holy Spirit’!

² See Niceaea (sic) 2025, Living the Apostolic faith together today. A Faith and Order world conference; *NICAEA2025: Where Now for Visible Communion?* is planned for August 28 – September 3, 2025.

All this changes for the worse when Caligula decides, in a dramatic departure from the Roman norm, that he will oblige all temples, small and large, throughout the Empire, formally to set up a statue of himself depicted as a deity. To Jews this was a direct provocation, and in the diaspora it was also an invitation to their Greek neighbours to attack the Jewish communities at the personal invitation of the emperor.

So far as Alexandria was concerned, home to a huge but minority Jewish population living fractiously with their Greek neighbours--actually living it seems in their own quarter of the city--it was a catastrophe, and nothing short of a pogrom ensued. We know about this in intimate and distressing detail from the two relevant works on the subject of Philo, the Jewish philosopher (sic!). Philo himself was head of the Jewish delegation sent to Rome to appeal to the emperor, and we have his eye-witness account of the 'meeting' that took place. It is the finest piece of eye-witness testimony, beautifully written and edged with the most striking pathos.

There is a special moment in the interview where the Jews and Caligula clash over their loyalty. We sacrifice every day for the well-being of the emperor, says the speaker for the delegation, perhaps Philo himself although there is every likelihood that the draft motion was in Greek and the argument in Latin. "Not enough!", Caligula tells the embassy from half-destroyed and smoking Alexandria, "I do not need you to sacrifice for me, but to sacrifice to me". Here the special problem that Jews were to have with Caligula is perfectly described in its essence.

But in any case the argument is lost in Alexandria, and just emerging in Jerusalem! Philo narrates the arrival of a "reporter" from Judaea bearing the stunning news that a huge statue is to be set up in the temple. Everyone is overwhelmed; in fact twice, Philo tells us, the man with the news begins to tell it and dissolves into uncontrollable weeping before he can get a word out! Here the implication is clear. The mere threat of the installation is enough. It did not need to actually happen.

Here the crisis, dramatic and instantaneous in Alexandria, is a slow-motion train wreck, which happens by virtue of the description in Philo and in the works of the Jewish historian Josephus to be narrated in remarkable detail. There is an irony here, for the threat to place a statue in the Jerusalem temple, specifically and particularly, looms for more than a year and in the end is never carried out. Nevertheless the Jewish response is tumultuous, and the special place of the Roman Governor of Syria, named Petronius, is preserved for all time in the detailed narratives of Josephus and Philo.

Petronius had been commanded by Caligula to cast a really enormous gilded version of the statue of the emperor and take it to Jerusalem, killing as many Jews as proved necessary along the way. Petronius stalled for time, and eventually this plan was never carried out, because Caligula was (famously) assassinated in Rome. As matters play out, according to Josephus, Petronius had made too many excuses to Caligula for failing promptly to carry out his commands. Finally exasperated, Caligula suggests in a letter to Petronius that he commit suicide, but that letter is delayed by a storm and a separate dispatch advising the

assassination of Caligula arrives first. For Josephus, Petronius was one of the good guys and God had protected him.

From a historian's point of view, there is something of special interest here. Since in the end there was no war at the temple and no statue installed, all was well that ended well and the story might not have been worth telling. This was not true of Philo, whose personal story these events were, and I suppose that Josephus read Philo and is in effect commenting--and reflecting--on him. Perhaps this is the reason that the New Testament doesn't notice this long-running moment, but actually I think it does! On which see below.

Two aspects are of special interest. The first is the Jewish response, which is one of mass civil disobedience directed squarely at Petronius. He leaves his military force in Caesarea and goes to Galilee to sense the response to his mission. Jews from all over the country travel to meet him, with a fairly simple message. Our laws do not permit us to allow statues in the temple, and we will die before we let this happen, they submit.

Remarkably there are many women and children in the crowds making this point, and the fact of the popularity of this protest is an important aspect. So too perhaps is the fact that it takes place in Galilee, rather than at Caesarea, where Jews may already have become reticent to express their views in hearing of their Greek neighbours. Jewish leaders too are there, more about whom on another occasion, but they are not especially prominent. At one point Petronius takes them aside for a private conference, but if they did not side with the crowd their voices did not win the day.

The second aspect, which seems to have been important to the negotiations but had little impact on Caligula, is the agricultural strike. If you impose a statue, we will cease farming activity and Rome will be deprived of corn. Of course this only makes sense if the threat was long-running and the negotiations protracted, but again it is the response of a mass movement.

Does any of this provide context for the earliest years of the church? Probably it does, and especially because the debate about the temple is very prominent in the New Testament, and so is the debate about the Law of Moses. My own view, not widely held I admit, is that these events are exactly the background to Mark 13, and at least that portion of the Gospel, if not the whole of it, should be dated to 40 CE. In general it appears that by the time of the writing of the New Testament's earliest documents the dust, so to speak, had settled, and especially because in the case of these events the only dust to settle was that of the crowds tramping to Galilee to offer their necks to the sword before they would permit their laws to be contravened.

My point is a simple one. The earliest church does not emerge from a political vacuum. In fact it emerges from a theological-political tumult! In all sorts of ways this context is important for our dialog with our neighbours as we face an increasingly complex and threatening world.

So much for the first century! Now briefly I should acknowledge the elephant in our room,

Donald Trump, in so very many ways the Caligula of our own day. Not especially interested in governing per se, Trump has upended American politics--and with it national life--by his extraordinary self-interest. However the next year plays out, in the years to come there will not be many aspects of American discourse about itself and its place in the world which do not bear the marks of Trump's impact. But for our present purpose, the analogy between Trump and Caligula is for another day, beyond observing how completely entrancing and newsworthy a consummate malignant narcissist can be!



The Launch of the Book of the Year: Marion Poynter's *In My Own Backyard*

Everyone, it seemed, came to the church. The launch of Marion Poynter's book, *In My Own Backyard: The Bountiful Harvest of an Inner-city Garden*, at St Mary's Anglican Church, North Melbourne at the beginning of November this year was a very exciting event. We all came – from inter-state, and from the country, from all over Melbourne and from the inner-city - friends and family and garden lovers - to wish the book and its author well.

The idea of writing about her house and garden had been in Marion's mind for some time and while the 2020 COVID lockdown proved difficult for many, she, in typical Marion fashion, saw it as an opportunity for a time of uninterrupted writing. She wrote every morning and at the end of all that self-discipline she had the text for a book. Illustrative photographs were collected; recipes for the bountiful harvest the garden provides were chosen; and a publisher approached. And then, quite suddenly it seemed, there was a beautiful book to be launched and we were all in the church for the grand occasion. Clutching our glasses of champagne and listening to a medley of garden music played by Beverley Phillips, St Mary's Director of Music. One easily recognisable tune was Percy Grainger's arrangement of this tradition English folk song:

*How many kinds of sweet flowers grow
In an English country garden?
We'll tell you now of some that we know
Those we miss you'll surely pardon
Daffodils, heart's ease and phlox
Meadowsweet and lady smocks
Gentian, lupin and tall hollyhocks
Roses, foxgloves, snowdrops, forget-me-nots
In an English country garden*

St Mary's vicar, Fr Jan Joustra, himself a keen gardener, introduced Caroline Davies to launch the book. Caroline had been president for many years of the Australian branch of Mediterranean Garden Society, which was where she met Marion. She spoke of her delight in their friendship and her admiration for Marion and her garden.

She praised both the garden and the book for their design, for their content, for their individuality and ambiance. She loved the way plants have been allowed to self-seed, adding a touch of wildness into the garden, and how dogs and chooks potter around. She especially loved the book for the way it lovingly traces the history of house and garden, for the photography and for the recipes. She noted the quotations that precede and set the tone for each chapter. One such, in the chapter about the history of the house, is from Adam Nicholson, 'A place consists of everything that has happened there; it is a reservoir of memories. It is necessary to go back to the foundations of the place, its roots and sources; understanding its historical beginning'.



Figure 2 Marion with Caroline Davies

In turn thanked Caroline for launching the book and also expressed her gratitude to the publishers, her family and all those who helped that day or earlier. After that, it was time for buying copies of the book (the large and happy crowd of well-wishers), signing the book (Marion), and buying preserves and cordial made to the recipes in the book (jars of Seville orange marmalade and bottles of lemon cordial were especially popular), and settling in for afternoon tea and lively conversation (that same contented crowd). Indeed, who could not be content with the lavish refreshments, including champagne, little lemon cakes, posh sandwiches and asparagus rolls, and other delicious fare.

Eventually we all went home, tired but happy, to put our feet up and to savour the book.



Figure 3 Marion with her grandchildren

And what a treat it is. I started by looking at the photographs, then read the recipes and then, as I read the full text, realised that it is not only a book about a special house and garden but also a love story. Certainly, a record of a bountiful harvest but also of Marion's love for her husband, John – there is a wonderful photo of John shelling broad beans – for the North Melbourne house and garden they bought and renovated together, for her family and friends, for the chooks that scratch in the garden, the bees that pollinate, for her dogs, Fynn and Toby, for the bounty that grows there, for cooking and sharing,

and, underlying it all, her love in sharing in God's creation.

Marion and her garden are never boring. She is always on the lookout for a new colour scheme, new plants to blend with the old, new recipes, and new friends to share it all with. How lucky we all are to know her and be caught up in her generosity and many enthusiasms.

If you don't already have a copy of the book or are looking for extras for that perfect Christmas present (a certain priest with the initials J.J. is reported to have bought at least nine), you can find it at North Melbourne Bookshop, Readings at Carlton, Ceres Bookshop, and the Royal Botanic Gardens shop or order it directly from Australian Scholarly Publishing enquiry@scholarly.info

The Kingdom of Heaven

Andrew Barnard

All around us

*In the garden,
toiling in the heat,
on her hands and knees,
I glimpsed the Kingdom of Heaven.*

*From her stories of people
some long past
I heard of the Kingdom of Heaven.*

*In the garden,
toiling in the heat,
I learned
there's plenty of hard work in the Kingdom of Heaven.*

○○○○○

A Journey in Faith: Churches where we have worshipped

Ron Austen

My first exposure to Christianity was when I was four and attended the local Methodist Sunday School. My father, Jim was a member of this congregation, probably for convenience as it was located on a site adjacent to our home in Grandview Avenue, Pascoe

Vale. My only memory of this Methodist church was the Harvest Festival display, consisting of rows of brilliantly coloured vegetables particularly the large pumpkins.

My next memory of Church activity was in 1939 when our family moved to Mt Gambier as dad had accepted a manager's position in the local wool spinning mill. Our chosen Church was Christ Church, Mt Gambier. The three reasons for this choice were simple: mum's background was Anglican; the Chief Engineer at Dad's mill was John Holland a migrant Englishman, who had arrived in 1927, and was the Choir Master at Christ Church; and finally, ease of access from our home in Lansell Street.

Archdeacon Clark, the minister ran a classic High Church service. I was later immersed in this tradition of singing all responses when 'drafted' into a new, boys choir in 1941 at age eleven.

The grounding of the Anglican Faith was driven into me by two sung services every Sunday, preparation for Confirmation. I was later leader of the Intermediate choral group, formed for our late teenage church group.

God exists. I know this because of the help God has given me all my life. In many crises, when I called on God, God supported me. In 30 years of piloting commercial aircraft, I have encountered occasions, usually due extremes of weather and turbulence, when God supported me. A Baptist mate of mine commented, "If the passengers knew you needed support to fly the aircraft, they would all get off". But on the plus side, when discussing this aspect of faith with a very experienced and senior Captain, his remark was, "Ron, you were lucky, as I didn't have such support".

My choir singing stopped when I discovered professional bike racing. Sundays then became an important part of my training. Racing became an obsession, always striving to win. Let us jump some years to my marriage. Audrey had been the Sunday School Superintendent at the same Mt Gambier church, and we had known of each other for nine years. My responsibility to the Anglican church was encouraged by Audrey.

On the Sunday morning after our wedding, I announced my intention to go to breakfast. Audrey disagreed. I could not go to breakfast until we had attended the morning communion at the Warrnambool church. So began the pattern for our married life. This is right and proper.

The next major Church contact was joining Saint Michael and All Angels Beaumaris, where we moved in 1959. The service here was also High Church and its rhythms became ingrained into our lives. We had three daughters to be baptized and confirmed and Audrey joined the parish Vestry. Here her experience and versatility shone. She managed the church maintenance and I was the obvious choice for her assistant.

No shovels and rakes were leaned on at Audrey's working bees. Specific tasks were distributed to those who attended according to their level of skill, and valuable planned maintenance was achieved, much to the dismay of the men on the Vestry. One chap

commented that it was the first working bee he had ever attended where no time was wasted.

This workmanlike pattern continued throughout our married life. When I was posted to Madang in New Guinea, the small church had a manual organ to accompany the singing. This organ, used only on Sundays, was a favourite site for wasps' nests. On some occasions when the organ bellows were pumped up by the organist, a plaintive single note could be heard. That key would be jammed open by dried mud. To fix this I would undertake some bush maintenance using wire and nylon cord. The organ was still operating when we left in 1966.

After returning from New Guinea, we moved house four times and each time also to a new church, where we contributed our skills to improve the properties: new drainage, PA installations, rebuilt kitchens, and other major works.

This unpaid activity by Audrey and myself enabled me to find a useful job after retiring from flying. Shortly after my retirement from Trans Australia Airlines while touring around the Riverland, we were discussing my future over a beer in a country pub. Audrey commented that I should continue working at something I was familiar with. So my next 30 years of enjoyable work commenced as a draft on the back of a beer coaster. This advertisement, placed in the Anglican newspaper "SEE", enabled me to gain enough contacts to keep me working at church maintenance until age 85 in 2015. All work was obtained by recommendation and proved far more constructive than flying aircraft.

Nanette, our daughter bought a house in the country at Trentham, 100 kms from Melbourne, which became our second home. When in residence we attended the small Anglican church. It was complete with all the original church furniture installed in the late 1920s. The two double front entrance doors were made of rough pine boards; these had to go. I constructed four new doors with lovely Messmate timber, donated by another parishioner. They took several weeks to construct and deliver. I then realized I was expected to complete the job by installing and painting them. This began a ten-year project of re-conditioning this church.

Personalities of the Vicars/Priests in the Anglican church vary greatly. One extreme is the perfectionist who commits to memory every prescribed word used in the Service and expects all responses to be voiced instantly, or else he begins the response himself as a prompt. The other extreme was a Locum we had one Sunday at the Trentham church. He had a broad Irish accent and, at Sermon time, moved into the small pulpit, leaned on the rail, and said, "The bible is a good read, but don't believe everything in it".

It was disappointing that, when our daughter, Alison expressed a desire to be a server at the Altar, the reply she received was, "Only boys will serve at the altar". Although this was 40 years ago, and we have progressed since then, as the father of three daughters, I cannot dismiss the memory, especially as the discriminatory attitude continues in some places today.

Our second last church was Christ Church South Yarra. Over the years of our church associations, we have always been able to attend church services which replicated the standards we experienced in our early life. On occasions our daughters accompany us, and our faith continues to support us as we age.

RF: This article was unfinished and I have taken the liberty of adding a few paragraphs.

Most recently, both aged 93, Ron and Audrey moved into accommodation in Parkville and were welcomed by the congregation of St Mary's North Melbourne. The service was familiar and they quickly became valued members of the community.

Unfortunately, Audrey's health has deteriorated and they have decided to attend church on line.

It has been good to know Ron and Audrey. We understand their decision but miss them both and will be delighted to see them any time they turn up at the 10 am Eucharist.



Prayer and Charity:

A Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary to the Lady Chapel of St Bartholomew the Great, Smithfield, London

Michael Golding

If you came this way,
Taking any route, starting from anywhere,
At any time or at any season,
It would always be the same: you would have to put off
Sense and notion. You are not here to verify,
Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity
Or carry report. You are here to kneel
Where prayer has been valid.³

³ T.S.Eliot, *The Four Quartets*, Little Gidding, Book I, lines 39-46 quoted by Fr. Marcus Walker in his sermon of 8 October 2023 at a choral eucharist to celebrate the appearance of the Blessed Virgin Mary to Canon Hubert of St Bartholomew the Great, London: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i8KU3Vw4NvY>



Advent is a time for prayer. A time too to wait vigilantly for the unfolding of God's mysterious plan for the salvation of the world, a plan that seems to hang upon the assent of a young woman visited by an angel. Last month I spent some time in the church of St Bartholomew the Great, the only location in the city of London which is recorded as having received a visitation from that same woman, the Blessed Virgin Mary. She came with a private revelation for one Canon Hubert and his fellow canons urging them to prayer and acts of charity. That seems to me to be a good Advent message and a fair basis for an Ave article about a church that, on a lighter note, has in its time also been visited by Hugh Grant, Benjamin Franklin and Damien Hirst.

History of the Church

The Priory Church of St Bartholomew the Great was founded in 1123 by Rahere, a courtier of King Henry I. On a pilgrimage to Rome he fell ill and promised God that if he recovered he would build both a priory (monastery) and a hospital. Recover he did and he honoured his vow dedicating both to the apostle St Bartholomew, who came to him in a vision.

Bart's hospital, as it is known, stands to this day, a teaching hospital and a UK National Health Service Trust still serving the community after 900 years. The Augustinian Priory however fell victim to King Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries. The Prior and canons were given financial inducements to go quietly. Most of the monastic land and buildings passed into private ownership, the nave was demolished and the priory quire became a parish church.



Despite that low ebb the church is a survivor, indeed it is London's oldest surviving parish church. When the vast majority of the city's churches fell victim to the Great Fire in 1666 St Bartholomew's escaped and its Norman and Gothic interior has been preserved despite the Luftwaffe's best endeavours in the Second World War. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries great effort was put into recovering some of the buildings that had been put to secular use. Painstaking repair and restoration followed including a new roof and a new organ, screen and stalls. As the church history puts it "as the years passed the church of St

Bartholomew the Great emerged from the encroachments of centuries like a butterfly from a cocoon.”⁴

The Church Today

Today St Bartholomew the Great is a vibrant parish church in the Anglo Catholic tradition drawing a large congregation from a wide catchment area. It is paired with St Bartholomew the Less, a smaller but very beautiful church in the grounds of Bart’s hospital together offering four Sunday services and many weekday masses, programs and activities. I was able to attend a Choral Eucharist and was lucky to get a seat. The professional choir under its Director of Music, Rupert Gough, was a joy.



It also attracts a steady tourist trade not least because of its having been used as a location for many significant films (including *Robin Hood Prince of Thieves*, *Shakespeare in Love*, and *Elizabeth the Golden Age*) and TV programs (including *Richard II: the Hollow Crown* and *The Mystery of Edmund Drood*, both by the BBC). Most famous of all perhaps, the fourth wedding in *Four Weddings and a Funeral* was shot in the church. Spoiler warning: not all goes to plan with that “wedding” of Hugh Grant’s character, Charles, but that cannot be laid at the door of St Bartholomew the Great.

The church also contains a number of important artworks, most notably *Exquisite Pain* by Damien Hirst an outstanding and controversial artist, who has attracted massive critical support and opposition. St Bartholomew was martyred by being skinned alive and the Hirst sculpture depicts the apostle carrying his skin and brandishing a scalpel as a nod to St Bart’s hospital. It is a powerful work although I am not sure I like it.

The Lady Chapel and the Visitation

So, now, by a roundabout route, to the Lady Chapel and the Visitation.

The Lady Chapel, at the eastern end of the church extending from the apse, was substantially rebuilt in the 14th century but as originally constructed it was probably quite small and dark, a place where prayers and masses were said or sung to the Blessed Virgin. Our source for her Visitation is a 15th century manuscript in the British Museum, written in Middle English but believed to be a translation of a lost 12th century Latin original.⁵ From this we learn that one Canon Hubert, an old man of pious character, was visited by

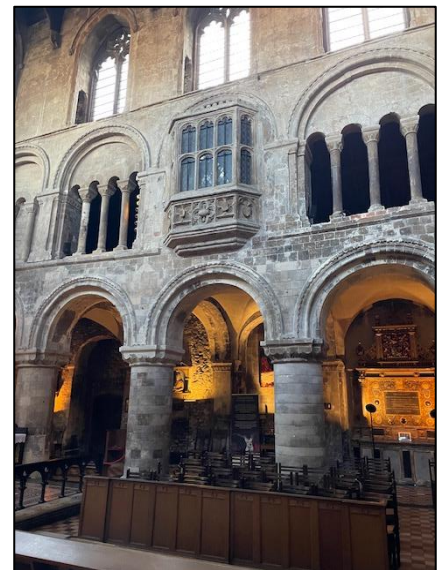
⁴ Rena Gardiner, *The Story of Saint Bartholomew the Great*, 30.

⁵ I shall quote from a modern English translation: E.A. Webb, *The Book of Foundation of the Priory Church of St Bartholomew, West Smithfield, London*, 1923.

“the Mother of Mercy” who gently chided the canons saying that “carelessness has now crept over them, charity has cooled” and the observances previously offered to herself and her Son had fallen away. She thanks them for past services of honour but comes also to “charge and requite for neglect” and to inform them that “here will I receive their prayers and vows”.

Perhaps these are not momentous words compared to those imparted at Lourdes or Fatima but for all that they are rich in meaning. I like the fact that there are no grand schemes but just a simple call to prayer and worship, that they gently recall the canons to the right path (Our Lady calls them “my dear ones” and speaks “for their health”) and that a carelessness in prayer and worship is associated with a cooling in charity. It seems to me that prayer, and charitable giving go well together as good Advent themes. As for the latter, Fr Jan gave us a timely reminder of the importance of charity in his sermon on 26 November when he urged us to consider the less fortunate and to check the pew sheet for ways we can help.

How the canons responded is not recorded. We do know that in the early 16th century Prior William Bolton built an oriel window from which he could see the canons at prayer. Was this an early Tudor spy cam? Had the canons slipped back in to their old ways? Later with the dissolution of the monasteries and secularisation the prayers presumably stopped as the Lady Chapel passed into private ownership being used first as houses and then as a printing works. It is here that a young Benjamin Franklin, a Founding Father of the United States of America, worked as a typesetter. I suppose that in his time the chapel was in reasonable repair but by the late 19th century it was reportedly “in a pitiable condition”. Happily it has been saved and restored and is available for prayer and devotion as in former times.



In a sermon that he delivered last month the Rector of St Bartholomew's said that his church was a place where the gap between heaven and earth was at its thinnest. This sense of the importance of place is of a piece with Our Lady's direction to the canons that she would receive their prayers and vows in its Lady Chapel. These are places where “prayer has been valid” as T. S. Eliot put it in his poem *Little Gidding*, words quoted by the Rector in his sermon and set out at the head of this article. Yet, as the Rector also argued, there are other places too. Some years ago a preacher, a refugee from South Sudan, told me that he had found it tough to adjust to worship in his new country because it was done in buildings and not in the open air. I suppose there are different places for different people. This Advent I will try to put off sense and notion and kneel and pray in St Mary's, North Melbourne.

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A White Christmas in Scotland

John Poynter

In December 1951, aged twenty-two, I saw snow for the first time, and experienced what passed as Christmas in Banffshire, in the north-east lowlands of Scotland. The memory persists, and I have revised some old notes to recount it

The day after I had first arrived in Banffshire, in September, 'Uncle' Willie Riddoch—mother's cousin, but I called him uncle—took me to a small stone cottage on Tarryblake estate to visit 'the Auld Shepherd' and his wife. He introduced me to the extremely elderly couple as 'Joseph's grandson'. 'Is Joseph here?', asked the old man, who had last seen my grandfather sixty-five years before, in 1886. I could understand little of the amiable conversation which followed, Willie falling into the couple's broad Banff dialect, a language, I was to discover, rich in Norse terms of abuse. The old woman served us excellent scones (the Scots are good at baking), the butter spread with her thumb, which she wiped clean before and after. After we left, Willie remarked what a pity it was that the couple had not been on speaking terms since 1913, when they had fallen out over whether or not to emigrate to Canada to join their only son. Thirty-eight years of silent resentment confined in a two-roomed cottage: emigration, it seems, divides families in more ways than one.

Some were more divided than others: after their emigration to Victoria in 1854, the Poynters lost touch with their Essex relatives. No so the Riddochs: Alec Riddoch, one of mother's Scottish cousins, was in Australia in 1914; when war broke out he joined the Australian Light Horse and served in Palestine, while two of his brothers fought as Gordon Highlanders in France and one did not survive. War took my mother and her brother Jim to Europe, and incidentally to Tarryblake, and mother had remained in Scotland, to be married and widowed, until 1925. Communication was maintained thereafter. When, in 1951, my mother wrote to her Banffshire cousins to tell them her son was to go to Oxford, bachelor cousin Willie replied inviting me to treat Tarryblake as my home. The invitation proved almost as important to my education as my Rhodes Scholarship.

Riddochs had lived in Banffshire for many generations, farming or teaching, and occasionally illicitly distilling whisky. It is said that they had fought on both sides at Culloden, the battle for succession to the crown overlapping with a family quarrel. My great-grandfather had taken up saw-milling, a profitable trade while the demand for timber for pit-props and herring boxes remained brisk. The business was continued by his son, my grandfather's older brother George.

The brothers and their several siblings had been born in a cottage across the road from Tarryblake Estate, a wood and several farms belonging to the Duke of Fife; by 1890, long

after grandfather's emigration to Australia, the business had prospered enough for George to buy the estate. He chose to build a house on a knoll, with a pleasant view down the valley of the Isla and across to the heathery dome of the Meikle Balloch, one of the countless northern hills worn smooth by glaciers and uncovered when the globe warmed. His choice was thought strange, because the house shared the knoll with a rooks' wood, from which thousands of raucous black birds streamed down the valley at dawn and flew back at dusk after a day's pillage. Decades later, when Willie occupied Tarryblake House, I found that human and rook understood each other mysteriously well. And Willie's hospitality, supported by his capable housekeeper and her mother and daughter, proved welcoming indeed, on those mild autumnal days

On my second visit, in December 1951, I learned, first, that in that latitude darkness could fall as early as 4.30pm, that wood fires and large earthenware hot water bottles were essential for comfort, and that porridge, oatcake and a 'wee dram' of local whisky matched climate with appetite. The first snowfall of my life confirmed all this, and I looked forward to Christmas.

What I did not know was that some 400 years earlier the Church of Scotland had banned the celebration of Christmas as 'too papist', and the day was not a public holiday. Willie and his brothers attended their office—in the former Free Kirk, it happens—on 25 December, and their mill in Elgin produced herring boxes, all business as usual. Celebration came a week later, with Hogmanay, the late-night welcome to the New Year triggering the great annual holiday. The origins of Hogmanay have been disputed, but Banffshire was happy to attribute it to the Viking invasions which had transformed the language, and so many local customs, centuries earlier. (The tradition that you were in for a lucky year if the 'first-footer' who crossed your threshold at midnight was dark-haired supports this claim: fair hair signified a Norse invader, likely to murder your family.) Now, of course, Hogmanay is an extended feast, closing Edinburgh and other Scottish cities for two or three days. The Riddoch's midnight celebrations of Hogmanay were moderate, and we even got some sleep.

Despite all this, I did notice that some aspects of a southern Christmas were creeping north. Willie's brother Wyness and his Canadian wife had us to dinner, with some Christmas trimmings, and Willie offered a modest Christmas celebration for children on the estate, with a decorated tree in his sitting room, and some presents. (Banffshire children already had a special school holiday on 'Turnip Day', when they were expected to harvest the local staple in the fields.)

And there was certainly a local market for Christmas trees, with Willie complaining of the number of young trees cut and stolen from the acres of woods on Tarryblake. The weekend before Christmas, walking with him up the hill into the woods for a stroll, we encountered a man striding down carrying a freshly cut young specimen on his shoulder. 'You've got

yourself a Christmas tree have you’, said Wille in a voice icier than the snow. ‘Aye’ was the cheerful reply: There’s hundreds up there!’ Even Willie was silenced.

In 1958 Scotland declared Christmas Day a Public Holiday. We may conclude that Commerce, not the papacy, had triumphed.

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A Christmas Cartoon *Submitted by David Keuneman*



“Really Joseph!
It’s Christmas;
Everyone is travelling;
Night is falling;
I’m tired and I’m pregnant.
And **now** you tell me
you haven’t made a booking!”

Ave is available for download via the St Mary’s Parish Website

<https://www.stmarys.org.au/wp/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/2023-Ave-Advent-Edition-FINAL.pdf>