

THE CLARION

The Magazine of The Parish of St Mary The Boltons

DECEMBER 2007 & JANUARY 2008



Preparing for Christmas

Towards the middle of October I noticed in the window of a well known pizza chain a poster that said 'Book now for Christmas' and in brackets, 'Yes, it's not too early!'

I certainly thought it was much too early and when I passed again the other day I saw that the notice, still up, was well faded. Preparation for Christmas seems to start earlier and earlier each year, with the result that by the time Christmas comes, we may feel like the poster, rather faded, not to mention jaded. It seems that all our preparations have gone on far too long, so that Christmas Day itself is not only something of an anti-climax, but has also lost much of its meaning.

The Church recognises that there must be a time of preparation before the great festival. But she tries to do things differently so that when Christmas Day comes, we are well prepared to celebrate the joy and meaning of Christmas – the birth of the world's Saviour and his promised return – without suffering from prior spiritual fatigue.

In some ways, the Church starts quite early to remind us that Christmas is coming and that we need to get ready. Since 4 November we have been counting down the Sundays *before* the beginning of Advent, reminding us to prepare for our time of preparation so that when Advent does begin – this year on Sunday 2nd December – we are not still wondering what we might do and so be in danger of leaving our preparations too late.

Advent is always just over three weeks long. This seems to be the right length of time, allowing us to arrive at Christmas Day, well prepared but also ready to continue our celebrations for twelve days until 6 January when we celebrate the Magi's visit to the infant Jesus, symbolising the revelation of Christ to the whole world.

The three weeks of Advent allow us time to reflect on and ponder the meaning and implications of the mystery of the incarnation; that with Jesus' birth, the Son of God, while remaining fully divine, became truly and fully human in order to make human beings safe, rescuing us from the destructive powers of evil and death.

As the carol 'O little town of Bethlehem' reminds us, we are not just celebrating an event

that happened about 2000 years ago. As we celebrate Christmas, so we sing and pray that Jesus 'be born in us today', that we may receive Jesus into our own lives and so lead lives that reflect God's love and care for the whole world in all that we say and do. It is in this way that we prepare ourselves for the time when Jesus will return, the time of His Second Coming. As the days of December lead us up to Christmas, may this Advent be a time of meaningful preparation so that when Christmas Day comes, we are ready to enter into the full joy of Christmas, allowing our celebrations to continue for the whole twelve days of Christmas and beyond.

With all best wishes for a joyful and blessed Christmas and for a happy New Year.

Ginny Thomas

O holy child of Bethlehem,
Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in,
Be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels

O Come, O come Immanuel

Behind the hymn

O come, O come Immanuel is one of those very great hymns that is in danger of passing out of use, at least in the evangelical Protestant tradition. It's only sung to one tune – Veni Emmanuel - drawn from a 15th century processional of French Franciscan nuns. This has a mournful tone at odds with the chorus, which tells us to 'rejoice, rejoice'. The original Latin words date from the 12th century, and they were translated by the noted hymn-writer and translator John Mason Neale, who rescued many ancient texts and brought them back into the living worship of the Church. The verses each take a biblical description of Christ (except the second, where the 'Lord of Might' is God the Father) and take it as a theme for prayer. The rod of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1) stands for power and authority, so, 'From depths of hell thy people save.'

The dayspring, or dawn, is from Zechariah's words in Luke 1:78; spiritually, Christ will 'disperse the gloomy clouds of night,' and put death's shadow to flight. The key of David is in

Isaiah 22:22; Christ will 'open wide our heavenly home'.

These are not references that spring easily to mind, but they are very thought-provoking, and arise from a deep knowledge of the Scripture. There has been a wonderful expansion of song-writing in different styles over the last few years, and there is no doubt that the simple directness of many of them speaks powerfully to parts of us that classical hymns could not reach. But they suffer sometimes from their simplicity; they don't give us enough to think about, and in the end, if they are our only diet, our worship is impoverished. This is one of those hymns that give us more to think about every time we sing it.

As it speaks about the coming Messiah, it is ideal for Advent, but it can also be very creatively used at other times of the year, perhaps during a serious time of intercession. The verses do not have to be sung in a vacuum; each of them can be related to the real experience of God's people today. We are in exile, as the first verse says; God is mighty to save (verse 2); Christians are oppressed and need help (verse 3); we fail and are downhearted (verse 4); we have a home in heaven, and a glorious hope (verse 5). It is a lovely hymn, and very rich in meaning. It would be a pity if we were to lose the habit of singing it: it does us good to grapple with hard things from time to time.

There are various versions of the lyrics, and not all the verses are nowadays sung. In these sad times, this one may be worth reinstating:

O come, Desire of nations, bind
In one the hearts of all mankind;
Bid Thou our sad divisions cease,
And be Thyself our King of Peace.

Mark Woods

It wouldn't be Christmas without...

For many people, Christmas traditions are important: it has to be celebrated so precisely with a correct etiquette to follow. All these Christmas traditions add to the stress and strains of preparing for one day and instead of celebrating the birth of Christ, people are caught up in what they should or should not do.

Yet many of these traditions are actually relatively modern inventions, dating back little more than 150 years, rather than 2,000 years in Bethlehem.

Christmas Crackers

You are sitting down to dinner, but before you get going, you pull a cracker, read out a terrible joke, put on the paper hat and then play a little with the cheap toy inside. Yes, Christmas dinner wouldn't be complete without these silly crackers.

You might have heard of the cracker's inventor, Tom Smith, as his company still makes crackers. Inspired by Parisian bonbons, sweets wrapped in tissue paper, he copied the idea. But to give it a twist, he added the motto (joke). A few years later, he added the 'bang'. However, his idea was copied by other manufacturers, so in the 1860s, he started to add a surprise gift instead of the sweet.

Christmas cards

Every year, the Post Office sends millions of Christmas greetings through cards. While it is getting increasingly harder to find cards that actually contain proper Christmas pictures, the sheer number of such cards is increasing. The tradition began in 1832, Sir Henry Cole, a wealthy businessman, wanted to send Christmas greetings to friends and professional. His card depicted a typical English family enjoying the holiday and people performing acts of charity. A thousand copies of the card were printed and sold, like hot cakes, for one shilling each.

Christmas robins

Robins, with their bright red breasts, are a key ingredient in many Christmas cards, but their association with Christmas actually came from the old uniform that the postmen wore: their bright red waistcoats gave them the nickname of robins. They tended to deliver Christmas cards on Christmas Day, a tradition that continued throughout the 19th century.

Snow

Having snow on Christmas Day is the theme of millions of Christmas cards, with everything from penguins, jolly snowmen and Victorian coaching scenes, Christmas means snow. Yet, during the 20th century, we officially had just seven Christmas Days with snow. So why do we think we can't have Christmas without snow? It is possible that this is due to the mini-ice age we experienced between 1550 and

1850: it was common for rivers to freeze over and the winters were very severe. Of course, with global warming, White Christmases are probably things of the past.

Father Christmas

Everyone knows Father Christmas, or St Nicholas as he is also known. One legend has it that he wanted to give presents anonymously, hence the chimney tradition. Our picture of a red-robed Santa creating presents in the North Pole is a fairly modern tradition. Until a Coca-Cola advert in the 1930s dressed him in red, he wore green robes. Our vision of Father Christmas as a rotund bearded man probably comes from the 1822 poem 'The Night Before Christmas' by Clement Clarke Moore.

Even the name Santa Claus is American, a corruption of the Dutch 'Sinterklaas', which itself is a translation of St Nicholas.

Christmas tree

Every year since 1947, the people of Norway have given a Christmas tree to be displayed in Trafalgar Square, but the tradition really started here in the 1840s, after Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's German husband, placed such a tree in Windsor Castle. A newspaper illustration (no pictures then!) showed the happy royal family celebrating around the tree and the tradition caught on.



Bishop of Kensington Paperless Christmas

The Bishop has asked us to look and send to others, an internet advent calendar. Please go to the following web link
<http://www.bok.paperlesschristmas.org>

Boxing Day Wednesday 26th December

We at St Mary's are going to provide a meal at St Jude's Church on Boxing Day, as our contribution to the Earl's Court Project's Christmas Outreach. The meal will be prepared in our church kitchen and taken up to St. Jude's. If you can help in any way with this, either practical or financial, please talk to Margarete Geier: 020 7373 1639

CAN YOU READ?

As part of our outreach work, members of St Mary's congregation have for some months been helping at St Cuthbert and St Matthias C.of E. Primary School. Our role is to help some of the children in most need to read English.

We have learnt that most of the children there are Muslims who do not have English as their first language. Some have arrived recently in England, and some have home situations that do little or nothing to encourage reading. Helping the children to read in a 'foreign' language in a class of perhaps 30 from many different countries is a huge task for the teachers, and our admiration for the work which they do is unbounded. However the opportunity for (nearly) one-to-one reading, which our extra resource offers, can help individual children to progress their reading skills faster.

Our personal commitment is typically for up to 45 minutes attendance at the school in the morning. We arrange a rota from our pool of readers to match reading dates with each reader's own availability. Reading materials are provided, and no formal teaching qualifications are needed. Patience is a prime attribute. A sympathetic ear, some gentle (or occasionally stern!) reminders about the task in hand, and persistence can yield great rewards. The school is located in Warwick Road near its junction with Old Brompton Road. If any readers who are not yet involved in this very worthwhile work would like to consider taking part, they are encouraged to contact Ginny about it. The need is much greater than our present team can manage.

Arthur Tait.

Dear Friends,

I returned this week to Gaza...

It is now almost a year since I first went to visit the Al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza City. This visit, as many of you will recall, led me to ask for your support in helping this hospital.

This is a report on what has been achieved and update on the situation in Gaza.

In material terms we have collected approximately US\$150,000. We still believe that commitments made will result in taking this figure up to US\$200,000.

I have been touched at the number of private individuals in the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Jordan and Lebanon who have given so generously. We have also received invaluable support from St Mary The Bolton's Church in London. To all these I reiterate my thanks. But I must also thank my friends at the Welfare Association, and indeed over these past months, they have genuinely become friends. Their practical support in managing and dispersing the funds, as well as their moral support, advice and encouragement have been invaluable.

Corporate support that was promised has not materialised and this has been a disappointment. Maybe in time we will find other institutions who will be prepared to contribute.

We have now spent the majority of the money collected. For those who wish to have detailed accounts, I would refer you to the Welfare Association.

The money raised has been spent on purchasing a mammogram machine (more on this later) and buying essential medicines. Thanks to you we have made a very real difference but... I am sad to report that the situation in Gaza is far worse than last year.

However, there is one 'improvement' and that has been the building of a large, high-tech security airport terminal by the Israeli authorities. It is clean and modern, yet even more soul destroying and de-humanizing than anything that was there before.

You emerge even faster now to the Palestinian side, not because their borders have been increased, but because the little infrastructure they had to receive visitors has been destroyed by aerial bombardment.

The landscape you emerge into is even more desolate than last year. The surrounding

industrial zone is now all rubble and twisted steel. The road to Gaza city is even more pock marked than before. But there is something new in the air. And that is the stench of sewage. This is because close to the check-point point (Erez) is the Bedouin village that was washed away by an avalanche of sewage as the neighbouring processing plant collapsed. Many people from the village drowned; but the smell lingers on.

Last year I recalled lots of young men with guns on the street. This time I saw very few. Maybe this has something to do with Hamas taking control, but I certainly noticed how much more subdued everyone on the streets seemed. Perhaps an explanation of this is how hard the blockade of Gaza is hurting its inhabitants. Good quality food is in very short supply. Staples like rice, flour and oil are still available, but prices have increased almost 100% since the beginning of the year, which is way beyond the purchasing power of most Gazans. Remember, we are dealing with a population where less than 30% have any form of regular income. Yet there are some painful signs of abundance: strawberries. Everywhere they are for sale on the streets. This is one of their major cash crops and sources of foreign currency, which now, because of the embargo, are left to sell on their streets for derisory prices rather than at the good prices they could have received from overseas.

It is good to be back at the Al-Ahli Arab hospital. The mission of serving the poorest of Gaza is still going strong. However, the strains on the hospital are far greater. Because of the tragic infighting in this part of Palestine the Al-Ahli Hospital, which is non-aligned and neutral, has grown in importance. More people come to the hospital for care and safety. They also check out sooner, at great risk to their recovery, because the little they are asked to pay they cannot: the 9 dollars that the extra few days of hospital care would cost them is intolerable. The Al-Ahli hospital, like all other hospitals in Gaza, is now denied 84 key medicines under the terms of embargo. Patients are dying because there simply are no medicines available. For example the substances they need for kidney dialysis machines are denied. Other critical supplies such as gas needed for general anaesthetic are running out. The incidence of

cancer, malnutrition, diabetes and coronary disease are all on the increase, exacerbated by stress, hopelessness and poor quality diets. Not all is bleak. I was taken to one of the buildings that has some re-furnished rooms, and in one of these holds the mammogram machine that the money donated by you helped buy. It was delivered the day before I arrived. It is now, I am told, the only operational mammogram machine in the whole of Gaza. Not only can it be used for better and early diagnosis of breast cancer, but it means that women can be screened for other health issues while they are there.

The rest of the money that you donated is being used to buy critical medicines that are not on the embargo list. This may not be as tangible or as glorious a use of money but still as important in saving lives. I hope that those of you who gave will find this to be an acceptable use of your money.

Some of you will recall the family I met last time that lives in the bombed-out graveyard near the hospital. I went back to visit them and took some basic items of food. Because I have children, and because I know children grow so fast, I was expecting the children of the graveyard to have grown big also. But I am sad to say that they were as small as I remember them. They are not just hungry now but severely malnourished. This time I had with me a wonderful doctor from the United States who gave me a very bleak assessment of their health. They and their mother, older brothers and sisters live in the most awful squalor that I have ever seen. I will spare you the details of the terrible stench of human waste, the walls cracked by the tremors of missile blasts, the twisted corrugated roofs... It is hard to believe that all this is just a few miles from Jerusalem, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the beautiful Al-Aqsa mosque... So close to some of the holiest sites in the world, cherished by the three Abrahamic faiths, a whole community has been abandoned, a population of one million or so left to fend for itself within the walls of a massive prison camp, its fresh water curtailed, electricity and fuel in short supply, food rationed, just so that they don't starve. The situation is set to get a lot worse, not simply because the embargo is likely to be further tightened, but also because it is feared

that the government of Israel may decide to launch a sustained military campaign. I do not use the word 'prison' lightly. As I came to leave Gaza, I came to understand for a little while what it is to be a Gazan: waiting at the perimeter, we hear gun fire. It was not scary because it was not aimed at us, but all of a sudden the exit back to Israel was closed. I, and all those with me, were stranded, with no sense of when we might be let out. During those hours there was much speculation about what was going on. Sometimes we heard that a mortar attack was going on, or that a bomb had been discovered. The truth of course in these situations is that no-one knows what is going on. You hear the thunder of F16s flying at high altitude and then the ominous buzz of the Apache Helicopters that just hover in the darkness their lights flashing. At moments like these you realise that you are no longer in control of your life and that others have complete power over you. It is a horrible and angry feeling.

Eventually, the non-Palestinians were let out. The Palestinians who had been queuing with us – the rare few given a permit to exit for medical treatment – are turned back and told to come back another day... No reason given, no reason needed for these inmates.

Reflecting on this I have the following to say: The first is that our brothers and sisters in Gaza are extremely tough and because of that, I fear the worst for them. They won't give up, or be subdued, they will endure ever greater misery rather than give in. Thus a blockade that is imposed on them to punish them for the audacity of having let democracy run its course and to give Israel 'security' will, I believe, only cause another generation of Palestinians in Gaza to hate. Making security for Israel in the longer term far less likely.

Secondly, we need to act, both through practical means and through prayer. From a practical point of view I would urge those who can, to give of their time to the charities working to alleviate the suffering there and engage in constructive debate to do what they can to influence public opinion and the minds of leaders and politicians who speak in our name. Mostly, I ask you, for more money.

Money will make a difference. The money will be used for food, medicine, upgrading

healthcare facilities, covering the cost of healthcare, and hundreds of different small uses. What we do here is neither fashionable nor headline grabbing, but doing this gives a few people a chance to live a little longer, better, and may be a chance for them to keep some hope and to remind them that they are not alone, that others outside, people who are free, have solidarity with them. If you cannot give money, then please refer me to people who can. I will come and talk and explain the situation in person. I will keep my commitment to go back again and follow up so that you know that your money is being well spent. Lastly, for those of us who have the luxury not to hate and have some control over our lives, I would ask you to pray for peace, for a just settlement, that the leaders who act in our name work towards a better world. Let me end with a prayer I shared previously with some of you, and one that as every day goes by, seems tougher to say in all sincerity, but saying it with conviction we must, if there is to be a better world :

“Pray not for Arab or Jew

For Palestinian or Israeli

Pray rather for ourselves

That we might not divide them in our prayers

But keep them together in our hearts.”

To make a contribution please send money to the following Bank and using the reference specified :

Bank Name: Arab bank (Shmeisani) – Amman, Jordan

Beneficiary: Welfare Association

USD Acct: 9917-1/510

Swift Code: ARABJOAXI18

Ref: Al Ahli Arab Hospital, Gaza

To find out more about Welfare Association and the fund for Al-Ahli Hospital then please consult the following web sites:

<http://www.welfareassociation.org/english/about.htm>

http://www.welfareassociation.org/english/Archive_2007/2007_015.htm

Metin Mitchell, November 2007

West London Churches Homeless Project.

We at St. Mary's will be preparing and serving the evening meal for the Homeless Project at St. Jude's Church on Sunday 6 January. A three

course meal – soup, main course and pudding – is required for 50 people. The meal will be prepared at St. Mary's from 4pm onwards. Please talk to Ginny if you are able to help.

As we are producing the January and December issue together, an advance notice concerns:

Shrove Tuesday 5 February - Pancakes at the Vicarage 7.30pm-9.00pm. A list will be at the back of the church nearer the time to sign if you would like to come.

Ash Wednesday 6 February

7.00pm Sung Eucharist and Imposition of Ashes

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Treasurer Carolyn Stubbs 020 7835 0074 **Gift Aid**

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Servers, Sidespeople & Social Secretary Sylvia

Gregory 01932 355863 **Sunday School** Jane Dass 0207

370 5309 **Traidcraft** Mary-G Blanchet 020 7352 6958,

Dorothy Patrick 020 7352 1396 **Assistant Treasurer**

Bill Gallagher 020 7384 3246.

THE CLARION Paper from **KallKwik** Printed in Church Vestry

ST MARY THE BOLTONS CALENDAR DECEMBER 07 & JANUARY 08

SERVICES AND READINGS

SUNDAY SERVICES

8.00am Eucharist

10.30am Sung Eucharist

4.30pm Evening Prayer

The meeting room at the back of the church is available for people with pre-school children. There is a baby changing facility in the wheelchair accessible toilet in the hall.

WEEKDAY SERVICES

Usually Morning Prayer is said at 8.30am (Eucharist on Feastdays) on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays except Public Holidays.

Wednesday 7.00pm Eucharist

READINGS in December

Sunday 2 December First Sunday Of Advent

Readings at 10.30am *Isaiah 2.1-5; Romans 13.11-14; Matthew 24.36-44*

Wednesday 5

Readings at 7.00pm *Isaiah 25. 6-10a; Matthew 15. 29-37*

Sunday 9 December Second Sunday Of Advent

Readings at 10.30am *Isaiah 11.1-10; Romans 15.4-13; Matthew 3.1-12*

Wednesday 12

Readings at 7.00pm *Isaiah 40. 25-end; Matthew 11. 28-end*

Sunday 16 December Third Sunday Of Advent

Readings at 10.30am: *Isaiah 35.1-10; James 5.7-10; Matthew 11.2-11*

Wednesday 19

Readings at 7.00pm *Judges 13. 2-7,24-end; Luke 1. 5-25*

Sunday 23 December Fourth Sunday Of Advent

Readings at 10.30am *Isaiah 7.10-16; Romans 1.1-7; Matthew 1.18-25*

Monday 24 Christmas Eve

Readings 11.30pm *Isaiah 52- 7-10; Hebrews 1. 1-4(5-12); John 1- 1-14*

Tuesday 25 Christmas Day

Readings at 10.30am *Isaiah 9.2-7; Titus 2.11-14; Luke 2.1-14(15-20)*

Wednesday 26 No Service

Sunday 30 December First Sunday of Christmas

Readings at 10.30am *Isaiah 63.7-9; Hebrews 2. 10-end; Matthew 2.13-end*

READINGS in January

Wednesday 2 *Basil the Great & Gregory of Nazianus 2 Timothy 4. 1-8; Matthew 5. 13-19*

Sunday 6 January The Epiphany

Readings at 10.30am *Isaiah 60.1-6; Ephesians 3.1-12; Matthew 2.1-12*

Wednesday 9

Readings at 7.00pm *1 John 4. 11-18; Mark 6. 45-52*

Sunday 13 January

Readings at 10.30am

Wednesday 16

Readings at 7.00pm

Sunday 20 January

Readings at 10.30am

Wednesday 23

Readings at 7.00pm

Sunday 27 January

Readings at 10.30am:

Wednesday 30

Readings at 7.00pm

Sunday 3 February

Readings at 10.30am

The Baptism of Christ

Isaiah 42. 1-9; Acts 10. 34-43; Matthew 3.13-end

1 Samuel 3. 1-10,19-20; Mark 1. 29-39

The Third Sunday of Epiphany

Isaiah 49.1-7; 1 Corinthians 1. 1-9; John 1. 29-42

1 Samuel 17. 32-33,37,40-51; Mark 3. 1-6

The Fourth Sunday of Epiphany

Isaiah 9.1-4; 1 Corinthians 1. 10-18; Matthew 4. 12-23

No mid-week Eucharist

The Sunday Next Before Lent

Exodus 24. 12-end; 2 Peter 1. 16-end; Matthew 17. 1-9

REGULAR EVENTS

Mondays 9.30am Mothers & Toddlers (term finishes on Monday 17 December)

Thursdays 9.30am onwards Fabric Group

Saturdays 9.15am onwards Gardening Group

December

Sunday 2 Parish Lunch & Traidcraft
3.00 pm Baptism Amber Van Dam
5.30 pm Wedding Blessing Mr & Mrs Collins

Marriage 7 Darlington Osiaku & Ellen Beishuizen

Saturday 8 Morse Family Baptism

Thursday 13 12.30pm Simple lunch

Sunday 16 7.00pm Carol Service

Saturday 29 2.00pm Baptism Andrew Hooper

January

Thursday 10 Midweek simple lunch

Sunday 13 Sunday School re starts

13 Traidcraft after 10.30 service

Monday 14 Bible Study Group

Thursday 17 PCC meeting

Monday 27 Bible Study Group

FROM THE NOVEMBER & DECEMBER 2007 REGISTERS

November

Saturday 3 Wedding Blessing Philip Denton & Angela Joyce

Sunday 11 Baptism Wilfred Machin & Lucas Siberschmidt

Saturday 24 Memorial service for Angela Lambert

December

Sunday 2 3.00 pm Baptism Amber Van Dam
5.30 pm Wedding Blessing Mr & Mrs Collins

7 Darlington Osiaku & Ellen Beishuizen

Saturday 8 Morse Family Baptism

Saturday 29 Baptism Andrew Hooper

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