



December 2018
& January 2019

Issue 57

Witney Congregational Church

R CROSS A D S

Witney Congregational Church is a crossroads where we:

meet God in worship

meet one another in friendship

meet our community and world with the love of Jesus



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WHAT'S ON GUIDE

Witney Congregational Church offer a whole range of activities through which we seek to Worship, Work and Witness to the Lord Jesus Christ in this community today

MINISTER

Rev Dr Jason Boyd

ASSOCIATE MINISTER

Rev Judi Holloway

WORSHIP

Daily Worship	9.30am	Mon-Fri	Short time of Prayer and Reading
Saturday Praise	11.00am	1 st Saturday of the month	
Sunday Services	10.30am		
	6.00pm	1 st Sunday of the month	

Communion is held twice during the month at the first Sunday evening and third Sunday morning services

PRAYER

The Church is open each morning for Prayer

STUDY & FELLOWSHIP

Tuesday	12.15pm	Light Bite Piece of the Word (1 st Tuesday of each month)
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YOUTH ACTIVITIES

Sunday	10.30 am	Crèche, Noah's Ark & The K.I.C.K. on Sundays
Monday	10.00 am	Noah's Ark – Infant Group for babies and pre-school children

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Tuesday	7.30pm	Monthly Deacon's Meeting
Thursday	10.00 am	Weekly Coffee Morning
Saturday	10.00 am	Weekly Coffee Morning
Sunday	12.00 noon	Bi-Monthly Church Meeting

SUNDAY LINK

Weekly bulletin for all Christians providing stimulating thought along with news and notices concerning our Church

St ANDREW'S BOOKSHOP

Opening Hours: Monday – Saturday



01993 709429

09.00 am – 5.00 pm

CHURCH WEBSITE

For further information, please visit our website:

www.witneycongregational.org.uk

MAGAZINE EDITOR

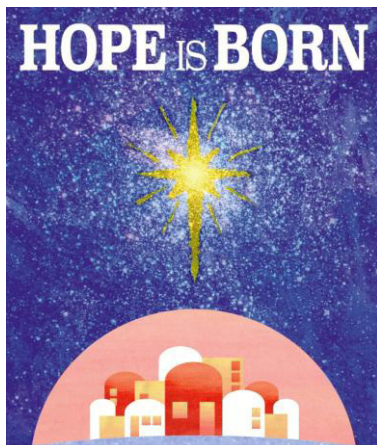
Terry Powlesland

E-Mail: terrypowlesland@uwclub.net

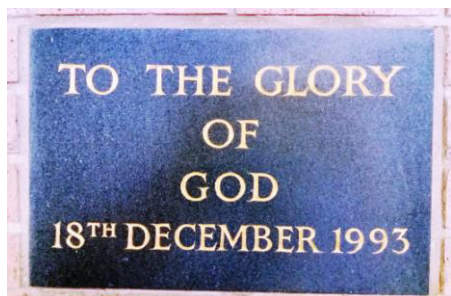
Further information can be obtained from the Church Office: 01993 709 992



The following really makes me angry, and, I have repeated it many times before; but it is the same old frustrating and annoying story! The shops have had their goods on offer now for a considerable time, and we are all subjected to the increased commercial hype putting pressure on us to decide what ultimately we ought to buy. However, let us focus on **Advent and the birth of Christ**



In the life of the Church, on the 18th December we should all be aware of this plaque, which we all see every time we go into Church, but this year is special as it represents 25 years to the commencement of the building of the Church as it is today, and this is reflected by 8 photographs within the magazine



The 23rd January 2009 is another milestone, as that is the day that Rev Jason Boyd, now Dr, was inducted and joined us from Cumnock as our Minister, and there is a celebration planned for later in the year

Turning now to those who have contributed to this edition; alongside the standard pages, Canon David Winter and Tim Lenton reflect on the carol 'Silent Night'; there is the continuation of Ken Lee's Bible Study series first contributed to the magazine in 1999, and there are Christmas articles from Beryl to name but a few

Many thanks for those who have contributed for this edition, but would encourage anyone to consider submitting article(s) for the next edition by either:
E-mail:

terrypowlesland@uwclub.net

jacquipowlesland@uwclub.net

or, just plainly written on paper, which can be typed up

The next 2-monthly edition, covering February & March 2019, is due on **Sunday 3rd February**

Your Editor



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Daily Prayer Time:

Mon-Fri 9.30 am

Services

10.30 am weekly & 6.00pm on first Sunday of the month and will normally be led by Rev Dr Jason Boyd unless advised below

December

2 nd	am	Cafe Church	
	pm	Evening Worship	Communion
9 th	am	Morning Worship	
16 th	am	The Christmas Story All-Age Worship	
23 rd	am	All-Age Morning Worship	Communion
		Lessons & Carols by Candlelight	6.00pm
24 th		Midnight Service with Communion at High St Methodist	11.15pm
25 th	am	All-Age Worship – Sharing Gifts	
30 th	am	All-Age Worship	
		Madley Park Residential Home	3.00pm

January

5 th		Saturday Praise	11.00am
6 th	am	Morning Worship	
	pm	Evening Worship	Communion
13 th	am	Morning Worship	
20 th	am	Morning Worship	Communion
27 th	am	tba	

February

2 nd		Saturday Praise	11.00am
3 rd	am	Morning Worship	
	pm	Evening Worship	Communion

The following events are given for your particular attention:

December

4 th	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm
	Deacon's meeting	7.30pm
8 th	Prayer Chain meeting	9.15am
	CTiW Carol Singing	10.00am
9 th	WICS Invitation to a miracle concert	7.30pm
	Church Meeting	12.00pm
	WICS Invitation to a miracle concert	6.30pm
13 th	Advent Quiet Day	10.00am
18 th	Springfield School Christmas Service	10.45am
20 th	Thursday Coffee Carols & Mince Pies	10.30am

January

8 th	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm
12 th	Prayer Chain meeting	9.15am
15 th	Deacon's meeting	7.30pm
18 th -25 th	Week of Prayer for Christian Unity	

February

3 rd	Church meeting	12.00pm
5 th	Lite Bite piece of the Word	12.15pm
	Deacon's meeting	7.30pm
9 th	Prayer Chain meeting	9.15am
	WRAG Sewing afternoon	1.30pm – 4.30pm

Dec	06	Sue
	07	Charlotte
	09	Audrey
	16	Layla
	25	Preston
		Kathy
	29	Cecily
	30	Jan S



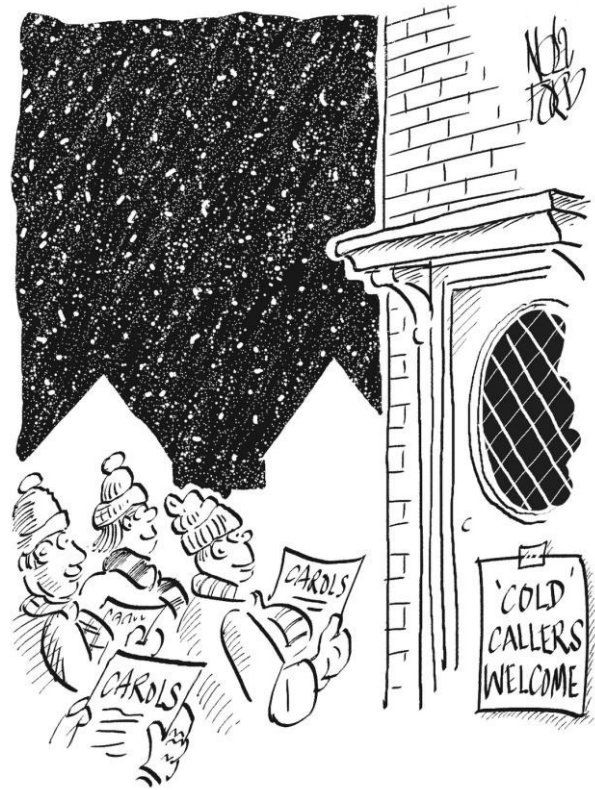
Jan	02	Benjamin
		Joseph
		Margaret
		Gwen
	07	Brian
		Storm
	24	David

Feb 04 Elaine B

Book Club

As part of Kathy Shaw's course of study on the Congregation Federation training course Kathy and Jan Park have teamed up to look at starting a Monthly Book Club, to be held in the church building and open to church members and people from the community.

The group will be registered with the local library and copies of each book will be loaned from the library service. With members support we are planning to have our first Book Club meeting on Saturday 25th January from 10.45am-12pm. Further details will be available at the next Church Meeting



Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a



Pastor's Paper

Preparation is essential to a sound painting job. Recently, the church had some painting done to the exterior of our High Street building. After the job was done, St. Andrew's Bookshop highlighted to us that their door was blistering. This was because the person carrying out the work took a shortcut and did not sand down the surface. The company was contacted and the job had to be redone. The sloppy preparation of one employee cost the company labour and material.

During my final week of annual leave, Viviane and I tackled the manse kitchen. It needed a lick of paint. I began by having to decide whether to do it or not. I have to confess, my initial reaction was less than enthusiastic. I realised it was important to Viviane and did need to be done. So I chose to do it – and to do it cheerfully.

Part of preparation is making sure you have all the things you need to get the job done: buying in the tins of paint, searching out the paint brushes and rollers, the sandpaper, and the dustsheets.

Out came the sugar water to wash down all the wall surfaces. While we were at it the cupboards were scoured from top to bottom. Plaster fillings were sanded down. Then the painting began.

As often happens, the job threw up unexpected things. On this occasion it was nothing too serious. Despite my best efforts to prepare, I discovered as I was painting that there was a place where the plaster was cracked. A little poke around laid bare a section the size of the palm of my hand. Viviane discovered that our trusty tub of filler had turned rock solid and so went out to get a tube which she proceeded to apply. It slowed us down a little.

At the end of the week we were able to sit back and enjoy the fresh look and smell of paint. It is satisfying to have a new start.

Advent is a time of waiting for the coming of Jesus Christ into our lives. Preparations have to be made. One of the verses my mother helped me to memorise was 'You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near' James 5:8 (though it was in the AV!). Patient preparation for the coming of the Lord is what discipleship is all about. It begins with a decision. Will I make the time to prepare? How important is this to me? Am I willing to put in the effort to make things ready to welcome Jesus anew into my life?

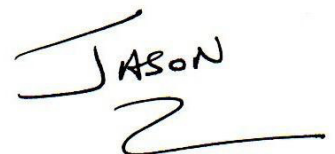
Once I've said, 'Yes', then I have to gather my tools. A Bible is essential. We may choose a set of advent notes to help us engage with God's word. Is there an Advent challenge to undertake?

Set aside regular times for prayer and reflection. Choose to do something that will show God's love coming into the world. Is there someone who is lonely who could do with a visit? Is there a phone call you have been putting off? Have you been thinking of volunteering for Late Nite Café or Street Pastors? There may be something else. Whatever it is, do it.

Once you've made your decision to prepare and you have gathered your tools, then it's time for the hard work to begin. You have to do it. The job takes time. Rushing a paint job will end up looking slap dash and you may have paint splattered everywhere. Preparing the way for Jesus to come into your life requires patient, daily attention.

The season of Advent will give way to Christmas day. The time for feasting and family, for giving and receiving, for resting and playing will come. If we prepare well, we will make room for others to join in our homes and become part of our families.

Shalom

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "JASON" with a stylized flourish underneath.



PRAYER LETTER

No 187

Letters

In the New Testament there are letters from The Apostle Paul to various groups of 'new believers', some of Jewish background and others from Gentile background. Paul's letters contain the Good News of Jesus, teaching and giving encouragement to new believers and warnings against false teaching. The letters of James, Peter and John also give encouragement and warnings. These letters which were written nearly 2000 years ago we can read for ourselves in the Bible or listen to during Sunday Services.

Recently I found this letter from Karen Francis (the wife of our past Minister Rev Norman Francis) which was circulated to members of the Church in 2006 and I thought it would be a helpful guide to prayer during the busyness of Advent.

Karen's Letter

LORD TEACH US TO PRAY

Dear Friends,

As many of you know, last month we were all invited to reflect on how, as a church family, we can become more passionate about our Christian faith. I could not help but pick upon some participants' expressions of disappointment with their own personal prayer life. Nor could I ignore the suggestion that it would be good if some help was offered to individuals desiring to develop the discipline of personal prayer.

My reflections led me to the disciples request of Jesus. 'Lord, teach us to pray'. It seemed such a simple question and for us in 2006 it may seem a ridiculous question. But not so. Perhaps we do need to ask God to teach us, perhaps we do need to develop a teachable spirit so that God can guide us into the discipline of prayer. I now share with you some help from the Teal Trust encouraging Christians to pray and some of my own thoughts

'Prayer is a gift. God has given each and every one of us the opportunity to address him directly.'

'Prayer brings the power of God to bear on the situations that we are concerned about. Prayer is one of the ways that God is able to work in our lives and in the lives of others and it opens new possibilities. So we can freely bring all of our concerns, our thoughts and desires, our hurts and our needs to Him, knowing that He is our loving father who wants to hear from us.'

How about practising prayer as you walk to the bus stop or as you sit on the bus, or wait in the doctors or while you cook? It's not as difficult as it may sound. It's certainly a way of acknowledging God's constant presence with us.

Many of us struggle to bring God into the busyness of our lives. Our busy schedule can squeeze out our prayer time and when we do pray we may find it difficult to bring our activities to God as prayer topics. We may think that God can't possibly be interested in our work life or in our housework or our leisure time. Yet the God who is Lord of all our lives is interested in all we do.

Brother Lawrence was a seventeenth century French Monk who knew God's presence at all times. His writings, borne out of experience of the bustle of a monastery kitchen, have much to

teach us today. 'God is everywhere, in all places, and there is no spot where we cannot draw near to Him speaking in our heart.'

However, can you imagine how it would warm God's heart if despite the busyness of our lives we chose to set time aside to speak with Him.

As well as finding God in the activity of modern living, we also need to find time to draw aside. Yet this can be hard to do, for one activity leads to the next in ceaseless pattern, leaving the only opportunity for a quiet time the moment when we climb into bed exhausted and in no condition for productive prayer.

We could choose to be legalistic about prayer and schedule it as an appointment. (We seem to schedule everything else that's important to us) After a while it becomes an appointment we want to keep rather than one we feel we have to keep.

What do we say?

Talk to God, don't worry about using theologically words or phrases. Remember God knows your heart. Just be honest with Him.

'Prayer is not limited by words but a touching of our spirit with the Holy Spirit of God that leads us into a relationship with the Father. This means we do not have to put into words but can simply open our heartfelt thoughts and emotions to our Father God.'

Pointers for Prayer

Why not practice the presence of God today? If you have a watch that beeps on the hour allow it to do so for a day or two and despite the potential for irritating your colleagues or neighbours, use it to prompt you to become aware of God's presence at that precise moment. Alternatively put a coloured dot in your diary or on your mobile phone. Every time you see it pray a brief prayer for someone in your mind at that time.

It wouldn't be a bad idea to ask God to help you pray at the time you begin your prayer. Now that's a prayer I know He will answer.

*Yours truly,
Karen Francis.*

As we learn from reading the Letters from the New Testament about Christian Life and from Jesus' example on prayer we can also learn from other Christians today not only through books on prayer but from peoples experiences of prayer.

As we enter Advent and the Christmas season into the New Year make time for God as He did send Jesus for us all.

May you all have a Happy Christmas and Healthy New Year

Every Blessing,
Beryl

Please note that for up-to-date prayer requests contact Beryl (703717)

25th anniversary of the start of building of the current Church



TO THE GLORY
OF
GOD
18TH DECEMBER 1993



The following two articles reflect the carol, Silent Night, and has been extracted from Parish Pump, and the first one is by Tim Lenton, and is entitled:

How Silent Night first began - 200 years ago

One of the most popular Christmas carols, *Silent Night*, was performed for the first time 200 years ago this month, on 24th December 1818, at midnight mass at a parish church in Oberndorf, near Salzburg, Austria.

The carol was originally a poem, written in six verses by priest Joseph Mohr two years earlier. Because the church organ was broken, he thought it would be nice to turn the poem into a simple carol that could be played by a guitar, and so he asked church organist Franz Xaver Gruber if he could write a suitable tune. Gruber did so in a matter of hours.

That night Mohr and Gruber sang the new composition, with Mohr playing guitar.

Karl Mauracher, an organ builder working at the Oberndorf church, took the carol home with him to the Zillertal, about 100 miles away, where it was taken up and popularised by two travelling families of folk singers, the Strassers and the Rainers.

They eventually sang it in New York, where in 1859 Episcopal priest John Freeman Young wrote and published the rather free English translation that is most frequently sung today, using only three verses and changing the rhythm slightly. The carol has been translated into about 140 languages.

The second article by Canon David Winter, takes a slightly different approach, and is entitled:

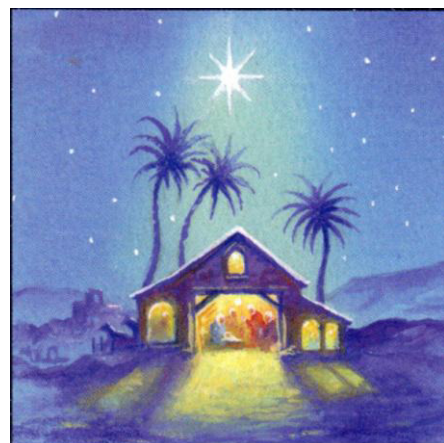
Peaceful Praise on a silent night

200 years ago this Christmas Eve a parish priest near Salzburg in Austria and his

organist wrote a new carol for the midnight mass. The priest, Fr Joseph Mohr, provided the words in a poem he had recently written. The organist was Franz Xavier Gruber who created a tune of haunting beauty. The carol, *Stille Nacht*, was duly sung at the service.

We don't know what the congregation thought of it, though I bet someone said, 'I can't stand all these new tunes!' But the simple words and wistful melody were to become one of the world's favourite carols, translated into hundreds of languages, 'Silent Night' as we know it.

My father told me of his experience in the First World War, when on Christmas Day the British troops heard the sound of German soldiers singing *Stille Nacht*. They responded with Silent Night, and the sacred words echoed across the blood-stained no man's land. It is a carol that breathes peace, quite unlike the traditional ones that stir us to action – 'O come all ye faithful', 'Hark the herald angels sing'. This German song is about the infinite peace of nativity – Mary pondering her heart all that was happening and the shepherds returning to their fields. The birth of this royal baby went largely unnoticed. There were no crowds, no cheering, no processions. But for two centuries people have sung this precious song of peace to recall that silent and holy night.



Bible Study

In this edition, and with permission from Ken & Marjorie Lee's family, and in memoriam to Rev Ken Lee, a series of Bible Studies, written by Ken and first submitted back in 1999, will be re-produced and is entitled:

MEANDERING IN MARK

"Meander" means "To wander deviously or aimlessly". Perchance this is not too accurate a description of these studies; it is hoped that they are not too devious nor totally aimless. However, the term "meander" is used to indicate an approach which takes its time, stops as needful to let a thought, an idea, an insight develop - all with the purpose of seeing what the Lord has to say to his people. May He speak, and to Him be the glory.

7. Mark 2:18 - 3:6

So far it has been things which Jesus has done or said which Mark has presented as causing controversy and opposition; words which have challenged, actions taken by Jesus, actions which were "not done" by "good religious people". Now Mark moves on to show Jesus being criticised for what his disciples and, presumably, Jesus are not doing - they are not fasting. Mark gives no context in terms of time, as to whether this was a particular religious festival season; he simply observes that both the Pharisees and the disciples of John the Baptist were engaged in the religious observance of fasting. For some reason it was a time for all good religious people to fast. Why are Jesus and his disciples not doing so? Jesus does not give a direct answer to the question but instead paints a picture from which his questioners, and we, have to tease out an answer. The picture is of the bridegroom at his wedding - a time of joy and celebration during which there can be no fasting. All of Jesus's hearers knew that for a wedding, the wedding guests were exempt from the requirement to fast as

indeed was the bridegroom. Neither Jesus nor his disciples were fasting. Could it be that Jesus was claiming to be the bridegroom? Once again Jesus is calling for people to recognise who he is, to make up their own minds about him. For those who will accept the Good News which he proclaims there is joy and celebration NOW because the bridegroom is come! Fasting is out for those who are with Jesus. It was and it still is!

What, however, are we to make of the reference to fasting in the days when "the bridegroom is taken away"? To those who first heard these words they may have been a reminder that a wedding does not go on indefinitely but gives place to the "normality" of married life. Not all of life is celebration; there are times of separation from loved ones and there is a place for fasting. For those who accept Jesus as "the bridegroom" the time for fasting is when he is taken away. How mysterious these words must have been to the disciples of Jesus! They had no thought of Jesus leaving them. They expected smooth progress from then onwards. Could this be why Jesus goes on in an apparently unconnected manner to talk of new, unshrunk cloth on an old garment causing of greater tear and of new wine splitting old wine skins? That which Jesus brings is so new that it requires a totally new approach, a new way of thinking, of acting. Although it relates to the old, it is NEW - New Cloth, New Wine, New Life which is to replace the old in the same way as married life replaces single life - there is continuity and yet all is radically different. The Good News which Jesus proclaims has no place for fasting so long as Jesus is present. All who know his presence have no need to fast, for with him there is joy eternal. But if "the bridegroom is taken away", what then? Can this happen, will it happen? At this point in his account Mark leaves his readers with a question in their minds, the question: Can there ever be a time when he, whom Mark proclaims as

"Jesus Christ, the Son of God", will not be with those who love him? How strong, how different indeed is the new cloth, the new wine of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Mark moves on to further controversy. Jesus and his disciples are walking through a field of grain and the disciples pluck some heads of grain, rub out the seeds and begin to eat them. This was an activity sanctioned by the Law as part of the caring nature of the Law - the hungry man was permitted to eat from the standing grain (Deut. 23:25). However, the disciples were doing this on the Sabbath and therefore, according to a strict interpretation of the Law, they were breaking the Law by working - they were reaping, threshing and winnowing. The Pharisees seize the opportunity to brand, if not Jesus, at least his disciples, as lawbreakers. Jesus responds; "So what?" No, that is not what Mark records, yet it could well express the nature of the reply Jesus makes. He takes his questioners back to David, David in a time of need who takes the holy bread which only the priests were supposed to eat and gives it to his men and eats some himself (I Samuel 21:1-6). Not one of the Pharisees would dare to condemn David for that action, and yet it was just as much, or possibly more, a breaking of the Law as the action of the disciples. How is one to interpret the ritual Law? Is the Law a caring Law or an oppressive Law? Jesus goes on the quote, in his own particular form, what was a ritual rabbinical commonplace of his day: "The Sabbath is delivered unto you and you are not delivered to the Sabbath." On this interpretation of the Law, many a rabbi would have agreed with Jesus. However, Mark adds one more phrase as coming from the lips of Jesus: "So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." Once again we face the question we faced at Mark 2:10 as to whether "Son of Man" is a Messianic title or Greek transliteration of an Aramaic emphatic form for "everyman"? If it be the former then Mark is picturing Jesus making

a very open claim to be the Messiah and we would have expected the next event to be a very open and definite challenge to this claim by the Pharisees. This apparently did not happen. If however, we take the latter interpretation, we have a picture of Jesus emphasising the positive aspect of much of the current liberal rabbinical teaching of his day by pointing out that the Sabbath was intended not only for the glory of God but also for the overall good of humanity. It would appear that Jesus is saying that the Sabbath is made for humankind, it is the gift of God to humanity, to be used and appreciated rather than to be a form of prison or, perhaps even worse, to be ignored. Within the kingdom of God, there is still a place for the full joy of the Sabbath. As if to emphasise this liberated God-centred use of the Sabbath, Mark goes on to record a further conflict story based upon the use of the Sabbath. However, before moving on to consider this story, let us pause to look at an anomaly in the account of the event just considered.

Jesus refers to an event in the life of David in which David takes of the sacred bread to feed himself and his men. Mark records this as happening when Abiathar was high priest. However a quick glance at I Samuel 21 reveals that the event actually happened when Ahimelech was high priest. In fact, Ahimelech was killed on the instructions of King Saul for helping David; Abiathar was the only one of Ahimelech's family to escape the massacre. So we find that Mark's record is in error. How did this come to happen? It seems inconceivable that Jesus himself should have made a mistake when we consider how great was his knowledge of the scriptures. So we must put the source of the error either with Mark or with whoever told Mark this particular story about Jesus. We need to remember that the story would have been orally transmitted for some 30 or more years before Mark wrote it down so that at some time in that telling the name of the priest

involved could have become changed to that of Abiathar. This would have been a very easy mistake to make as Abiathar is indeed a priest who was much more involved with David than was his father Ahimelech. Perhaps this small error in terms of a name can serve as a warning to us in our use of scriptures and indeed in the whole of our Christian living, a warning not to spend too much time studying small details and in so doing missing the grand overall picture of the working out of the love of God through Jesus Christ.

With that thought in mind we move on to the final conflict story in the group of incidents which Mark presents at this point in his narrative. The scene shifts to a synagogue on a Sabbath day. Among those present is a man with a withered hand. Reading the story one almost gets the impression that the Pharisees, who are also present, had brought this man along specifically to try and trap Jesus. Jesus enters and sees the man - and the Pharisees. He calls the man forward but addresses the Pharisees: "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?" The Pharisees give no answer. Had they given an answer it would have had to include the statement that it was lawful to save life on the Sabbath and that not to do so, when it was possible so to do, was unlawful, for that was equivalent to actually killing the person. They could have added that in the case of the man before them, the question of life or death did not arise, and that therefore his need could wait until the Sabbath was over. It would do no harm for the man to wait another day before being healed. Perhaps they thought these things, but they said nothing. Maybe they didn't want to appear in a bad light with the other people in the synagogue by condemning the man to another day of disability. We just do not know. What we do know is that Mark records that Jesus was angry at their attitude and grieved at their hardness of heart. There was good that

could be done - do it now. There was help that could be given - give it now. It was the Sabbath, the day for resting in the love of God - show forth that love now. Jesus said to the man: "Stretch out your hand". The man did not respond "I can't" even though his hand was quite useless. At the word of Jesus the man had the will and the power to respond; he stretched it out and his hand was restored to full life. It was in the responding to the command of Jesus that the healing came.

So Mark concludes his selection of conflict stories with a truly remarkable sentence: "The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him." We do not know for certain who the Herodians were. It does however seem certain that they were a political grouping rather than a religious grouping such as the Pharisees. Obviously they had some allegiance to the family of Herod the Great and the political aspirations of that family. The family of Herod was noteworthy for a ruthless doctrine of expediency based on what seemed most likely to benefit them rather than on what was right. That the Pharisees, who were supremely concerned with what was right, should ally themselves with such a group as the Herodians in opposition to Jesus is a warning of the danger of a religious faith which has become more concerned with the letter of the Law than the spirit, and the terrifying doctrine that the end justifies the means. How much evil is done in our world, in God's Name, by good people who have become blind to any vision except that which they have convinced themselves is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth! How often, as Christians, do we conspire with the Herodians of our day to destroy Jesus because his Good News is too challenging to our hearts and minds? Maybe we do not do it deliberately, but how do we think - like Herodians, like Pharisees, or like Jesus Christ, the Son of God?



The following article has been extracted from Parish Pump, and is entitled:

25 December - Christmas throughout the Christian world

For nearly four weeks leading up to Christmas Christians recognise a period called Advent. It means 'coming'. It is a time of spiritual preparation. 'Coming' refers to Jesus' first coming as a baby, but it also looks forward to a day when Jesus is expected to return in triumph at his 'second coming' to establish perfect justice and a new order of peace.

Originally Christians marked Advent as a time when they refrained from excessive eating and drinking. Then Christmas Day reintroduced them to the joys of feasting. Christmas celebrations lasted for twelve days, with gifts exchanged as a climax at Epiphany (6 January). Today, however, Advent is more likely to be associated with accelerating festivity, with the days following Christmas something of an anti-climax until 'twelfth night', on which decorations are removed. Many Christians worldwide are trying to revive the spirit of Advent by setting aside time to pray and address global poverty.

Christmas Day is celebrated as the anniversary of Jesus' birth, although the actual date is not known. Most Christians celebrate it on 25th December. However, the Orthodox Church (the ancient churches in Eastern Europe and parts of Asia) follows a different calendar and celebrates on 7th January. Christians make a point of taking communion on Christmas Day. Many make it the first thing they do as the clock strikes midnight.

On 6th January the Christmas festival continues with a celebration of Epiphany, which means 'the appearance'. Christians remember the visit of wise men (magi) to Jesus, bringing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. The Christmas tradition of exchanging gifts originally honoured these

men, who were the first non-Jews (Gentiles) to worship Jesus. It forms a reminder that in Jesus God was giving Himself for the benefit of the entire world.

Orthodox Christians use this day to recall the baptism of Jesus as a grown man. The significance of Jesus being baptised was that He identified Himself with human beings in all their need. They mark the day by praying for God's blessing on rivers, wells and water sources.

Christmas has never been just an escapist festival for Christians. Those who treat it seriously recognise that not all the world is able to face the days with frivolity or joy. The day after Christmas, Boxing Day, was historically marked as the feast of St Stephen. He was the first man to be put to death rather than give up his belief that Jesus was God. And two days later a day remembering the Massacre of the Innocents recalls Herod's attempt to destroy Jesus by killing all male babies in Bethlehem. Although not so widely marked as Christmas Day, it gives Christians the opportunity to pray for children in today's world who suffer as a result of the actions of adults.

This is from:

https://christianity.org.uk/christmas-throughout-the-christian-world/#.W9LI_xNKhsM

Christianity.org.uk is the website of the Christian Enquiry Agency Ltd, a registered charity. Originally set up by Churches Together in England, the charity is accountable to the CTE's Group for Evangelisation



The following article, extracted from a Junior Educational Magazine, has been submitted by Beryl Cartwright and is entitled:



A Christmas 'box'

Christmas is a time when people have always tried to think of others and give money generously to the poor. Churches had 'Alms Boxes' where people could put their gifts on Christmas Day. The day after Christmas was the day when these boxes were broken open, and the contents distributed to the poor, and because of this it became known as Boxing Day.

There is evidence that this custom dates back as far as Roman times, and continued up to the time of the Puritans when all such Christmas customs were banned. Indeed the churches were closed, so the alms boxes had no chance to be filled.

The tradition of giving out 'Christmas Boxes' is all that remains of the custom.

Christmas Boxes were sums of money handed out the day after Christmas to those people who had provided a good service during the year: for example, the postman, milkman, and refuse collectors.

This tradition still continues today although it usually happens before Christmas now, as these people don't call on Boxing Day.



The two St Stephens

The 26 December is also the Feast of St Stephen, the first Christian martyr to be killed for his faith. He lived at about the same time as Jesus, and was stoned to death.

It was on this day that we are told in the song . . . 'Good King Wenceslas looked out on the Feast of Stephen . . .'

One of the legends about St Stephen is that he worked in Herod's kitchen.

Stephen out of the kitchen came, with a boar's head in hand:

He saw a star was fair and bright over Bethlehem stand:

He cast down the boar's head and went into the hall:

'I forsake thee, King Herod, and thy works all;

There is a child in Bethlehem born is better than us all.'

(carol written in 1400)

There was another St Stephen who was a Swedish missionary. Although his feast day was some way away from Christmas, somehow the two celebrations have become mixed up.

The second St Stephen is said to have loved horses, and many customs were practised on his feast day connected with them.

In Munich, men on horseback would ride round the inside of the churches, their mounts gaily decorated with ribbons.

In some other countries including the British Isles, horses were 'bled'. This meant letting a small amount of blood, not enough to harm the horse, to get rid of evil spirits that might cause illness during the following year.

The traditional Boxing Day hunt may well be a modern tradition stemming from the feast of this St Stephen.

The following article has been extracted from Parish Pump and is entitled:

All in the month of December

- 200 years ago, on 24th December 1818 that the popular Christmas carol 'Silent Night' was performed for the first time, at midnight mass at a parish church in Oberndorf bei Salzburg, Austria. It had been written just a few hours earlier by teacher and church organist Franz Xaver Gruber, to lyrics by priest Joseph Mohr. (The lyrics were actually a poem Mohr had written two years earlier.)
- 175 years ago, on 19th December 1843 that Charles Dickens' novella *A Christmas Carol* was first published.
- 150 years ago, on 9th December 1868 that Franz Haber, Polish-born German chemist was born. He was winner of the 1918 Nobel Prize for Chemistry for developing synthetic ammonia. He was known as the 'father of chemical warfare' for his work on poisonous gases during World War 1.
- 100 years ago, on 14th December that the historic British general election of 1918 took place. It was the first time that women (over 30) and all men (over 21) were eligible to vote. Lloyd George's Liberal coalition was re-elected.
- 75 years ago, on 22nd December 1943 that Beatrix Potter, the children's writer and illustrator, died. She had created animal characters such as Peter Rabbit, Squirrel Nutkin, Mrs Tiggy-Winkle, Jemima Puddle-Duck and many more.
- 70 years ago, on 19th December 1948 that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly.
- 60 years ago, on 5th December 1958 that Britain's first motorway, the Preston By-Pass, was opened. It is now a part of the M6 motorway.
- 30 years ago, on 21st December 1988 that a Pan Am jet exploded and crashed onto the Scottish town of Lockerbie,

killing 259 passengers and crew and 11 people on the ground. The bomb had been planted by Libyan terrorists.

- 20 years ago, from 16-19th December that Operation Desert Fox took place. US and British forces launched a major four-day series of sustained air-strikes against Iraq after Iraqi President Saddam Hussein refused to cooperate with UN weapons inspectors.

The following article, written by Canon David Winter, is on Dickens' Christmas Carol, taking a slightly different approach, and is entitled:

The Conversion of Ebenezer Scrooge

We think of the traditional British Christmas as a few days off work, a family get-together and a big meal. In fact, that only goes back to Victorian times. Before that it was a religious event, with church services and carols, but not a great community event.

Among important influences on the change was a single story by Charles Dickens, '*A Christmas Carol*', first published 175 years ago this December. It is in effect a morality fable, with a memorable anti-hero, Scrooge, and a splendid happy ending.

Ebenezer Scrooge ran his business with single-minded dedication to profit. His former partner, Marley, had died, and now in sole charge he decided to impose a more rigorous regime. There would be no Christmas Day off for his assistant Bob Cratchit, which ruled out the family's hopes of a celebration meal together. Bob's wife Martha was shocked, but Bob valued his job and said nothing. Scrooge, who regarded all such fanciful stuff as 'humbug' remained immovable, despite pleas to the contrary; That was, until Christmas Eve.

That night he had a series of dream-like visions. The first was of his late partner, Marley, begging him to reconsider his attitude. There then followed three ghosts. The 'Ghost of Christmas Past' was a vision of his own unhappy childhood. Then came the 'Ghost of Christmas Present' about the disappointment and tears his decision had brought to the Cratchit family. The third was the most powerful – the 'Ghost of Christmas Future', in which he saw his own grave. Was this how he wanted to be remembered?

When he awoke on Christmas morning, Ebenezer Scrooge was a changed man. Bob need not work on Christmas day, and Scrooge himself would furnish a sumptuous meal for them all. The whole day was transformed – tears of joy (Dickens knew all about tears) and finally the junior of the family, Tiny Tim rounded off the whole experience with a cry of 'Merry Christmas, everybody.'

The story captured not only the public mood but also the public's heart. This was the sort of Christmas they wanted. And gradually it began to take shape – holidays for workers, charity for the poor, warmth and love in the family. Eventually the law and the work of trade unions gave the new tradition a feeling of permanence, but there's no doubt Dickens' 'Christmas Carol' story started it all.

Who is 'Santa Claus'?

On the whole British people are happy with the title 'Father Christmas', a suitably neutral name for the central character in children's Christmases.

In America, however, and by a process of cultural indoctrination increasingly in other English-speaking countries, the same red-

coated and bearded fellow with his sack of presents is known as 'Santa Claus'. They are, of course, one and the same person, and his name was Nicholas, and he was known as a patron of children, who would from time to time distribute gifts to them.

The first St Nicholas was bishop of Myra, in the country we now call Turkey, in the fourth century. He was known as the friend of the poor, and especially poor or abused children. At (or just before) Christmas he went around handing out presents to them, as well as rescuing some from dreadful circumstances. The red robe our modern Santa Claus wears may be a vague representation of a bishop's garment, and the floppy hat is his mitre!

From that comes the practice of giving presents at Christmas. We can't give them to Jesus on His birthday, so we give them to someone else, in love and gratitude. That, at least, is the theory.

Quite how the massive commercialisation of such giving developed probably owes more to smart marketing than Christian generosity.

It's not Nicholas's fault, of course, nor of the Dutch Christians who took the practice to America as migrants 300 years ago. The original good bishop from 1600 years ago is remembered by the Church on **December 6th**, and the lucky children in Belgium and the Netherlands get their presents then.



The following article, extracted from a Junior Educational Magazine, has been submitted by Beryl Cartwright and is entitled:

Christmas flowers



The Christmas Rose

This beautiful creamy white flower originates in mountainous areas, and flowers over the winter between December and March even in the snow.

The flowers were once considered sacred and were used to ward off the plague and all sorts of evil spirits. The roots which are black, give it the name of black hellebore. These roots when dried and powdered cause violent sneezing.

The Poinsettia

This plant, whose leaves turn a beautiful red and look like flowers, comes from Mexico. It was discovered by Dr Poinsett in 1828 and named after him. Its Mexican name translated means 'Flower of the Holy Night'.

There is a legend as to how the plant came to have such lovely red leaves.

One day a little peasant girl was standing by the doors of the church watching enviously as people took in gifts to offer to the statue of the baby Jesus. She was sad that she had nothing to give. An angel appeared to her and said that she should pick some of the plants which grew by the side of the road, and take them as her offering.

The girl picked a large bunch of the green-leaved plants and took them inside. The people in the congregation were very cruel and laughed out loud to see the little girl in her tattered clothes taking a bunch of 'weeds' as an offering. She was very ashamed and her face reddened. As she blushed, the leaves of the plants turned scarlet too and what had looked like ordinary plants appeared to turn into beautiful flowers.

The people were amazed at this miracle and very ashamed that they had laughed.

The scientific explanation of this miracle is in fact that the plant reacts to light — it is photo-periodic. The plants, which start out life as all green, turn red if exposed to 11 hours of light every day for 70 days.

