

LIGHT AND LIFE
TO ALL HE BRINGS



HOLYTOWN PARISH CHURCH
OF SCOTLAND

CHRISTMAS 2014

Dear Friends,

The sun has dimmed its dazzling rays,
The daylight reached its shortest span;
Now all the hushed and humbled earth
Awaits the birth of God made man.

How can we face this tiny judge
Who found no lodging at our inn,
But by a silent glance of love
Pronounces freedom from our sin?

Like nature in these Advent days
We must put off our lofty pride,
In stillness and humility
Prepare our hearts for Christmastide.

Praise to the Father, by whose plan
Our Saviour came to set us free,
Praise to the Son and Paraclete
Who joins us to the Trinity.

Order of the Paraclete

I came across these words recently as I was browsing my books in preparation for our season of Advent and Christmas and was deeply touched by some of the imagery which these words immediately aroused within me.

On reading those first few words I found myself visualizing the longer days of autumn and winter with that very low sun that we get in the sky at this time of year which does indeed never seem to shine as brightly as at other times of year.

Now as the trees have lost their leaves and their bare branches are wonderfully silhouetted against the almost icy blue sky it seems that indeed much of nature has gone to sleep. So I could hear and almost feel the silence of the 'hushed and humbled earth' of which the words spoke. I could certainly see it - for looking around me the earth has indeed put off its showiness and colour and become quite still and humble. In the cycle of life it has become dormant awaiting the first warmth of spring to once more bring it to new life.

As I write this Advent approaches - a time of watching, wondering and waiting - and during Advent as we watch and wonder and wait for 'God made man' we are encouraged to be like nature.

We are encouraged to do as these words say - to shake off any pride, to humble ourselves before God and to take and make moments of stillness to be with him.

If we can indeed do this throughout Advent, by taking time away from all the busyness of our Christmas preparations to remind ourselves of just who we are waiting for then, we will indeed be preparing our hearts for the new life to come at Christmastide - Immanuel - God with us.

My Advent prayer for you is that you may find those moments to be with God and experience anew the wonder and joy of the birth of God among us.

Blessings to you and your family this Christmas time as you prepare your hearts to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

Caryl

CHRISTMAS DIARY

Sunday 14th December - Christmas Gift Service - 10.00 am

We invite you to bring a gift which is suitable for either a girl or a boy. It will be helpful if you state 'boy' or 'girl' on the parcel and the age group for which the gift is suitable. Your gifts in past years have been much appreciated. We look forward to a good response this year.

Sunday 21st December - Nativity Service - 10.00 am

The children of the Sunday School will be presenting a "Nativity Play". We look forward to a large congregation to see the children, who have been practising hard.

Wednesday 24th December - Christmas Eve

The Crib Service will be held in Wrangholm Kirk, New Stevenston at 7.00 pm.

The Watchnight Service will be in Holytown. At 11.00 pm we shall have Community Singing followed at 11.30 pm by the Watchnight Service.

Thursday 25th December - Christmas Day Service

This year the Christmas Day service will be in Wrangholm Kirk at 10.00 am.

Sunday 28th December - Christmas Evening Worship

6.30 pm - Evening Worship in Holytown Church Hall

CHRISTMAS MAIL

The Boys' Brigade will deliver Christmas mail for within Holytown. Cards may be placed in a box in the Vestibule of the church on Sundays 14th and 21st December. A small donation will be much appreciated.

FLOWER LIST

December 14 Margaret Anderson
21 D Paterson
28 C M Boyd

THANK YOU

Mrs Winifred Menzies would like to say 'Thank you' for the flowers which she received on 2nd November from the church. She also appreciates her visits from the minister.

Mrs Mary Marshall would like to thank everyone for the beautiful flowers she received from the congregation on her 90th birthday.

CONGREGATIONAL NEWS

Magazine Distributors: We should like to thank all the magazine distributors who have so faithfully visited the folks in their district and given them a chance to catch up with what is happening. Your visits are particularly important for those who are unable to get out and about.

Church Flowers: Week by week flowers have been placed in

the church throughout the year. We should like to thank all of the donors most sincerely for not merely bringing beauty within the church but for being able to provide pleasure to those to whom the flowers were later given. You are very much appreciated. We should also like to thank Mrs Christine Bell for not merely arranging the distribution but also from time to time helping the donor to get the flowers to the Church. This is much appreciated.

Flower List: The new Flower List for 2015 is available in the Vestibule of the Church. We invite you to write your name opposite the date of your choice if you wish to place flowers in the church.

Freewill Offering Envelopes for 2015 will be available shortly. Please contact Susan Reid if you would like to receive a set or if you wish to cancel your envelopes and change to standing order payment through your bank.

Please also remember that signing up for Gift Aid can provide an additional 20% to Church Funds - all at no cost or effort on your behalf - just your signature on a form!

Church Audit: The annual audit of the books of the organisations will take place on **Friday 9th January 2015** from **6.30 pm to 7.30 pm** in the Church Vestry. Will all treasurers please arrange either to be there personally or to have someone available to present the books.

ONLY WITH OUR HEARTS

With our eyes we see the glitter of Christmas

With our ears we hear its merriment,
With our hearts we touch the tinsel-tied trinkets . . .
But only with our hearts can we feel the miracle of it.

Helen Steiner Rice

ANGELS . . . ANGELS . . . ANGELS

There are angels everywhere in the Christmas story. An angel turns up and informs Zecharias that his elderly wife is going to have a baby boy (later to become John the Baptist). An angel turns up and tells Mary that the Holy Spirit is going to overshadow her and she's going to give birth to the Son of God. An angel turns up and tells Joseph, Mary's husband-to-be, that his fiancee is pregnant as a result of the Holy Spirit and that he is to go ahead and marry her. An angel turns up and tells the shepherds watching their flocks that a Saviour has been born in the little town of Bethlehem. (This is followed by a choir of angels singing glory to God.) Everywhere you look in the story of Christ's birth, angels are found playing a critical role.

(Stocking Full of Christmas compiled by Mark Stibbe)

PROPHECY

We are always astonished when someone foretells an event which subsequently happens but our predictions are very minor when compared with what is to be found in the Bible.

It never ceases to amaze me that Isaiah, who lived 700 years before Jesus' birth was able to tell us so much about his coming. In Isaiah 9:6-7 we read,

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."

Micah 5:2 states,

"And thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall come forth unto me that that is to be ruler in Israel, whose going forth have been from of old, from everlasting."

Micah lived at least 650 years prior to Jesus being born in Bethlehem.

We are left to wonder how the people all these years ago reacted to what was foretold. Did they expect the Saviour to be born in a few short years? We shall never know. What is, however, clear, as a well-known hymn says, "God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform." God, unlike us, has all the time in the world. He is not confined by our mortal time.

When the time came for Jesus to be born Mary and Joseph were in Nazareth, approximately 100 miles from Bethlehem. As if, on cue, we read in Luke 2:1-3,

"And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was

governor of Syria.), and all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, ut of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David) to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife.”

Thanks to the decree Micah's prophecy was fulfilled.

In the midst of all the many people in Bethlehem, Jesus was born. Apart from Jesus' mother, Mary and Joseph, who would have known of the significance of the birth? Quite possibly, no one! This is yet another instance of God moving in His own mysterious way.

We are all aware that the shepherds were the first to welcome Jesus. What a night that must have been for them - a mixture of fear when the angels appeared and joy when they saw the baby and probably not a little proud that they were the first to see the child.

There is a prophecy in Zechariah 9:9 which states,

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, thy King cometh unto thee; he is just, and having salvation, lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a cold the foal of an ass.”

Here we are looking ahead to the entry into Jerusalem on what is now known as Palm Sunday.

As well as remembering what happened 2000 years ago in Bethlehem, we can also rejoice that God doesn't merely see the present but is in charge of what happens in the future.

The gift of His Son surpasses any other gift either received or given, it is an eternal and everlasting gift from a loving and caring God.

This little poem from 'A Stocking Full of Christmas' compiled by Mark Stibbe seems to sum everything up.

*God grant you the light in Christmas, which is faith,
The warmth of Christmas, which is love,
The radiance of Christmas, which is purity,
The righteousness of Christmas, which is justice,
The belief in Christmas, which is truth,
The all of Christmas, which is Christ.*

THE REAL CHRISTMAS

The real Christmas takes place not in a home or a church, or at a certain time or in a particular location. Rather, the real Christmas happens in the human heart - a heart willing to humbly receive the gift of God's love in Jesus. In other words, the real Christmas can take place anywhere and at any time!

While the Christmas season is here, it's easy to remember to give to charity, share with others, visit the lonely, and wish our loved ones, friends, associates, and even strangers all the blessings of the season. But as we leave behind the festivities and get down to the business of the new year, we tend to leave behind our Christmas spirit as well. We forget about giving to those less fortunate than ourselves, about sharing with and caring for others, about extending a friendly greeting to those we meet. We forget all about the real Christmas, the one that happens every day.

During the Christmas season, bring Christmas into your heart by meditating on the reason why Christ was born into the world and planning your response to His gift of love. Then make yourself a reminder note so you will remember, when the season is over, to live the real meaning each day of the new year.

Helen Steiner Rice

CHRISTMAS IN THE EIFEL 1939

All the bells are silent,
Who comes to the mother and child.
We listen scared - shocked.
The wind roars through the bare branches.

And what the angels sang,
Lost and now only an echo,
No shepherds are on their way
From the slopes to seek the stall below.

The star has been hiding itself
The clouds are drifting grey and heavy.
It is as if no morning will come
No bright morning will return here again.

And yet, in the angel songs
One word - sweet and strange:
O peace, holy peace
That will reward our goodwill!

In our hearts let us cherish
The loving word, loyal and true.
Soon the star will light our paths

And the darkness will become bright.

The people compelled by grace
Freed from sorrow and death;
Out of ice, snow, darkness and distress
A rose will be seen to rise.

This is my version of the German poem written by Heinrich Ruland. The date is significant as the first Christmas of the Second World War.

CUSTOMS IN OTHER LANDS

In the Netherlands Saint Nicholas evening is on the 5th of December and the 6th is Saint Nicholas day. He is also known as "Sinterklaas". From the 14th century St Nicholas has been associated with the giving of presents to children.

On St Nicholas' Day choirboys from the church go through the streets asking for bishops' gold. Nicholas was also a bishop. Later in cloister schools monks dressed with long white beards and a red cloak gave the good children presents. Later Zwarte Piet (possibly representing the devil) became associated with St Nicholas riding above the roofs and throwing sweets down the chimney.

In Curacao, one of the Dutch Antilles Islands, St Nicholas came by sea and went round the town of Willemstad and came down to the ship on which I was travelling.

In Italy the children receive their gifts at Epiphany, 6th January, from an old witch called La Befana. According to legend La Befana was doing housework when the wise men from the

east came to her. She was so busy, that she didn't offer them hospitality. Thus the wise men went on their way to Bethlehem and La Befana thought that they would come again on their way back. But the wise men went back home by another way; La Befana never saw them again. As a punishment the old witch must for ever look for Jesus and in each house leave a present in case that He ever does go there.

Nowadays on Christmas Eve La Befana flies on her broomstick from house to house and slips down the chimney to fill the shoes of the good children with presents and the shoes of the naughty ones with coal.

On the evening of 5th January musicians go through the streets, sing in front of houses and play on the violin or the pipes a song called La Befanata. For their efforts they hope to receive a small gift or something to eat. One of the musicians is more often than not dressed as La Befana.

Costa Rica as with many other countries around the world has its own unique and special way to celebrate Christmas. As the last days of November pass by, the weather starts to change and it becomes colder, clearer and windy. As the wind starts to blow harder and the days start to get colder, the people begin the decoration of their houses. Bright, tropical flowers highlight decorations for Christmas. Special trips are made to gather wild orchids blooming in the jungle areas. The manger scene is called a *portal* and is decorated with these brilliant flowers and colourful fresh fruit. Wreaths of cypress leaves and red coffee berries are very popular. The supper after Midnight Mass consists of *tamales* and other local dishes.

*Christmas is the gift from heaven
Of God's Son given for free.
If Christmas isn't found in your heart
You won't find it under a tree.*

IN TIMES PAST

If you walk down the Holytown Road you will find an avenue leading into a playing field. At one time a lodge house stood at the entrance to that road - long since demolished. However, if you were to walk up what was once the road, now lost by the advent of Euro Central, you would have reached Mid Lodge where the Duff family once lived.

Mrs Duff once told me that one of our local postmen, David Breingan, walked up to Mid Lodge. When he got there, he told Mrs Duff that he'd only come to tell her he had nothing for her.

If you went beyond Mid Lodge you came to the 'New Road', today's A8 and if you crossed the road you would come to a continuation of the path leading to Woodhall House (no longer in existence). In effect the A8 as it is now called effectively divided the communities of Calderbank and Chapelhall from Holytown.

Another point of interest is at the road from the Main Street, leading to the Wee Lane into Sunnyside Crescent. At one time there was a shop there owned by Hannah Stewart. She was later to become Mrs McAndrew. Her name appears on the little plaque on the pulpit in the church. The shop changed hands and became 'The Co' Dairy'. The bus stop was there for buses to Motherwell, Hamilton, Strathaven and Ayr. One

of the children of a policeman was told by his father that his mother was away stravaigin'. The boy's comment was that if you went to the co dairy you would get a bus for there.

How many remember the co-op dairy and the avenue?

THE MAGI

We are accustomed to thinking that the greatest gift of the Magi was gold, frankincense and myrrh. It wasn't. the greatest gift they brought was their devotion; their willingness to endure whatever it took and to look as long as it took to find what God had promised them through the sign. Their physical gifts paled in comparison.

(Dan Schaeffer)

How children become confused!

Three young children were playing the parts of the wise men in a school nativity play. At one point they came to Mary and Joseph at the manger and said the following:

Magi 1 Here, this is gold.
Magi 2 This is myrrh.
Magi 3 And Frank sent this.

BEFORE CHRISTMAS

This is another poem by Heinrich Ruland. It seems to describe very effectively a much more tranquil age.

Out of the grey clouds appears the winter night
Today in the east no red moon can be seen

The shops are already closed and dark
As the wind from the mountain rattles at the door.

The lamp is burning giving a peaceful light
As the delicate flame seems to quietly hum.
Your face as you sit in the twilight
Looks pale in the gentle light.

Furtively you sew stitch after stitch
Working with very busy fingers
Furtively laughing you lay on the table
The brightly coloured doll's clothes.

Close by the children peacefully sleep
Their dreams known only to God
Now and then burrowing in the pillow
Any words are muffled and confused.

O wonderfully blessed time! Hidden from view
Lies the little Christ child at rest
Take care, take care! A star keeps watch
Brightly shining over our roofs.

GIFTS FROM GOD

This bring you a million good wishes and more
For the things you cannot buy in a store -
Like faith to sustain you in times of trial,
A joy-filled heart and a happy smile,
Contentment, inner peace, and love -
All priceless gifts from God above!

Helen Steiner Rice