

Avoch Linked with Fortrose and Rosemarkie Church of Scotland

Quarterly Newsletter Issue 10 December 2021

Winter Skies

Some shepherds.....



William Mather

...were in the fields.....an angel of the Lord appeared.....His glory shone around.....The angel said, "Don't be afraid, I bring you good newstoday your Saviour was born.....Christ the Lordyou will find a baby lying in a manger....."A great army of angels appeared singing praises to God.

The Birth o Jesus

In the time o Caesar Augustus, the Romans ordered a census tae be cairried oot ower the the hale country. This happened when Cyrenius wis the heid man o Syria. So aw the folk went tae be registered, each wan tae his ain toon.

Noo there wis this joiner - Joseph wis his name - livin in Nazareth in Galilee. He'd heard that everywan had tae report, an check that his name wis oan the electoral roll. So he made his wey tae Bethlehem, the birthplace o his ancestor, King David, alang wi Mary his future wife.

Mary was expectin her bairn an her time wis nearly due. When they arrived in Bethlehem, there wis nae place for them in ony o the inns. But wan o the inn-keepers, takin pity oan them, let them stey in his stable. Durin the night, Mary gied birth tae a wee boy.

Meantime, that very night, there wir some shepherds livin oot in the fields nearby, keepin an eye ower their sheep. Suddenly an Angel o the Lord appeared tae them an the night sky was fair lit up! The shepherds wir aw gobsmacked, but the Angel says tae them, 'Dinna be feart, for I bring ye guid news - guid news for the hale world. This very night in David's toon, Bethlehem, a Saviour has been born. He is Christ the Lord! Ye will find the wean aw wrapped up, lyin in a stable trough.'

At wance, the hale sky wis festooned wi angels, praisin God, sayin, 'Glory tae God in the highest, peace oan earth, guidwill tae aw men!'

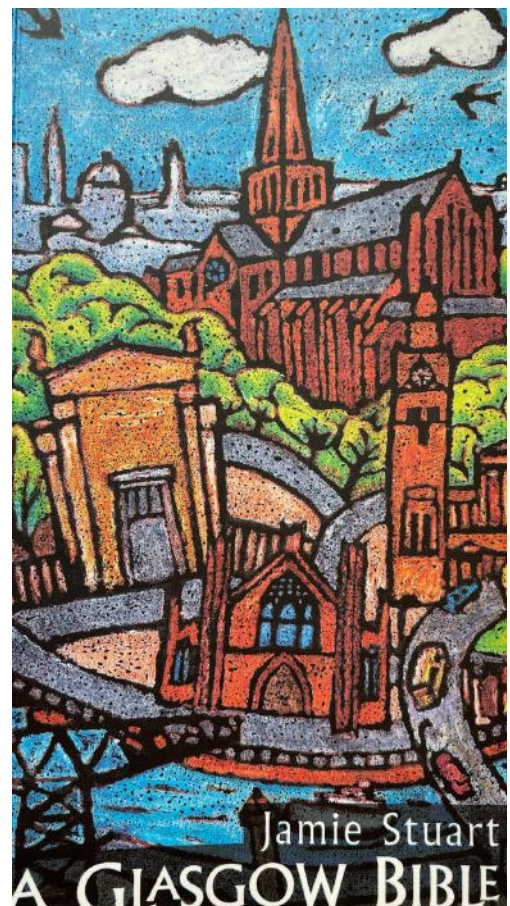
When the angels went back inty Heaven, the shepherds looked at wan anither an yelled, 'C'mon! We'll away doon tae Bethlehem an see whit's happenin!' So they went, hurryin aw the

wey. Right enough, there they fund Joseph an Mary - an the wee wean, lyin snug in the feedin trough.

The shepherds wir fair taken wi the boy an telt aw the folk whit had happened an whit the Angel had telt them *them* about the birth. Every wan wis dumfoonert at the story, but Mary kep it tae hersel an wunnered whit it aw meant.

Then the shepherds went back tae their fields, praisin God for the visit O the angels, an because they'd seen the wean.....jist as the Angel had telt them.

Extract from *The Glasgow Bible* by Jamie Stuart



Christmas is not an event within history but is rather the invasion of time by eternity

Hans Urs Von Balthaser

Advent - the season of expectation and preparation

According to one major denomination's website, Advent is a season of expectation and preparation. That leads us to two questions: what are we expecting this Advent? How are we preparing for Advent?

If we think of the Christmas season generally we know that it drips expectation even excitement especially for those who are younger. Christmas is filled with expectation as a season that reflecting on the birth of Christ in winter has been associated with families coming together and taking time aside from the rest of life to pause and celebrate. The theme of preparation for the celebrations runs deep through the Christmas experience – especially in the western world with its long history of Christianity. Not only for celebrations for the Christian festival but all the practicalities of a festival.



Four years ago, I was caught up in those twin themes of expectation and preparation with a local Primary School in the Borders. The limited time for music teachers in today's schools meant that she only had time to prepare for the concert but not the annual carol service in the park. Enter the locum minister who had the chance for weekly rehearsals with the children in the Advent season.

Preparations followed: setting up the service which given the Borders dialects, included some readings, a poem (which the head obligingly read), and a carol in Scots (*Quem Pastores Laudavere* became *Him the Herds Returnin Ruisit*) – the kids happily took all of this in their stride. Preparations continued with an hour's rehearsal each week to help the children master the carol repertoire in time for the carol service in the open-air.

Expectation mounted as the big day arrived. The electric piano was sent on ahead in the "school van" and the whole school set off towards the park, with the minister and a chatty P4 child bringing up the rear of a long "crocodile" which was led resolutely up the hill by two of the teachers. Neither pre-performance nerves, nor the release of pent-up energy, seemed to dim the flow of conversation at the end of the "crocodile" – up or down!

Advent - this coming year

When we turn our thoughts to the deeper meaning of Christmas as understood by Christians down through the centuries these two questions about what we are expecting this Advent and how we are preparing for Advent remain helpful as we focus our thoughts.

What are we expecting this Advent?

The answer from the four lectionary readings for Advent is this: a righteous branch; a messenger, who like a somewhat scary life-coach will "refine our lives"; a "daughter" (in a very metaphorical sense) whose life is turned around – where lament turns to rejoicing; and, finally, a "son" who brings peace or shalom! Hearing that you might echo the response to a children's story: "Well, it's not bad as stories go – but is that all there is to it?"

How are we preparing for Advent?

That takes us to our second question: How are we preparing for Advent? Well, the biblical account of Christmas in the New Testament, is actually rooted in the whole thrust and flow of the Old Testament. Each year, most of us need to be reminded of some of the key themes that lead into Christmas hence the time of preparation.

At the heart of Christmas is the surprising message that God takes on flesh to live amongst us – that is why the birth of Jesus Christ (his incarnation) is so central - the paradoxical idea that God, the one who reigns, identifies with human beings is thus at the heart of Christianity. God does this to change our notions of kingship and the kingdom. It can take a lot of preparation to come to terms with that.

By the time we reach our fourth Sunday in Advent, we will hear the words:

*“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times.”*

If you want to appreciate their deeper meaning and add to your sense of expectation – can I encourage you to prepare Sunday by Sunday as we explore what lies behind them in the Old Testament. You see, when it comes to the Christmas Story: “It’s very intriguing as stories go – and there’s more to it than meets the eye!” It has the potential not just to refine but to transform our very lives, often in unexpected ways.

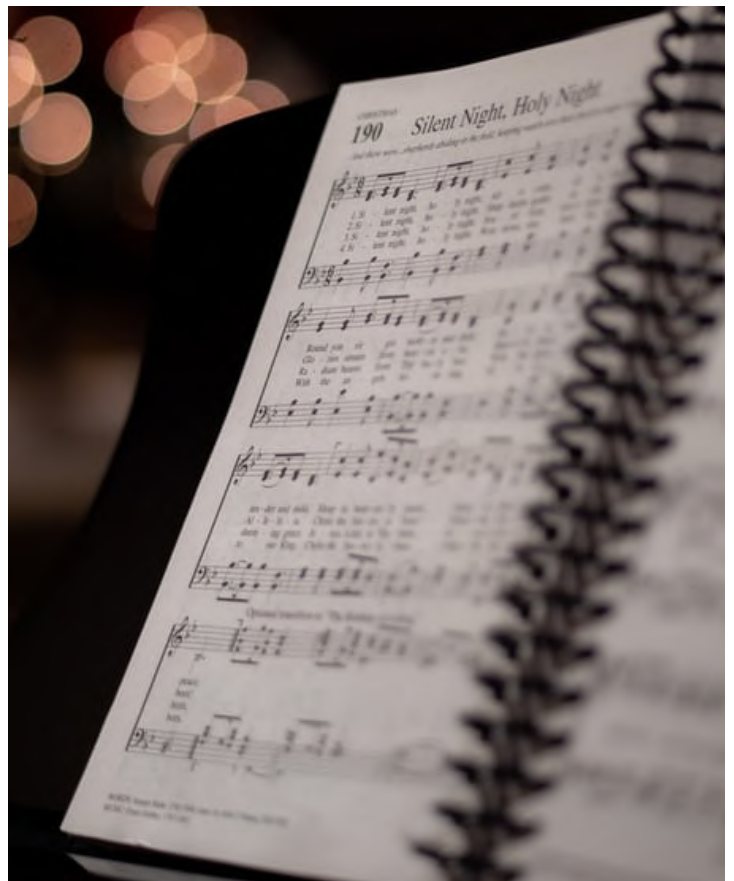
Rev Dr Warren Beattie

Could You Name that Carol?

(from just one line)

1. Light and life to all he brings
2. The wondrous gift is given!
3. Love is smiling from thy face!
4. And this shall be the sign
5. And by the light of that same star
6. May have gathered there
7. Thus to come from highest bliss
8. Worthy our Saviour
9. Brighter visions beam afar
10. Sing in exultation

Answers further on after an article by Jack Kernahan on *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens



A Christmas Reflection on Luke 2:4-7 and Matthew 2:13-15

What image comes to mind when we turn our thoughts to the Christmas story? Sometimes it seems to have become a rather warm sort of narrative. Christmas cards and tableaux have done their bit through the ages to paint a picture of a small, cosy stable with a tiny baby tucked cosily up among the straw in a manger, the obligatory ox and ass looking on. As often as not, there's also a warm looking glow to the scene.



Reality would surely have painted a different picture. Who knows what the birth place would really have been like. I think back to when I was in a very unsophisticated farm house in the Himalayas a few years back. The sleeping was up under the roof on mats spread out over bare boards. To reach the 'facilities' involved a climb down a wooden ladder, then through the kitchen with its wood-fired clay oven and then down a few stone steps more into the dark place where the family's horse and goats were browsing on small tree branches packed into rough wooden mangers. The atmosphere was stuffy and the whole place smelt really strongly of the animals. It occurs to me that that this may have been closer to the uncomfortable reality of the place of the Nativity than the familiar picture we've been conditioned into imagining.

Our Christmas celebrations duly come and go and the door of the imagined stable is, metaphorically speaking, closed on the familiar Nativity scene while we turn towards the New Year ahead. But in the circumstances of the time and place we learn from Matthew's Gospel that events are about to take a turn for the worse. The flight of mother, father and baby into Egypt to evade the threatened horror of infanticide introduces a chilling note.

The sad fact is that being forced into fleeing a cruel regime isn't something relegated to past history. For all too many in the world today, fleeing from oppression, warfare and hunger, with all the difficulties and dangers that refugees are likely to confront as they undertake their perilous moves, is a state of affairs that we can never truly imagine. It's a move they'd much rather not have to make and the fact is that babies are part of those refugee movements. The word 'refugee' isn't used in the Bible to describe the Holy Family. Yet, in the story of the flight into Egypt, Jesus has suddenly, through dire circumstance, become part of a refugee family on the move to escape the terror of Herod's cruel edict.

In our age, much that is said about refugees is based on incorrect fact and faulty perception. The reality is that, in many places in today's world, so many families find themselves in home situations so dangerous and lacking in hope that they are forced to seek a safer life elsewhere. And also, as the climate warms and food and water supplies become ever more uncertain, the pressure to leave country and culture behind and seek out a safer life in an alien place is surely sadly set to become a much more familiar feature of our shared world.

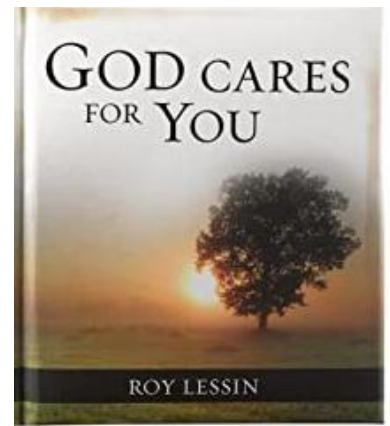
Douglas Willis

From the Bookshelves

When Calum asked me to review a couple of books I have found helpful on my Christian walk I was undecided which ones to choose, so I settled on two that I turn to many times when I need reminding of God's love and promises.

The first was a gift to both Graeme and I from my hairdresser in Glasgow. She gave it to us just after Graeme was diagnosed with cancer. It's a little book I've returned to many times.

God Cares For You by Roy Lessin is a compact little devotional beautifully illustrated and packed with promises of God's total and constant care of us. There are pages reflecting on the names of God. Jehovah-Jireh - God is your provider and Jehovah-Shalom - God is your peace. Names reminding us of God's power and provision giving us confidence and reassurance especially when times are tough or uncertain or when our faith perhaps has 'dipped'. God sees our tears, hears our cries, and knows our circumstances. He is our Healer, Restorer, Shield, Rock and Refuge. The pages and illustrations in this little book are encouraging reminders of God's deep everlasting love and faithful constant care.



The Eye Of The Eagle by David Adam is based around the Celtic hymn Be Thou My Vision which is one of my favourites. Through each verse of this well-known hymn we are encouraged to discover the spiritual gems that are hidden in all our lives and to see how the early Celtic Church sought to be alert to God's Presence. Central to much of Celtic living and prayer was their vision of God. They expected to encounter Him when they were fishing, sharing a meal or gazing at a sunset.

The Celtic people lived out their faith and practised the presence of God. From their first moments of waking to the close of the day they knew God was with them. He was part of everything they did and walked with them in the ordinariness of life. They sang and prayed through their chores and although life was difficult and often harsh they firmly believed they didn't face it alone. They knew they were loved and accepted by God and they rested in Him.

As Adam leads us through each verse of this great hymn he draws on the experiences of his own life to further illustrate each theme. Each section ends with some suggested spiritual meditations which serve to highlight the chapters theme and deepen our walk with God.

The Eye of the Eagle is a spiritual gem which challenges our awareness of God. Are we open and receptive to Him in our surroundings, in our work and in our leisure? It's a book which reminds us of the deep love God has for each of us and that we are enfolded in His love and care no matter

what happens.

If our heart is fixed on Him, then we will see Him in all things and like the early Celtic Christians discover the peace and presence of God wherever we are and whatever we are doing.

Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart.

Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art.

Thou my best thought in the day and the night

Waking or sleeping Thy presence my light.

Sandra Bell

A New Thing After the Filling Station?

One of the casualties of Covid has been ‘The Filling Station’ – nothing to do with food but everything to do with a spiritual ‘filling’! It was really called the ‘Black Isle Filling Station’ part of a UK-wide franchise of over 100 such ‘Filling Stations.’ We just found with a break of 18 months and with all the team getting older it was time to review, let go and trust God for the future. A wrench!

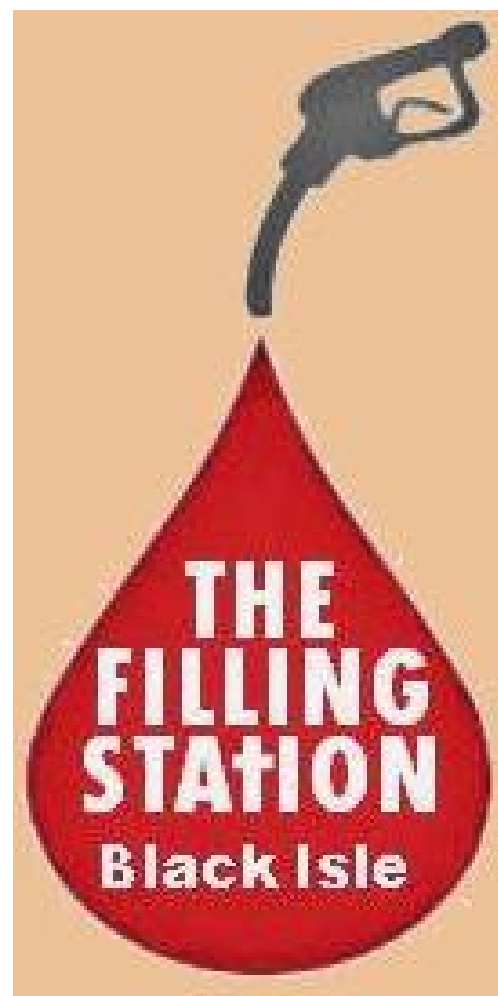
It all started in 2014, headed up by my wife Libby and then after three years she felt it right to stand down and pass the baton on to.....her husband!

Some of you reading this may have come to some of the monthly meetings on a Tuesday evening at the Gordon Memorial Hall. Like all of us on the Planning Group you will have shared in some wonderful times of Jesus-centred prayer, worship, teaching, fellowship and cake! We had a great variety of speakers preaching about different aspects of the renewing work of the Holy Spirit in the church today. The meetings also provided a focus for great times of unity between Christians from many different church traditions both on the Black Isle and further afield.

We always felt very importantly that we were not a church but were strategically a renewal group for the church. Only God knows how well that worked! It is surely no coincidence that during this time we have seen the arrival of Warren Beattie as our Minister in the Church of Scotland and Rory Stott at Fortrose Free Church. We are indeed blessed.

So, yes, we say goodbye to six years of a very special ministry on the Black Isle but we trust God for whatever ‘new thing’ he might have up his sleeve. As we have prayed we have been very struck by Isaiah 43:18-19: “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See I am doing a new thing!”

William Mather



'Pound Poor but Love Rich'

On a lovely, bright autumn afternoon, I caught up with Christina (Tina) Cormack and her niece Veronica as Tina shared memories of her life. The time just flew by! What follows is part of what we covered.

Margaret MacSween

Were you born in Avoch, Tina?

No, I was a war baby. I was born in Yorkshire as my father's regiment, the Camerons, was stationed in Yorkshire, prior to WW2. He fought in Belgium, Holland and eventually France. He was rescued in Dunkirk but was sent to Burma, India then Japan, after the Hiroshima bomb was dropped. He became very ill at that

time and had to have an emergency operation in the field where hygiene wasn't the best and was invalided home to England on a hospital ship, HMS Sheffield. He chose to go to Raigmore, just a series of huts back then, for onward care but 100s of miles away from Yorkshire. Unfortunately, my brother Sandy and I only knew our father briefly, with him being at war then invalided home.

So, when did you meet up with your father?

My first encounter with my father was when a gentleman, presumably an army official, collected me and my brother and took us to Leeds railway station, where another man escorted us north. I was six, and Sandy was 18 months younger. By this point my father was very ill indeed. I have a vivid memory of the journey as I was held up to the window in the railway carriage as we went across the Forth Railway Bridge and I threw out a penny for good luck and my brother did the same. We eventually arrived in Inverness, then went across on the Kessock Ferry. It was at that point, I met the most wonderful woman who went on to having the biggest bearing on our lives. My granny, my father's mother, a wonderful Christian and also an army widow. She had a very hard life, my poor granny.

She sounds like a remarkable woman.

Oh, yes she was. With her first husband, my father's father, she had 6 children one of whom died in childhood when living in Ireland during the Troubles. It's not known where the child is interred. In addition to doing for her own family, she did tasks like washing for single soldiers. One of my early recollections is that granny got a guinea a month for doing these chores. With the guinea, she'd go into Dublin to buy the likes of shoes for however many children needed them.

Unfortunately, her husband was invalided out of the army with tuberculosis and for a time granny nursed him too. I have a postcard he sent on his way to Strathpeffer Isolation Hospital, apologising for leaving her with so many children and having to care for them. He, too, was a young man when he died and she was left a widow at 30. She remarried a few years later and went on to have five children, the youngest of whom is still alive and is 90, living in London. Granny would read the bible repeatedly from end to end and told us all the stories. She really was the biggest influence on my life.



Tina, Veronica and camera shy Dexter

What memories do you have of childhood living with granny?

On Sunday mornings we walked from Charleston where we lived to where Munro's Nursery is now to The Free Church with Sunday School thereafter - this lasted for several hours. Granny always said, 'Bairns, don't take a lift from anyone.' But how could we? There was hardly a car on the road! At the church, only our neighbour and the precentor had a car - even the minister didn't have one. In the evening we went to the Free Church in North Kessock.

We were a typical family brought up in Charleston. There were very few of what you might call whole families - my brother and I had three cousins who, too, were raised by granny. No running water, no inside toilet at that time. Water was carried from the standby pipe on the street. In the summer holidays we'd go beachcombing for wood that came in on the tide. We would walk for miles and to the woods to gather wood for the fire. We also gathered and stored doorkins (pine cones) used to bank up the fire. We'd also gather rosehips from wild dog roses, used to make rosehip syrup and we used to get six old pence per bag. Tattie picking along from Charleston was a must - it paid for your winter boots. We went to Drumsmittal School, then Dingwall Academy, bussed to Dingwall in Archie's bus, the Bluebird - great memories.

I remember our neighbours too. Mrs Christina MacLeod, who came from Skye, had poor eye sight and would sit on a ledge in the outside porch in her matching white apron and black skirt. 'Which one of the bairns is it?' she would call out. 'Morning, Granny MacLeod' we'd reply with our name and she'd let us pass. We went to the mill every day, up to the top floor to turn the grain, with the miller and we would each get a poke of oatmeal to take home to granny for our morning porridge. In the afternoon we would go to the blacksmith, 'Are you needing a hand, Jimmy?' to which he would reply, 'You can blow the bellows but not if the horses are coming.' There were Health and Safety rules even then! Our reward was a pan drop which was black as could be but nobody minded. Roddy who sat behind us in church would often give each of us a pan drop and 9 times out of 10 one would drop and you could hear it roll all the way down to the front of the church from the wings. Bath times on Saturday night was a performance! The tin bath was taken and had to be filled with hot water boiled up in a black pot outside. The girls got bathed first while the boys sat through in the good room listening to Dick Barton, Special Agent on the wireless. Then it was their turn before 'all hands to the pump' to get the bath emptied.

The arrival of my father's army trunk was a big day. Inside was the most beautiful pair of silk pyjamas from Japan, royal blue in colour. That was so special that granny said I could wear them that night. But I couldn't go to school the next morning - the dye had run - I was royal blue as were there the sheets! So the big black pot was boiled up again for washing and then everything went through the mangle. I never wore them again.

What do you remember about Christmas?

I only spent one Christmas with my father and granny. He was a very ill man by the time he came to Inverness and I vividly remember I was given a doll which rather foolishly I later gave away to someone. I regret that. My brother was told to look under the bed where he found a train set. But usually our Christmas stocking, if we were lucky, had a sixpence, new pair of stockings, a pencil and a tangerine. Anything big like a jigsaw had to be shared by all. Not long after my 7th birthday

my father died. He was only 36. My granny was so upset she couldn't tell us and left it to an elderly lady to tell us. I didn't know what died meant or comprehend what that would mean to us.

She then said, 'Supposing your daddy is not here in body, he is here in spirit. Always be proud of your father.' I'll never forget that.

And I'm sure you are proud of him.

Oh, yes, I'm immensely proud of him. I've fought a long battle with the Legion to have my father's name commemorated. He didn't die in the field, so he's not publicly remembered anywhere, except in Dunvegan Castle on the Roll of Honour, with him being a MacLeod. However, with my persistence, when the rolls are made up again, his name will be added and it will go on the roll in the Old High Church in Inverness, the regimental church. It'll also go on the roll in Edinburgh Castle and I'll have the satisfaction of achieving what I set out to do. I have his medals and also the cord which went round his mace. He was a drum major and at times he was a pipe major which is unusual. My grandfather was musical too. When he came out of the army he played in an orchestra, Mrs Davidson's Orchestra. It was the last orchestra to play at a ball in Rosehaugh before it was closed. The musicians were rowed from Kessock to Avoch Pier, met by a horse and gig and taken to Rosehaugh. Granny said for the following week she only had to offer him a glass of water and he would be 'off again', drunk as a lord. It was down to the amount of champagne he'd drunk. Imagine!

The other man in your life, of course, was your husband, Ian

Oh, yes indeed. We met at the La Scala cinema Inverness when I was 15. There was a bus strike and he walked me down to catch the ferry home. After a few weeks, he crossed over on the ferry and met granny. I remember he asked if he should call her Mrs MacLeod. She said, 'No, just call me granny.' I knew then that she approved of him. We were married in 1959, me aged 17 and Ian four years older. We were married for 59 years and were very fortunate with a happy marriage and four children, three sons and a daughter. Ian was an electrician and had good jobs in Thurso and

Invergordon amongst other places. At that time, married women were not encouraged to work but I worked in Woolies and, for years, in a kilt shop before becoming a carer. I nursed Ian for 25 years, following a devastating stroke. Dr Fraser and Dr MacGregor were my backbone in dealing with Ian's care. I just had to call or one of them popped in for support. I can't thank them enough.



Ian and Tina's wedding with Veronica as flower girl

Sadly, our eldest grandson Lee developed cancer when he was 11. Initially, he lost an arm but what a fighter he was! A beautiful boy. There's a seat at the front of Fortrose Academy to commemorate his life. Then I lost a great grandchild Leo aged four and a half years, to muscular dystrophy. He, too, was such a beautiful boy. His baby brother Toby was born before he died. A hard time for a family but I believe what doesn't break you, makes you. I have always faced challenges head on.

And that mental strength came from your granny.....

Oh, yes, my life was founded on my granny. I have, I hope, many of her attributes. It was her who pointed us in the direction to which our lives took us. Granny would read stories from a junior bible and I learned about a faith that has upheld me ever since.

She taught us good habits too. On a Saturday we would sit round the kitchen table, each of us given a vegetable to prepare for broth on Sunday so that we all did our bit. Then there was the cleaning of the shoes for Sunday. The only time the bairns fell out was over who had to clean Chris's shoes, as he was a policeman and had size 12 shoes. Cherry Blossom brings back lots of memories. So, too, the stink of Brasso – how I hated cleaning the brasses, fenders and fire dogs!

We were taught to make the most of what we had - I remember when I went to Dingwall Academy, the navy skirt that my granny wore to her second wedding in 1920, was altered to fit me for school. I remember granny turning the sheets, side to middle to make them last longer and vividly remember making cloutie rugs from old clothes pulled through with a hook from a hessian backing. They were really warm under foot. We may have been pound poor but we were love rich thanks to my remarkable, granny Christina MacDonald. We lost Granny in 1970 aged 82. By this time she had great grandchildren, the eldest being John my son. Her passing left a tangible effect on us all - to this day the remaining family are very closely linked.

Tina Cormack



A Favourite Carol

Away in a Manger - I have loved this carol since early school and like most children it was one of the first carols I learned to sing. And the Nativity is probably the first play we ever did, every girl wanting to be Mary or an angel. The sound of children singing this just melts my heart.

The story of a couple travelling on a dark night, with no rooms available and a baby to be born. Once born and laid in a manger, this baby Jesus was to change the world. Angels sent out the message and poor shepherds and rich Magi joined together to worship him. The rest of the life of Jesus was like that, mixing with the rich, the poor and the sick - it didn't matter to him and it should be like that with us too. That night in the stable changed the world - can we be like Jesus and accept all others?

I well remember my first Midnight Service. I was ten years old. When we went into Church the ground was black. We sang lots of wonderful carols and when we came out it was snowing which reminded me of one of the carols we had sung, *Love came down at Christmas*. That magical feeling happened the year my father died as well, coming out into a snowy night. Did God send his love down with the snow or is it just a childhood thought? Does it matter? Maybe not but I shall hang on to my thoughts.

Anne Fiddes

The Sky at Night

Catching a glimpse of the 'Northern Lights' is one of the delights of winter nights. So, too, escaping from streetlights, scanning the skies on a cloud free night and marvelling at the size and scale of the universe. Some of us are pleased when we identify planets such as Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn or constellations, Ursa Major (The Big Dipper), Pegasus (The Winged Horse), Cygnus (The Swan), Orion (The Hunter).....

For serious astronomers, such knowledge is a baby step on a long journey to a deeper understanding of the cosmos. Studying black holes is only one specialism of many. Black holes develop in outer space when a massive star dies, and its matter is condensed. Anything that comes within a black hole's reach - including light - will be swallowed up, never to re-emerge, because of the black hole's inconceivably strong gravity. By its very nature, a black hole cannot be seen, but the hot disk of material that encircles it shines bright. Against a bright backdrop, a black hole appears to cast a shadow.

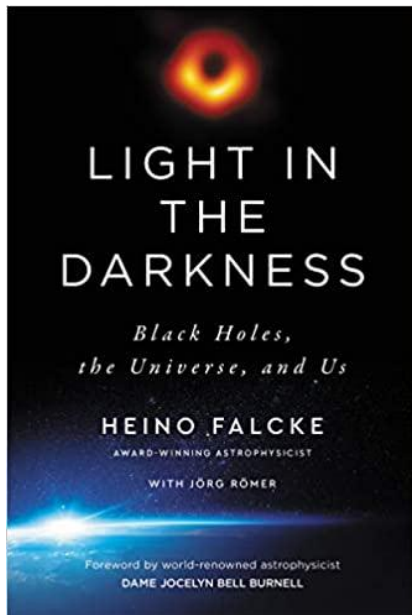
Imagine then the excitement in 2019 when a team of astronomers and astrophysicists captured an image (right) of the shadow created by a supermassive black hole in the centre of Messier 87 (M87), an elliptical galaxy some 55 million light-years from Earth. This black hole is a mind-boggling 6.5 billion times the mass of the Sun. Catching its shadow involved eight ground-based radio telescopes around the globe, operating together as if they were one telescope the size of our entire planet. The project took 25 years.



The team leader was Heino Falcke (right), a professor at Radboud University, Nijmegen, in the Netherlands. He has captured the story in a new book, *A Light in the Darkness*.

Heino Falcke is also a lay preacher and wrote the book, not only to tell his own story but also to share his sense of the harmony between science and faith. "I wanted to tell our amazing journey to the first image of a black hole, but then I realized that our story was part of a much bigger and older journey of humanity to explore our universe and to go to the edge of our knowledge. So, I try to take the readers by the hand and lead them through "my universe," from the first view of the stars, all the way to the beginning and end of space and time. "What lies beyond?" is the ultimate big question in the





the last chapter. I want to encourage people to dare to think about God again—people who are also in science. This is primarily a science book, but I don't hide that I am a Christian, because that's part of who I am. I want people to ask questions and seek their own answers. Asked about whether he saw a conflict between science and his Christian faith, Falcke was equally clear: "I personally never had that issue. In fact, it always felt like a constructed conflict to me. If God is the creator of the universe, then science just means understanding God's creation better. It is as simple as that. If God made that universe there is nothing that can disprove God. Sometimes you just need a little bit of patience to figure out what it all means..... Throughout its history, astronomy has been associated with some of the deepest

questions of humankind, and it still is. The sheer size, and beauty of the universe tells you also something about the unfathomable size of the Creator."

The Reason for God by Timothy Keller

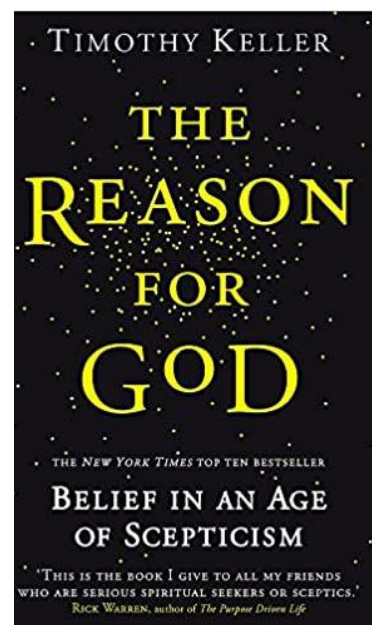
Why does God allow suffering in the world? Why have so many wars been fought in the name of religion? These and many other big questions are addressed by Keller who, while pastor of a large New York church, listed the most frequently voiced doubts brought to him by members of his congregation.

With careful reasoning and using a impressive range of sources, he looks at each doubt and explains why a God centred view can be perfectly valid and often more rational than secular explanations. For example, he notes that a sense of 'moral obligation' is an innate human quality found in people of every belief and culture. That strong people should be allowed to trample and destroy weaker ones is universally regarded to be morally wrong. Keller then considers how such a concern for others could have developed through the brutal process of evolution which has as its central premise 'survival of the fittest'.

He argues that such inherent altruism has no parallel in nature and cannot be explained by evolution. Rather it points to the supernatural standard of behaviour of a divine creator. Other issues and doubts are dealt with in a similar fashion and unlike some other books I've read, I found Keller's arguments to be very convincing and helpful in an increasingly sceptical world. I'm not surprised that some churches are using his work to facilitate discussion groups. It certainly gives plenty of food for thought.

PS When questioned about the presence of so many sinners in churches Keller notes that 'a church is a hospital for sinners not a museum for saints.'

PPS Avoch and Fortrose & Rosemarkie Hospitals for Sinners open every Sunday. Chief Surgeon Dr Warren Beattie. No ailment untreatable.



Douglas Simpson

News from the Pews

In the last 18 months, Mary Naismith reached two significant milestones. Last month she celebrated a 'big birthday' with a zero in it. A year last April, as we all went into lockdown, Mary decided to retire from her role as church organist after an impressive 33 years service. We'll all miss her playing, not least the rousing Welsh hymn tunes played at the end of the service the day after a Welsh win in rugby! This is the story of Mary's time as an organist in her own words.

In January 1987 we moved to a new build bungalow in Ness Way Fortrose. Both Rev. John Howard and Rev. Nicky Simpson called at my door inviting me to come along to their respective churches. I ended up going to Fortrose and Rosemarkie Church of Scotland where I later became a member.

It seemed the news had got around that I could play piano / organ and after Marie McIntosh retired I was asked to play

in Rosemarkie Church for the evening service which I did on alternate months with Fortrose evening service where the late Flora McInnes played. The late John Waters played at both morning services. Evening services eventually stopped. After John retired as church organist, I became the organist at Rosemarkie Church for morning services on alternate months with Sandy Jack who played at Fortrose Church.

In June 2014 Fortrose Church sadly closed, so later on Sandy and I did month about rotas in Rosemarkie church. Over the last few years both the late Nancy Cameron and Maggie Wynton also played, on a rota with me.

I have enjoyed sharing my small talent with the church over the years. Sometimes joyously for weddings and sadly for many funerals. Over 33 years there have been five different ministers and lots of interim ministers, each with their own take on their choice of hymns and tunes.



Mary receiving a thank you presentation and flowers from Warren



Ethel Urquhart with some of the 471, yes 471, shoe boxes she filled, or had donated, for Blythswood this year. An amazing achievement although Ethel is quick to play it down, 'I have plenty time to do all this. They have so little and we have so much.' £120 was also provided for fuel.



Members of the newly formed Pastoral Care Group who were able to attend the Dedication Service last month - more on the Pastoral Care Group in the next newsletter.



I've been coming here for two hundred years and...

Ian Basham has prepared an innovative special bicentennial Christmas card, kindly donating proceeds to the church.

If you are intrigued by the sentence at the bottom and how it ends, then single cards are available at 50p, £1 for a double or packs at £4.50 in Rosemarkie Church.



The Tuesday afternoon craft group, under the skilled guidance of Sylvia Brooks with their Christmas Tree Wall Hangings.

Banana Trust

A huge thank you to all who provided knitting - and spoons of all sorts - for the banana boxes sent out to Malawi by the Banana Trust. All safely delivered to Dundee.

Christmas begins with Christ. It flags up a message, Christ is here.



Coming from Wales 'The Land of Song', music played a huge part of my life from a very early age. Welsh people will burst into song almost anywhere, be it walking into the coal face or at a football match or in a pub.

My first choice is a Welsh hymn *Oh the deep deep love of Jesus* sang to the tune 'Ebenezer'. The words are by Samuel Trevor Francis and the music by Thomas John

Williams. It is one of the many Welsh hymn tunes in E minor and speaks of the 'Deep Deep love of Jesus' as being 'Vast, Unmeasured, Boundless and Free'.

My second choice is *Calon Lan* a Welsh language song, originally written as a hymn in the early 1890s. Daniel James wrote the lyrics and John Hughes the tune. Calon Lan means 'Pure Heart' and in the translation we read that no matter how much wealth or riches we have, we cannot sing freely unless we have a 'Pure Heart'. Although not coming from a Welsh speaking background, I learned this in Welsh at school for the Saint David's Day Eisteddfod.

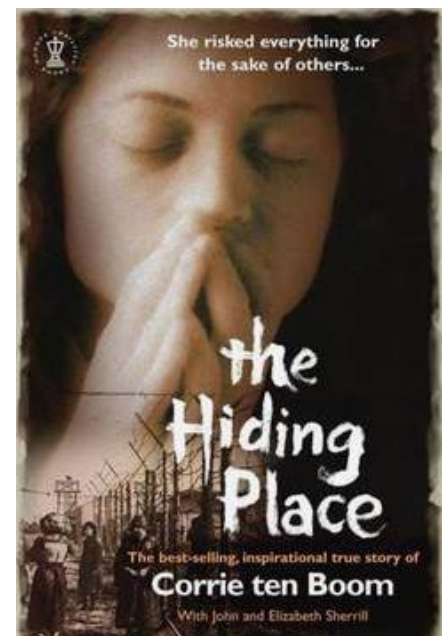
My third choice is Katherine Jenkins, who most of you will know, is a classically trained Mezzo Soprano from Neath, South Wales. From her many solos and albums, I would choose her duet with Andrea Bocelli's *Time to say Goodbye* (right). A truly moving performance from both.



My fourth choice is *All in the April Evening* and as I have lived in Scotland far longer than I did in Wales, I have chosen the Glasgow Orpheus Choir for this performance. Hugh Stevenson Robertson, was a Scottish composer and leading choral – master. He wrote all the choral work, and the words were penned by Katharine Tynan, an Irish writer, known mostly for her novels and poetry. It always brings a tear to my eye and makes me think of the ultimate sacrifice of Christ's death on the cross.

I would choose the book *The Hiding Place* The story of Corrie ten Boom, a truly inspirational 50 year old Dutch lady, who offered shelter to persecuted Jews through the anti – Nazi underground.

I think I would take some binoculars as my luxury item as it would help me spy out any danger and look out for the boat coming to take me home! Just in case I got homesick!



A Christmas Carol

This year will be the sixtieth in which I have read Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. My interest in Dickens started with listening to dramatizations of his books on the radio, or 'wireless' as it was known in those days, when I was around ten years old. Seeing the 1946 film version of *Great Expectations* in the cinema was a memorable experience but the culmination was actually reading the books. As my interest developed, my father casually mentioned that a gentleman in his office read *A Christmas Carol* every Christmas, and I decided to try to do the same. I have succeeded in this since I was around 15, although I must admit that during my working life it could be somewhat rushed. The book is fairly short and divided into five chapters or 'staves'. I try to read one each day from 20th December, finishing the book on Christmas Eve.



An illustration from the original book

While at times it inevitably feels that I know it word for word, some years I find something which I hadn't seen before or appreciate the significance of a point lost on me in earlier readings. Re-reading a favourite book can be compared to looking again at a picture or photograph and finding something previously unnoticed. Of course this is very much the case with the Bible. God's Word to us can be revealed as 'new every morning' in a passage which we thought we fully understood, often in a reading which just emphasises a word different from the word emphasised in a previous reading.

A Christmas Carol is the story of the change in attitude of Ebenezer Scrooge to the celebration of Christmas and his whole outlook on life. The story is probably well known to everyone, but if not, just read the book. I will not repeat it here. If you have not read the book, I envy you, coming anew to this story. The same applies if you come to any of Dickens' writings for the first time! The name 'Scrooge' has now entered the dictionary as a noun meaning a miserly person while the Hebrew word 'eben-ezer' means a stone of help. Such a stone was erected by Samuel after the Israelites' victory over the Philistines at Mizpah (1 Samuel 7:12). The significance of using this name for the grasping cynic Scrooge is somewhat difficult to understand, although Dickens may just have been amused by the name, having incorporated it in his earlier book *The Pickwick Papers* in the 'United Grand Junction Ebenezer Temperance Association'!

Dickens requires a full paragraph to describe Scrooge and his misanthropic character, starting with the phrase "a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone", but after the visits to him of four 'Spirits', the first the ghost of his deceased and equally miserly partner and the subsequent three showing him his past Christmases, his present Christmas and the possible future Christmases he could have, he is totally altered. No specific explanation is given for the reason for his transformation in the course of these visitations, but he emerges from the experience as a man who "knew how to keep

Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge”. His is not a religious conversion, such as Paul’s on the Damascus Road, and, while Dickens’ faith is often traced through the story, there is really only one reference to practical Christianity, and that is somewhat negative. Scrooge accuses the Spirit of Christmas Present of excessive zeal in Sabbath observance only to be rebuked that “there are some upon this Earth who lay claim to know us (the Spirits) and who do their deeds of bigotry and selfishness in our name, who are as strange to us...as if they had never lived. Charge their doings on themselves, not us.”

There are several portions of the story in which what we read in our Bibles is reflected. The book is a story of a callous heart transformed. Scrooge’s callous heart separates him not only from people but also from God. There is a perfect example of a hard heart in Exodus 7 and following, in which Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go. He rebelled against God, as effectively Scrooge was doing, and finally he was punished by God. Mark 8:17-18 tells of Jesus comparing a hardened heart to being spiritually blind. Yet a hard heart need not be permanent. Read Ezekiel 36:26.

The revelations by the Spirits of Past and Present Christmases show several episodes of joy and laughter. While there is actually very little recorded in the Bible of Jesus’ own joy, joy, a fruit of the Spirit, is found in Christ’s presence. God’s presence is fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11). We are encouraged to worship joyfully (Psalm 98:4) and we receive with joy the Word of God when it is in our hearts (Luke 8:13). Scrooge himself drops to his knees with joy praising Heaven for the change in his life. The book of Job is not one immediately associated with laughter, but Job 8:21 tells us that “He will yet serve your mouth with laughter and your lips with shouts of joy”. The old Scrooge saw no value in being merry or celebrating Christmas and certainly not in laughter. There are examples of laughter in the Bible. Sarah laughed with joy at the birth of her son Isaac (Genesis 21:6) Balaam’s talking donkey of Numbers 22 suggests that God has a good sense of humour! “A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones” (Proverbs 17:22).

The change brought about in Scrooge, especially as he saw the foretelling of his end if he continued as he was, is a model of human redemption. Even a pitiless, callous and unsympathetic man like him can be redeemed if they accept goodness, through faith, into their hearts. (2 Corinthians 5:17). We have a choice about the way we view life. It is never too late to change that perspective if it is not in line with the teachings of Jesus Christ and his glorious gospel.

“And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God bless Us, Every One!”

Jack Kernahan



Name that Carol - Answers

1. Hark the herald angels sing v3
2. O little town of Bethlehem v3
3. Still the night v3
4. While humble shepherds v3
5. The first Nowell v3



6. In the bleak midwinter v3
7. See! in yonder manger low v3
8. Child in the manger v3
9. Angels from the realms of glory v3
10. O come all ye faithful v3

A Local Christmas Carol

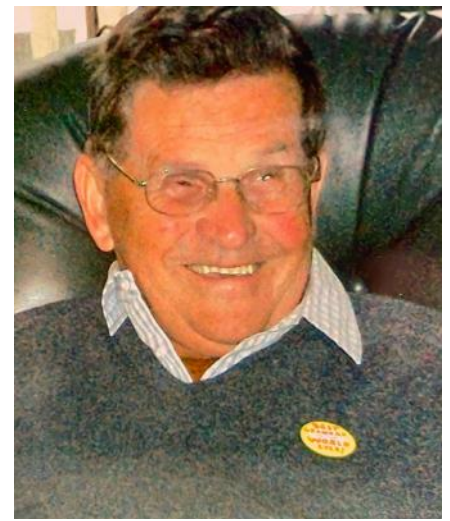
A Saviour is Born

*Have you heard the wondrous story of the Saviour's lowly birth?
How our father up in glory sent his son from heaven to Earth.
Shepherds in their fields abiding, watched their flocks and were confiding
On that bright and starry night, keep them safe 'till morning light.*

*In the stillness of the evening from the glory up above,
Came a messenger from heaven telling of God's gift of love,
Then a heavenly host did gather, praising God our heavenly father,
Bringing peace and joy to all, who upon the Lord did call.*

*Then the shepherds on the hillside left their flocks and made their way,
To the manger in the stable where the infant baby lay.
There in that poor humble dwelling, they the wondrous news were telling.
Here according to God's word a Saviour's born. He's Christ the Lord.*

*Will you take the precious Saviour to your heart and to your home?
He is waiting for a welcome, will you say, 'My Saviour come?'
Then the joy bells will be ringing and the angels will be singing,
Shouting forth that loud amen, comes a soul now born again*



George Reid

George was born in Avoch on 10th October 1929. He went to Avoch Public School then on to Fortrose Academy. After leaving school at 14 he got a job on the railway at 75p a week - the going rate at the time. He then went away to the fishing, as was family tradition. At 18 he was called up for National Service in the Army. When he was 29 he developed diabetes so left the sea and joined a builders' merchants where he stayed for 17 years. He then joined the security staff at the Kishorn oil yard on the West Coast for 11 years.

George was saved in 1957 during a Faith Mission campaign. We both served as church officers in Avoch Congregational Church for many years. He was a deacon, church secretary, Sunday School superintendent, organist supply and did many children's services using the visual aids going at the the time. He also ran many Sunday School picnics - 3 double decker buses arriving were a summer highlight for many children. George had to take early retirement when he lost his sight in 2000 - however, that did not keep him from serving his Lord.

George was always very musical, playing the accordion, organ/piano - always by ear. He was also a member of the church choir and Highland Gospel Male Voice Choir for many years. Even though he had lost his sight, he still had a fantastic memory - reciting hymns, psalms, scriptures and every poem he had written over the years. *A Saviour is Born* was his only hymn. The carol was first sung at the Mart Christmas Service and since then in all the local churches.

Moira Reid

Luke Haywood - the soldier of Fort George

When Luke Haywood was a soldier at Fort George around 250 years ago the fort was a very different place from what it is today. Stretched along the shore just below the fort were rows of stalls that served as a meat market for the soldiers and their families, and the ferry boat (right) plied between the fort and Chanonry Point.



As Hector MacPhail, minister of the church at Resolis, was waiting for the ferry to take him and his white pony back to the Black Isle, Luke Haywood, a soldier from the fort, approached the market and stopped to buy some meat from the stalls close to where the minister was waiting. “How much for a quarter of mutton?” he asked the stall keeper. When told the price the soldier exploded with a string of oaths and blasphemies. He finished by saying that he would sooner see his soul in hell than pay the price that the butcher was asking. After some argument the price asked was paid and the soldier turned away from the stall with his purchase.

“A fine day, soldier,” said Mr MacPhail, who was now determined to speak to the man.

“A fine day, sir,” replied the soldier.

“That seems a fine piece of mutton you’ve got there.”

“So it is, sir,” said the soldier. “And cheap, too”

“What did you give for it, may I ask?”

The man told the price.

“Oh, my friend, you have given far more than that,” said the minister.

“No sir, I gave no more. There’s the man I bought it from, and he can tell you what it cost.”

“Pardon me, my friend,” said the minister, “you have given your immortal soul for it! You prayed that God would damn your soul if you gave the very price that you have just named, and now you have given it, and what is to become of you?”

As Hector MacPhail stepped onto the ferry, Luke Haywood made his way back to the army billet. The minister’s words were still ringing clearly in his ears. “You have given your immortal soul for it, and now what is to become of you?”

The words grew louder in Luke Haywood’s mind until they drove him right out of the barracks and back to the water’s edge. “Where is that man that spoke to me?” he asked the butcher. “Oh, you mean Mr MacPhail,” said the butcher. “He is the minister at Resolis and you will have to go far enough before you catch him, for he crossed more than an hour ago”. But no distance would be too great for Luke Haywood at this particular time in his life for those words had shown him that he had damned his soul indeed, and now, as the minister had said, “What was to become of him?”

The words remained with him on what seemed to be an endless crossing on that small boat, and they did not leave him over the nine miles of bracken and moor between Chanonry Point and Resolis. It was a short distance to travel, however, for all the peace of mind that Luke Haywood

received at the end in the recently built Resolis Manse. Hector MacPhail was described as a man “minutely conversant with the depths of Satan on the one hand and the unsearchable riches of Christ on the other”. For two days Luke Haywood stayed with the man who had awakened him out of his sleep of death, and as the way to peace with God and salvation for his soul was gradually explained to him, he saw that the God who would indeed have condemned his soul to hell would now save his soul for heaven if he would call upon His name and seek His forgiveness for his many sins.

No more would the barracks and the market at Fort George ring with the blasphemies of Luke Haywood. Christ had died that he might live, and live he did to the glory of Christ’s name.

“Soldier! You prayed that God might damn your soul....and now, what is to become of you?” But the God who heard his oaths and curses also heard his cry for forgiveness and salvation through Christ the Saviour. The same God answers such cries to this very day. Something to think about when we look across at Fort George or drive up Fairy Glen. **Contributed**



Patricia and the Young Girl

Last month an English curate shared online the story of how she came to faith.

One day an unaccompanied young girl showed up at a little church. Me! When the service started I was totally baffled. ‘We’re now on page 3 of the order of service.’ But what on earth was an order of service? ‘We’ll now sing hymn number 63 in the green book.’ I located the green book, turned to page 63. Nope, that wasn’t what they were singing.

By the end I had decided this church thing wasn’t for me. It didn’t make any sense. I’d got nothing from it. I wouldn’t be going back.

That might have been the end of the story if it hadn’t been for Patricia. Patricia was in her 80s. She would never have considered herself as an evangelist. She wasn’t an office bearer. She wasn’t on any kind of rota. But she’d spotted me. And she spoke to me. ‘Hello, dear, you’re new here aren’t you? I’m sorry I didn’t see you come in or I would have asked you to sit with me. Would you like to sit with me next week?’ And I did. I turned up the next week and the next and the next. And Patricia kept me right about where we were in the service, when to stand, when to sit, what the words meant.

That’s it. That’s all she did. No great proclamation of faith. Just by faithfully and patiently, week by week, sitting being beside me, Patricia helped me make enough sense of church and of faith. It become a place where I met God. And everything else flowed from there. Quietly, unspectacularly, on an ordinary Sunday, this unassuming woman changed my life for ever by her gentle witness to the steadfastness of God.

How often did Jesus call our attention to the small and the ordinary: the mustard seed, the yeast, the widow’s mite? I think of Patricia often and thank God for her and 'the small thing' she did.

Edited

'Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation...'

The opening line of that popular hymn are strong in their acknowledgement of an all-powerful, God of creation. COVID - 19 has had a huge influence on lives in this country and beyond, including a well-recognised impact on mental health. Out of this has come an outpouring of published articles and books on how therapeutic the natural world has been for individuals, in lock-down and after. Those



writing comment on how they'd become so bound up in themselves and in work issues that they'd lost contact with the key things in life which they'd no time to see or to do.

Lock-down, plus all the complications that the pandemic has brought with it, have caused many to pause and take stock. Of course, that's hardly a new kind of thing. Many decades back, W.H.Davies wrote a poem with the memorable first line:

What is this life, if full of care, we have no time to stand and stare?

This poem was once familiar in schools as one of those pieces of writing you had to learn by heart. I wonder if anyone can remember having had to memorise it and - worse - having to recite it aloud in class. I know I can recall the experience from the dim and distant past and it was a daunting task! The trouble was that the all-important punctuation was often passed over in the rush to get the trauma of having to recite the thing over and done with - and to be able to sit down at your desk again as quickly as possible. Of course, this missed the whole point of what the poet was getting at.

But to return to the hymn... The third verse has these lines:

Ponder anew

What the Almighty can do

If with His love He befriend thee.



It's powerful stuff, the opening two words suggesting that we take things slowly and allow ourselves a chance to look at things afresh, acknowledging what God is capable of doing. Those two words jump out at me every time we sing the hymn and that's been the way of things for more years than I can remember. In fact, they've stuck with me wherever I've gone, at home and abroad. I think of the many trips my wife and I made to various European mountain areas where, after a long slog upwards, the sheer grandeur of the panorama of snow-capped peaks and steep, green forested valley sides never failed to lift the spirits. And, at our feet on some high Alpine meadow below the snows, the azure blue, trumpet flowers of gentians, reflecting the clear skies above, were no less powerful in their own special way each time we sat down and took the time to look at them.

That word 'ponder', a little antiquated though it may sound at times in the present age, is, in fact, just the word for those priceless moments of wonderment at the glory of creation. To pause and look at the intricate detail of a little flower in a high Alpine meadow, sometimes using our binoculars the wrong way round as a microscope to better appreciate the detail, was another way to be amazed and to appreciate anew the breath-taking gifts of the Creator God.

Douglas Willis

Writing in Later Life

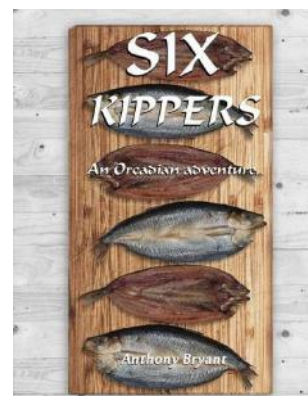
For much of the pandemic, church met virtually, with time after each service to chat together in smaller groups. It was following one sermon on Christian Faith in Later Life, the idea for an interview with the Bryants was born. Stroma Beattie

Tell us a little about your background?

We met at a Sailing Club, Jane having been encouraged by a friend to take holiday membership and turn up to see if someone would take her on a boat. I (Anthony) did not usually go to the Sailing Club on a Monday but went that day and as they say 'the rest is history.' I worked as a Chartered Surveyor/Factor initially with the Duchy of Cornwall and latterly as the Regional Director for the Highlands with the National Trust for Scotland. Jane has a teaching background. We have two children and have lived in the Black Isle since 1986. We celebrated our Golden Wedding Anniversary a few years ago in the Gordon Memorial Hall.

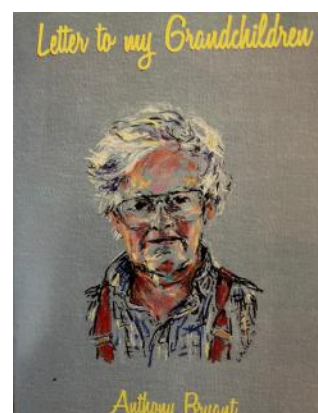
You have now published four books, what first inspired you to write?

When I was still working, I had to write a number of reports to persuade committees to agree to my project proposals. I felt I could be more persuasive if my style improved, so I joined a local Writing Group through a friend Betty Marshall. Later I was given "I cannot eat more than six kippers for breakfast" by Murdo Grant, a tutor to the group, who challenged us to write a short story incorporating an odd phrase. This grew to three chapters. A few years ago, I came across the draft, decided to complete it and self-published my first novel *Six Kippers*.

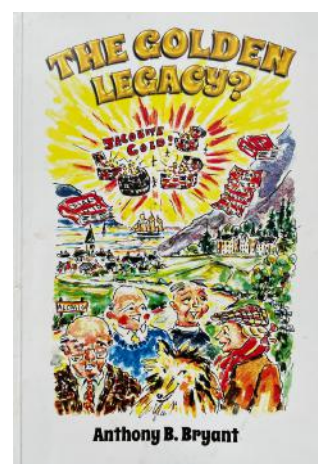


What about your other books?

They have been drawn from life experience. My father had two dramatic events in his life - going to Oxford to study law but giving it up to become a musician and the other joining the London Fire Brigade during the war as an Auxiliary Fireman to avoid shooting a Wagner lover. After he passed away, I realised there were so many things I had not asked him that I decided to write *Letter to my Grandchildren* to save them the same problem. For *Carnelian*, I drew on the cruises Jane and I used to enjoy and for *The Golden Legacy*, my time in Cornwall along with my understanding of Scottish estates.



I lost 50-60% of my eyesight following a stroke but I am still able to read. I find that ideas develop in my mind and the story almost writes itself. I come across situations and ask the question why? I also enjoy researching the background to the stories. I use a large font on the computer screen, type to get all the ideas down and then go back later to correct and edit the material.



What are the benefits to you of writing?

I enjoy it. It gives a sense of accomplishment. I have self-published and sell the books for charities such as the Highland Hospice. My stories are a bit like life - things happen and life develops.

What is the hardest thing about this stage of life?

Coping with the infirmities which come along as well as my loss of sight. For Jane it has been the challenge of Rheumatoid Arthritis. It was also a very difficult time when we had to move my father here because of his poor health and the loss of his wife. However, we are both very grateful to have excellent carers and the support of family.

What are your secrets to vitality in later years?

I am not really conscious of these things. I certainly do not see myself sitting in an armchair with metaphorical slippers. I started composing music at an early age. I composed a piece for our Golden Wedding. I have designed a house. I am the ultimate dabbler.

We are grateful to God for the example of Anthony and Jane Bryant who have embraced this life stage with grace, acceptance and creativity. For anyone who would like to buy copies of Anthony's books, please contact the Bryants.

The Ants and the Grasshopper

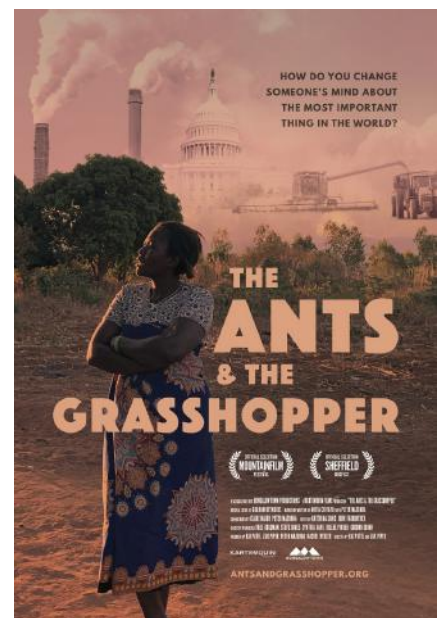
The name of Esther Lupafya (right) was well known - especially twenty or so years back - to the congregations of both Avoch and Fortrose & Rosemarkie when Catherine Patience, Catherine Willis and an enthusiastic group of ladies from Avoch Guild met in the Avoch Church Hall on Saturday mornings to pack items and send them on their way to Esther at Ekwendeni Mission Hospital. These included some great knitting: small blankets for premature babies and knitted baby jackets for the orphan care programme in villages around the hospital.

The term 'force of nature' was created for the likes of Esther Lupafya – she is irrepressible. A paediatric nurse by training, she moved on to be a lead nurse in HIV Aids treatment before becoming a co-founder of a non-profit organisation, Soils, Food and Health Communities (SFHC).

It was in this latter capacity that she features in a film, *The Ants and the Grasshopper*, which was shown at Eden Court recently. Esther met her 'co-star', Anita Chitaya, when Anita visited a paediatric nutrition clinic as a young mother. The friendship developed and we see Esther as Anita's mentor in a film that was 10 years in the making.

Anita is an equally impressive character. After a tough childhood she was abducted, held captive and co-erced into marriage by her husband-to-be, Christopher, his friend Winston, and a gang of men.

Quite remarkably, Anita has forgiven Christopher and he has responded by becoming an equal partner, happily cooking, cleaning



and declaring that he does not want his son to get married the way he did, so breaking the patriarchal tradition. At the start of the film his friend Winston is still resolutely resisting any suggestion that he should help his wife Jenifa cook, farm, water plants or do other chores seen as 'women's work'.

Anita is a small farmer, skilfully inter-cropping to maximise the yield from her one acre of land but acutely aware of the impact of climate change. We see her at the parched Rukuru River, drawing water from slow-filling boreholes, dismayed at the devastating impact of irregular rainfall. But she is spirited too. She shows families how to create and use clay stoves to use less firewood, she introduces new crops, she shares innovative recipes that improve nutrition – all the time encouraging men to be part of the solution by sharing responsibilities traditionally assumed by women only.

The film-makers take Anita and Esther to meet farmers in in the USA, the second largest emitter of greenhouse gases responsible for the erratic rains in Malawi. 'It feels as if both rain and time are running out.....and while the rich discuss what to do, the poor must endure,' Anita comments.

In Wisconsin, the intrepid pair explain how climate change has made their soil arid. One young farmworker argues that the world is just undergoing a "weather cycle". His father adds, 'It's in the Lord's hands' to which Esther responds 'God did not ask us to spoil the atmosphere.' At the end of the film, the young farmworker regrets dismissing the Malawian concerns. He now runs an organic chicken farm. Later, they share a meal with a family from the same Presbyterian denomination as themselves. The family switched from conventional to organic farming after their son was born with a heart defect, thought to be linked to exposure to agricultural chemicals. But, in competition with mega-farms, their farm isn't profitable and the father works at a coal-fired power station while the mother works as a school nurse. They feel humbled by what they hear about Malawi but dismiss climate change as 'an agenda'. Esther is gracious and later comments, 'Change starts with denial.'



And, so, their travels continue, seeing for themselves something of the wide spectrum of American society. As they fly home, Anita comments, 'This country has everything and they take it for granted.'

In Aesop's fable about the ants and the grasshopper the diligent ants work hard and plan for the future; the happy-go-lucky grasshopper does not. He lives in the moment, singing and laughing with no thought of tomorrow. In the African version, the grasshopper is a metaphor for climate change. The ants are us - all of us. A single ant cannot lift a grasshopper, but united they (or we) can. It is a reminder that we are all God's children, all living in inter-connected world, a world where we are asked to care for each other. In the developed world we still have a lot to do.

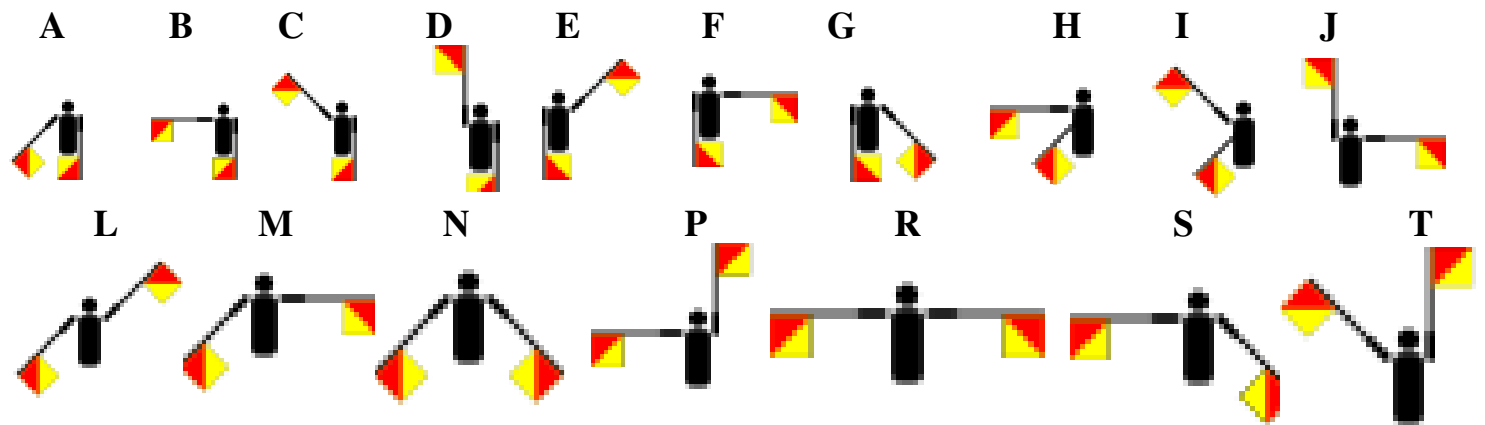


And the photo on the left? Winston at the end of the film sharing cooking duties with his wife, Jenifa.....

For the Young.....and the Young at Heart



York Minster both stirs and stills the soul. There is so much to see and think about. One feature that really catches the eye is a set of semaphore saints. But what is their message? All the letters you need are in the 17 below. Just to make it more of a challenge, the artist has made a slight error in the last letter on the top line. The left hand as you face it should be at 10 o'clock, not 12 o'clock. If you're stuck, the message is at the bottom of a page earlier in this newsletter .



Last year we suggested you use spare gift tags to note what you were thankful for in 2020 and add them to the Christmas tree. This time we are suggesting that you write the names of people or situations that you want to pray for. Christmas can be a particularly difficult time for many so why not keep a few spare tags to add to your tree when you think of people who need your prayers. 🙏🙏



Siblings!

Rev Sam Wells writes about sibling rivalries in the Old Testament - Cain and Abel; Abraham and Lot who were cousins but 'their possessions were so great that they could not live together'; Isaac and Ishmael; Jacob and Esau; and, of course, Joseph and his brothers. But he begins with a personal anecdote, a scenario that some of you might recognise.

I grew up with a sister who was 3 years 4 months older and 11 days older than me. When I was a boy there were two things I wanted more than anything else. One was to be an elephant. And the other was to be older than my sister. Maybe the two desires were really the same desire. It seemed in everything that mattered, like getting extra dessert and staying up late on weekends and becoming streetwise at primary school, I was always second. And there's only so much coming second a man can take - especially a 7 year old man.

What *is* it about siblings? We can't live with them; we can't live without them. If someone attacks them, we're the first to step in, if they're sick we can't sleep for worry; but leave us in a room with them and in no time we find ourselves turning from wallflowers into fireworks. I once had Christmas dinner with a friend who had his 93-year-old and 91-year-old great aunts and his 89-year-old great uncle join us for the festive occasion. The great uncle said, 'Pass the roast potatoes, would you' - and proceeded to help himself to a generous portion.

'Stop it - put those back,' snapped his older sister. 'Don't be so greedy.'

The younger sister pleaded, 'But surely, it's Christmas Day!'

The elder sister was not deterred. Looking imperiously at her 89-year-old brother, she said, 'He *has* to learn!'

May the joy of the angels, the eagerness of the shepherds, the perseverance of the wise men, the obedience of Mary and Joseph, the peace of Jesus be with you this Christmas.

And whether having Christmas dinner with siblings, partner, family, friends or on your own, may no one feel rebuked for taking too many roast potatoes!

Guest Editor

For the next newsletter, March 2022, we start what we hope will be a regular feature of Guest Editor. First up is Douglas Simpson. If you have any offers of articles - or ideas for articles - Douglas can be contacted on 01381 620433 or via simpsjo5@hotmail.com. The deadline for all articles is Saturday 29 January 2022. However, having the materials in well before the deadline is always a welcome bonus to any editor!

In the meantime, a sincere thank you to all who contributed to this edition. Very much appreciated. The newsletter belongs to us all! CM

The Church's Foundation Stone



As mentioned in the previous issue of the newsletter, the sermon preached on 12th August 1821 at the opening of Rosemarkie Church was on 1 Corinthians 3:11. 'For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ'. Our thoughts were led to Christ as the true foundation, not only of the building, but also of our lives. If the Church is not built on Jesus and the Gospel it will fail, and so will our lives.

As individuals we are identified in numerous ways throughout our lives. As children, by whom our parents are, as adults by our occupations, by our marital status, possibly by whether we are 'incomers' in a community. These are 'building blocks' in our identities, but they are changing as we grow, they are not the foundation. The foundation is found in our identity in Jesus Christ. When we build on that foundation, no matter how the other individual blocks or identities change as our lives change, the 'building' of our lives will never crumble or fall. The cracks will appear if we try to build on the individual blocks and not on the foundation.



When an arch is built, it is not a foundation stone, but a keystone which is crucial to the stability of the construction. The first of the photographs, taken on 24th June 1892, shows the laying of the keystone into the arch over the Big Burn in Munloch as it flows under the railway embankment then under construction. Note the ladies half way up the slope! Until 1960 the keystone did its job faithfully, keeping the arch in place under the railway. Over sixty years later, it is still there,

holding up the house built on the former railway line, but it is unseen. The second photograph is taken from the same spot as the first. The archway, and of course the keystone, are covered in a curtain of ivy!

The cornerstone or keystone of our lives (Jesus Christ) may be hidden, but He is still serving His original purpose. He is our Saviour!

Jack Kernahan

Key Contacts:

Minister: Rev Dr Warren Beattie 01381 620111
wbeattie@churchofscotland.org.uk

Avoch: Bob Moore 01381 620043
bob.knockmuir@gmail.com

Fortrose and Rosemarkie Session Clerk: Jack Kernahan
01381 621610 jackkernahan@aol.com