

Rhagfyr /December 2020

Cylchlythyr/Newsletter

Rhif/Issue 30

# BABELL ZION NEWYDD

Rhiw Babel Pensarn Caerfyrddin SA31 2DJ

Ni wyddom am ddim rhyfeddach,- Crëwr  
Yn crio mewn cadach  
Yn faban heb ei wannach,  
Duw yn y byd fel Dyn Bach.

J Eirian Davies

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**Thanks to Babel Zion Newydd Chapel for permission to do this**

**Llangunnor Network**  
*Preserving and Promoting  
Llangunnor*

## **A message from Corey**

Annwyl gyfeillion / Dear friends,

Christmas time is finally here! The Christmas tree holds pride of place in our lounge in the manse, which is filled with our favourite decorations that we've collected from our travels over the years. Peris' Nativity scene, which Nain buys each of her grandchildren, is set up nicely on the coffee table. And we've been eating our weight in mince pies and chocolate oranges.

All of these things are wonderful things that we enjoy each year. But what we most enjoy about this season is the time that we spend with one another. And it's been an absolute joy for Catrin and I to be members of Babel Zion Newydd over the past year, and we're grateful for the privilege of sharing in leadership with our church.

This year has, of course, looked radically different than we could have imagined. The chapel has been empty since the spring and will continue to be empty until next year. Yet, though the building has been empty, the church has continued to serve and love one another in appropriate and loving ways. We've seen you volunteer to do the shopping for one another, support each other during grief, and be faithful, reaching out in love to your neighbours. It's this love and service that is the true meaning of Christmas, because it reflects the love of Christ in real and tangible ways.

In describing the theological meaning of Christmas, the Apostle John tells us that *'the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.'* Here, we're reminded that the presence of God is felt in the presence of his son who 'dwells among us' by his Spirit, which fills all who trust in Jesus.

I pray that your Christmas season is filled with joy and happiness as you reflect on the transformative truths of Christ's birth and that you're reminded of God's presence with you each day. Remember that you're warmly invited to join our weekly service on Zoom or receive a written devotion via email or through the post.

If I can support you in any way, please contact me at any time at [corey.hampton@ebcpcw.cymru](mailto:corey.hampton@ebcpcw.cymru) or 07983681610.

Pob bendith / Every blessing,

Corey

**Pob bendith dros y Nadolig a'r Flwyddyn Newydd**



**Every blessing for Christmas and the New Year**

## **The Congregation/ Y Gynulleidfa**

We are mindful of all those who are hospitalised or in residential homes at this time, the lonely and the fearful and those who are finding life difficult especially at this Christmas time, and all who have a burden to bear. Gweddiwn y byddwn yn parhau i gefnogi ein gilydd yn enw Tywysog Tangnefedd. We pray that we may continue to support one another in the name of the Prince of Peace. Diolch i Tina a Nan am rannu'r gerdd ganlynol gyda ni.

If you look for me at Christmas  
You won't need a special star,  
I'm no longer just in Bethlehem,  
I'm right there where you are.  
You may not be aware of me  
Amid the celebrations,  
You'll have to look beyond the store  
And all the decorations.  
But if you take a moment  
From your list of things to do  
And listen to your heart you'll find  
I'm waiting there for you.  
You're the one I want to be with,  
You're the reason that I came,  
And you'll find me in the stillness  
As I'm whispering your name.

**JESUS**

### **Services/ Gwasanaethau**

Services continue on Zoom

#### **Forthcoming Services**

December 13<sup>th</sup>: Zoom with Corey at 11 am

December 20<sup>th</sup>: Zoom Carol Service at 11 am with the Sunday School taking part

Christmas Eve: Zoom 11.30 pm Communion at Midnight

January 3<sup>rd</sup> : Zoom at 11 am with Corey

The details as usual for the zoom links are as follows:

Zoom Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87986477837>

Telephone: +44 203 481 5240

Meeting ID: 879 8647 7837

There will also be a Service for all the chapels on Christmas Day at 10 am for half an hour with Mr Emyr Williams. Dydd Nadolig: Yr holl gapeli 10 o'r gloch am hanner awr. See email for Zoom link. Telephone details below

Dial by your location

0203 481 5240 United Kingdom

Meeting ID: 883 5084 0738

Password: 015285

## Mike Shephard writes

Dear Friends,

I tend to be an outdoor person and like nothing better, on dry winter evenings, than sitting by a lighted fire pit looking up at the night sky. That is when I am at my happiest and most at peace, both with myself and with the universe. I was recently thus engaged when I became conscious of a noise behind me. I turned round to be confronted by two children who had climbed up the boundary fence. They were obviously neighbours but I had not met them until now.

*“Hello,”* said the younger child, *“My name is Mali and I am nine years of age. This is my brother, Sam. He is eleven years old and he has something to ask you.”* Mali was clearly their spokesperson and appeared to be the more confident of the two children as, indeed, proved to be the case. Sam, though, despite his shyness, quickly found his voice.

*“Would you like to buy logs for your fire?”* he asked me. *“They are well-seasoned and I could let you have them ready bagged. The cost will include delivery. I will bring them every week in my wheelbarrow. I will charge five pounds a bag but I will give you more logs than you would get from a shop. I will also include kindling for no extra cost.”*

So it was that we met two delightful, young entrepreneurs who, true to their word call with logs, every Friday evening. The one bag of logs has become two bags but such a work ethic, in children, is surely to be encouraged. The children live, with their parents, on a smallholding and wood is readily available. Sam cuts the logs himself – albeit with parental supervision.

I wonder if any readers share my enjoyment of sitting outside by a fire, on these long dark evenings. I have done so for many years – particularly on 21<sup>st</sup> December – which marks the longest night. I also festoon every fence and garden building with lights to symbolise that the blackness of winter will give way, ultimately, to longer and warmer days. I have no doubt that our cave age ancestors did much the same thing and will probably have believed that the lighting of a fire was a means of restoring power to a greatly weakened sun.

I always think it significant that the festival of Christmas, marked as it is by brightly coloured lights, came to be celebrated at a time of year, when the world, in the northern hemisphere at least, is at its blackest. Jesus, we can be certain, was not born in December as shepherds and sheep will not be found on Palestinian hillsides in the depths of winter. It is far more likely that he was born in April but the first Christians, being drawn mainly from the ranks of slaves would have had no time off for celebration in that busy month. They therefore ‘Christianised’ the Roman festival of Saturnalia held in December and decided that this would be the time of Jesus’ birth. This was more than a matter of convenience. They believed the timing to be appropriate as for them that birth of the Christ Child marked the coming of light into a dark world. We need not be religious to believe that such was the case. Indeed, the most non-religious of historians relate how, within a few generations of his death the more unsavoury practices of the Roman Empire were being challenged and

were gradually changing. The light revealed them for what they were and enabled them to be dealt with.

One of the most revolting features of the then world was child murder or infanticide. A letter written in the twenty-ninth year of Caesar Augustus has recently been unearthed, in which a workman, Hilarion, advises his wife, Alis, who is heavily pregnant, to throw the baby on the midden, or refuse heap, if she did not want it. He did not expect anyone to demur. In the cities of the Empire you could always pick up abandoned children and bring them up as slaves; or if girls, as worse than slaves. The Bethlehem event, however, ushered in the light with Jesus, as an adult, teaching that children were to be valued and esteemed and, indeed, emulated as possessing the key to a new kind of kingdom.

In the same way he challenged a patriarchal society which viewed women as inferior to men. Women, in such a world, had no voice and were seen very much as second class citizens. They were the property of their husbands and could be beaten or abused without censure or recourse to justice. The phrase 'rule of thumb' is rooted in the fact that a husband was allowed to strike his wife as and when he wished but only with a rod as thick as his thumb. Jesus, in contrast ennobled women and paved the way for equality which, in Christian countries at least, is now enshrined in law.

Light was also shed on human relationships in that, with the passing of time, slaves were, first, to be treated as brothers and with kindness and then, albeit late in time, set free. In ancient Rome there were more slaves than there were free citizens with a statesman, such as Cicero declaring them to be 'the excrement of mankind.' Slaves and prisoners were counted fair sport in the Roman arenas but with the coming of light came a new reverence for human life which, ultimately changed public opinion and led, eventually to gladiatorial shows being abolished.

Those who brought such light were punished by emperors, such as Nero. He had them covered with pitch and set alight in order to illuminate the imperial gardens at night. Today though, we esteem the light bringers whilst Nero is a name we give to our dogs.

I do hope we will enjoy all kinds of light this Christmas. If it is dry why not light a fire and sit out beneath the stars thinking deep thoughts.

Much love to you and yours

MIKE SHEPHARD

**The last date for your envelope contributions to the Chapel funds for this year will be December 23<sup>rd</sup>. If you would like your envelope to be collected from your door please contact Carole or Helen. Thank you.**

# **CERDDWYR CYNNWR WALKERS**

Saturday/ Dydd Sadwrn 28<sup>th</sup> November/Tachwedd 2020

## Taith gerdded PENIEL Walk

Today is scheduled to be the last walk of the season for the walkers. At 7.30 a.m. I know it is raining heavily before I am out of bed as I can hear the noise it makes on the roof of the conservatory. Once out in the kitchen I can now see it lashing down outside. I mention to Dawn that it is raining and we would probably be having phone calls shortly withdrawing from the walk.

Sure enough at around 8.30 the phone indicates a message. Upon opening it is one who described herself as a wimp wishing to give it a miss.

At 8.45 I answer the telephone to have the question "Is there any point walking in the rain?" My answer is "Yes".

So at 10 am there were six walkers ready to face the rain which had abated and in fact stopped. We changed the plan slightly and drove out to Glangwili bridge to commence the walk.

We started the walk proper by heading up hill towards Peniel. We turned right after passing Castell Pigyn Mansion and walked 200 yards to join the Abergwili to Peniel Road. From there it is about a half mile up hill passing Llwynpiod and Llwynpiod Quarry. Looking back there is a lovely view of Bronwydd Road, the town, Pensarn and Llangunnor. From the hill top it is an easy, fairly level stroll to Peniel village. We enter the park and take a rest to have a snack and drink. Mike of course (who else) went to sit on one of the wooden benches and suddenly realised that it was soaking wet after the rain, but too late! During the meal Lee joined us having missed us at the carpark.

After the break we crossed the main road and headed west for Glangwili Bridge which one of the ladies mis-pronounced as Glang wili.

We carried on through the yard of Rhydfwyalchen Farm [Ford of the blackbird farm] and we thought what a lovely name.

From Rhydfwyalchen we catch a glimpse of Nant Felys (Sweet Stream) in the valley below which is a tributary of the Gwili. We carry on downhill passing names like Cwmgwili Mansion, the old home of the Phillips family, one of whom was Molly Phillips, a J.P. in Carmarthen in the 1960s. She was also an Olympic ice skater but did not speak very much about it. It seems that Dawn's mother worked there in the 1920-30s and she often told the story of how the butler had once made her stand on a step ladder in the dining room because of her short height to see if she could tell what was missing from the long dining table. She couldn't. It turned out to be the cruet set. Then we see Bwthyn-Y-Garddwr (Gardener's Cottage) Rhywdywyll (Dark Hill) and Danrhiw (Underthehill)

We then arrive back in Maesgwili and our walk of 4.5 miles is at an end, but the day is not over, for out come the picnic chairs and in a circle the six of us have a chat over a lovely cuppa and a sandwich.

We will have to wait and see what the future holds re being allowed out in groups or other Covid restrictions for next year.

Until then please stay safe and have as happy a Christmas period as you can.

The walkers who had a fine clear and dry day were:- Lee, Mike and Gwen, Gwyn and Helen and Gareth and Dawn.

Cofion

Gareth a Dawn

## **Angels at Work by MFS**

What a coincidence. I was at the desk working on this newsletter and in came an email from Mike with his latest article for the Ambulance service which included his thought provoking poem 'Angels at Work'. During my time at Tregib Llandeilo one of my duties, as well as the weekly Tuesday and Thursday assemblies, was to arrange the Christmas Assembly for the whole school. One Christmas I included the poem below written by Mike Shephard since I knew there was one sixth former, Martin, who would do a brilliant job and so he did. It has dialogue, narrative and humour but more than that there is a message. In his own words Mike says:

'The message is that we have to get our hands dirty if we are to make a difference to the world. We cannot always be kept safe and risk free. It is only as we experience the rough and tumble of life, with all its hurts and pains, that we become equipped to serve others. That, actually, is the real meaning of Christmas.'

"A stable?" gasped the angel.  
"You surely can't be serious!  
I know the Boss is sometimes strange,  
And his ways are oft mysterious.  
But a stable! A bed of straw!  
That really takes the cake!  
You must have got the message wrong,  
And made a big mistake."

"It's no mistake. I've double checked  
And used the direct line;  
A cattle-shed in Bethlehem!  
And midnight is the time!  
So come on now! Roll up your sleeves!  
At least we have the space,  
To get our mops and buckets out  
And tidy up the place."

"My gosh, it stinks!" One angel said,  
As he trod in something smelly:  
"It's worse for me," his friend replied,  
"I forgot to bring my wellies!  
But there's little point in moaning,  
The job just must be done.  
We've got to make this stable fit,  
For Mary's first born son."

And work they did, from dawn to dusk,  
And cleaned out nook and cranny;  
They put the sheep outside the barn,  
Along with all the Nannies;  
They used their dusters with a will,  
And had no time to sing;  
No angel voice was heard that day,  
Just the swish of angel wings.

They never took a breather,  
Nor stopped for well-earned breaks;  
No cup of tea or coffee,  
Nor slice of Angel Cake.  
They sweated as they laboured,  
And did not dare sit down,  
Until the stable was transformed,  
For one who'd wear a crown.

But the angels had jumped the gun;  
Their toil had been in vain.  
"I'm sorry boys," the good God said,  
"It must be done again.  
I want the boy to know the truth,  
Of life for humankind;  
To cosset him and keep him safe,  
Is just not in my mind."

"I want that he should understand,  
Not just the 'highs' but 'lows' –  
To share all human pain and grief,  
And speak as one who knows.  
I want the babe to be my voice,  
And bring me within reach,  
Of poor and humble, sick and sad,  
To practise, not just preach.

"Bring back the dirt, the grime, the dung.  
Come on! I'll lend a hand!  
I hear a donkey's hoof beats;  
Approaching through the sand:  
'I'm sorry Ma'am, my house is full.'  
That's what the host will say.  
Now are we done? Almost! Not quite!  
I think we need more hay." MFS©



## **A Favourite Carol**

## **Rosemary Kerr writes**

One of my favourite carols is “Still the Night.” It is usually sung quietly and thoughtfully. The birth of Christ our Saviour in that lowly stable in Bethlehem and his life on earth culminating in his death on the cruel cross and his resurrection to be our living Lord, is surely a wonderful message for us to tell. I can remember for many years singing with a friend at a Christmas musical evening where we sang “Still the night” as an encore. To me it symbolised the beginning of the Christmas celebrations.

Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht

Still the night, holy night!  
Sleeps the world; hid from sight,  
Mary and Joseph in stable bare  
Watch o’er the Child beloved and fair,  
Sleeping in heavenly rest,  
Sleeping in heavenly rest.

Still the night, holy the night!  
Son of God, O how bright  
Love is smiling from thy face!  
Strikes for us now the hour of grace,  
Saviour, since thou art born!  
Saviour, since thou art born!

Still the night, holy night!  
Shepherds first saw the light,  
Far and near, the angel-song  
‘Christ the Redeemer is here!’  
‘Christ the Redeemer is here!’

In 1816 a young priest called Joseph Mohr went for a walk in the evening and looked out over a very quiet winter scene in his home town in Austria. This gave him the inspiration to write the carol we know as “ Still the Night.”

The title is not based on any detail of the Biblical Christmas Story! We are not told that the night Jesus was born was silent. In fact the evidence suggests otherwise! We read of a great company of the heavenly host saying, “Glory to God in the highest.” However we find a clue to the author’s intention in the second phrase ‘Holy Night.’ In the presence of holiness sometimes we are gripped by stunned silence. For example in the Book of Habakkuk ~Chapter 2 verse 20 we read, “ The Lord is in His holy temple, let all the earth be silent before him.” So in the imagination of Joseph Mohr the night of Jesus’ birth was silent because it was holy. For the first time in history the holy God was physically present on earth in human form.

Joseph Mohr was practically an outcast at the time of his birth as he was a fatherless child, but thanks to his relationship with God and a loving mother, he was used by God to pen words that still challenge, move and inspire us to this day.

Thank you Rosemary

### **The Sunday Club/ Yr Ysgol Sul**

The Sunday Club continues to meet via Zoom. This can be challenging especially since the singing is not quite synchronised. Imagine hearing us all two or three beats behind or in front of each other. The word cacophony comes to mind. We are now preparing a Nativity script for the morning service on the 20<sup>th</sup> of December. We hope that you can join us.

## Carol Quiz/Cwis Garolau

### How well do you know your carols?

Complete the following phrases. There are two phrases from each carol. Extra points for not looking them up.

1. O Come, all ye \_\_\_\_\_
2. Yea, Lord, we \_\_\_\_\_ Thee
3. While \_\_\_\_\_ watched their \_\_\_\_\_ by night
4. To you in \_\_\_\_\_'s town this day
5. As with \_\_\_\_\_ men of old
6. Holy Jesus, every day, keep us in the \_\_\_\_\_ way
7. The cattle are \_\_\_\_\_, the \_\_\_\_\_ awakes
8. Bless all the dear \_\_\_\_\_, in Thy tender care.
9. O little town of \_\_\_\_\_
10. O come to us, abide with us, Our Lord \_\_\_\_\_
11. \_\_\_\_\_, the herald-angels sing
12. Born to give them \_\_\_\_\_ birth
13. Suai'r \_\_\_\_\_
14. Cwsg cyn daw \_\_\_\_\_ a'i gledd ar ei glun
15. I orwedd mewn \_\_\_\_\_ rhoed \_\_\_\_\_ y byd
16. Tyrd, \_\_\_\_\_ i'm hymyl ac aros o hyd
17. Tua Bethlehem dref, awn yn \_\_\_\_\_ gref
18. Ac \_\_\_\_\_ Ef
19. Draw yn ninas \_\_\_\_\_ Frenin
20. Yn y \_\_\_\_\_ isel gwael.

/22

### How did you do out of 22?

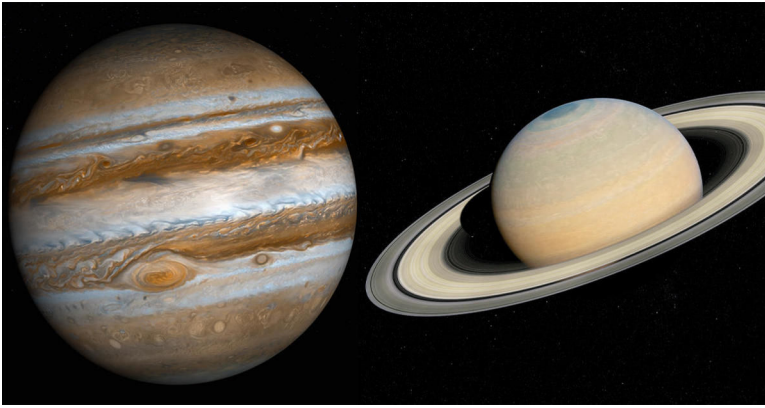
### These sentences are from the Gospel accounts of the Birth of Jesus

1. At that time the Emperor \_\_\_\_\_ ordered a \_\_\_\_\_ to be taken throughout the \_\_\_\_\_ Empire.
2. Joseph went from the town of \_\_\_\_\_ to the town of \_\_\_\_\_, the birthplace of King \_\_\_\_\_. He went to register with \_\_\_\_\_ who was promised in marriage to him.
3. After Jesus was born in Bethlehem \_\_\_\_\_, in the days of \_\_\_\_\_ the king, wise men from the east came to \_\_\_\_\_ and asked, "Where is He who is born King of the \_\_\_\_\_?"
4. Go and search for the \_\_\_\_\_ and when you \_\_\_\_\_ him, come back and tell me so that I can go and \_\_\_\_\_ him."
5. An angel of the \_\_\_\_\_ appeared to them and said, "Don't be \_\_\_\_\_! I have \_\_\_\_\_, which will bring joy to all the \_\_\_\_\_. This very day in David's town a \_\_\_\_\_ has been born - \_\_\_\_\_, the Lord."

How did you do? /22

# The Star in the East or the Bethlehem Star

*'Dawel nos, sanctaidd yw'r nos, wele fry seren dlos'*



One tradition has it that the Star the astrologers followed to Jerusalem from the East over two thousand years ago was actually the two planets Jupiter and Saturn getting so close to each other that they seemed as one. What is remarkable is that this is set to happen again during Christmas week this year. The last time this star

was visible to the naked eye was in 1226. The two planets have been gradually getting closer to one another since the start of summer and will be seen as one at its best on December 21<sup>st</sup>. It can be seen at its best here just after sunset. This is the best viewing for 800 years. Let us know if you see it.

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## A Last Minute Christmas Pudding



### Ingredients

110g/4oz butter  
110g/4oz soft dark brown sugar  
2 eggs  
450g/1 lb homemade mincemeat  
175g/6oz self-raising flour  
1 tsp mixed spice  
1tbs brandy

### Method

1. Whisk the butter and sugar together
2. Beat in the eggs one at a time
3. Stir in the flour and the spices
4. Mix the mincemeat and the brandy in to the mixture and make sure it is well mixed
5. Turn the mixture into a 2 pint greased basin or two smaller basins, Cover with greaseproof paper and then foil.
6. Cook in the over for 2 hours at 150C/330F/Gas 2. When the pudding has completely cooled it can be frozen. Take out of the freezer on Christmas Eve and steam in the oven or on the hob for an hour.

*Cymerwyd y rysait uchod a'i gyfieithu o lyfr Ena Thomas: "Nadolig Blasus Ena." Bu farw Ena yng Ngorffennaf eleni. Roedd wedi bod yn cogionio ar raglenni Heno a Prynawn Da am flynyddoedd ac roedd yn bersonoliaeth mawr iawn. Yn wreiddiol o Felindre, Abertawe ymgartrefodd gyda'i phriod a'u meibion yn Tir Ysgawen/Elder Grove Llangynnwr. Cydymdeimlwn gyda'r teulu oll.*

# Christmas customs and traditions

It was the Emperor Constantine in 312 who changed the religious map of the world and brought the Roman Empire to Christianity after many long years of persecution. It was also Constantine who designated December 25<sup>th</sup> as the day to mark the Saviour's birth. Let's look at some of the customs and traditions associated with Christmas and reflect on the way they contribute to the message of Christmas.

## **The first Christmas Card**

When was the first one sent? Well the actual date is uncertain but a card designed by a boy of sixteen called William Eagley and now in the British Museum was believed to have been sent in 1842.

In 1844 Rev Edward Bradley on Newcastle and William Dobson of Birmingham sent handpainted cards to save themselves the trouble of writing letters at Christmas. Then Sir Henry Cole invited JC Horsely an artist, to design a card with a Christmas greeting on it in 1846 and about a thousand were sold. By 1870 the custom was well established. The original cards all had something to do with that first Christmas in Bethlehem. Today it is reckoned that around 2000,000,000 cards are sent. Maybe technology hasn't got the better of the Christmas card after all!

## **The Mince Pie**

Have you made your Mince pies yet? Did you know that the first Mince pies were oblong shaped - like a manger? At first they were filled with minced meat, but later fruit and peel were added and the colours reminded people of the gifts of the wise men at Bethlehem: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Later still a top was added to represent the roof of the stable and the hole which allows the steam to escape was star shaped. So as we wish people a happy Christmas and offer them a mince pie we shall once again be reminded of the manger, where the Baby Jesus was laid because there was no room elsewhere in the house.

## **The First Christmas Tree**

Christmas trees were practically unknown in this country until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is true that a certain merchant wrote in 1605, "At Christmas they set up fir trees in the houses at Strasbourg and hang on them roses cut out of many-coloured papers, apples, wafers, gold foil, sweets, etc.", but it was not until Prince Albert ordered a Christmas Tree from Windsor Castle in 1841 that the custom became popular in this country.

Why a fir tree? According to a German legend a very holy man St Boniface who lived in the eighth century was sent from England to Germany to preach about Jesus. On a frosty night in December he was walking in a wood when he came across a group of people worshipping a pagan god. This was the night when offerings were to be made to this god and they were met beneath an oak tree to offer a human sacrifice of a little boy. Just as they were leading him forward St Boniface snatched an axe and felled the great tree with a single stroke. As it fell to the ground it left behind a little fir tree which had been growing between its roots.

The saint turned to the people and said, "From this night, that little tree shall be your holy emblem. It is the **wood of peace** for your houses are built of it. It is **the sign of eternal life** for its leaves are evergreen. **It points to Heaven** and shall henceforth be called the Tree of the Christ Child. See that you do not forget."

## **The First Christmas Pudding**

The first Christmas Pudding was made around 1670 and it might have surprised you. It was just stiff porridge with raisins added. Then meat broth, chopped sheep's tongues, fruit juice, wine, spices, and breadcrumbs were mixed together and this was served in a semi-liquid state. Not much like the delicious dish covered with white sauce that we are used to today.

Do you put a sprig of holly on the top? In Norway and Sweden it is known as the Christ-thorn because the prickly leaves are like the thorns in the crown that Jesus was forced to wear on Good Friday and the red berries remind us of the drops of blood that came when the thorns pierced his flesh. So once again a popular custom remind us of Jesus and also remind us that we cannot celebrate Christmas without being reminded of that most important festival Easter which is the very reason for the origins of the Christian Church.

## **The Animals at Christmas**

Christians have never forgotten that the animals, some of whom shared the Bethlehem house where Jesus was born, bear an honoured place in the Christmas celebrations.

In Poland, where there is a fast on Christmas Eve, the master of the house waits for the first star to appear before he distributes small pieces of unleavened bread to every member of the family and carries some to the horses and cattle in the outbuildings. Then everyone sits down to a table on which a white cloth covers a layer of straw or hay in memory of Christ's birth in a stable.

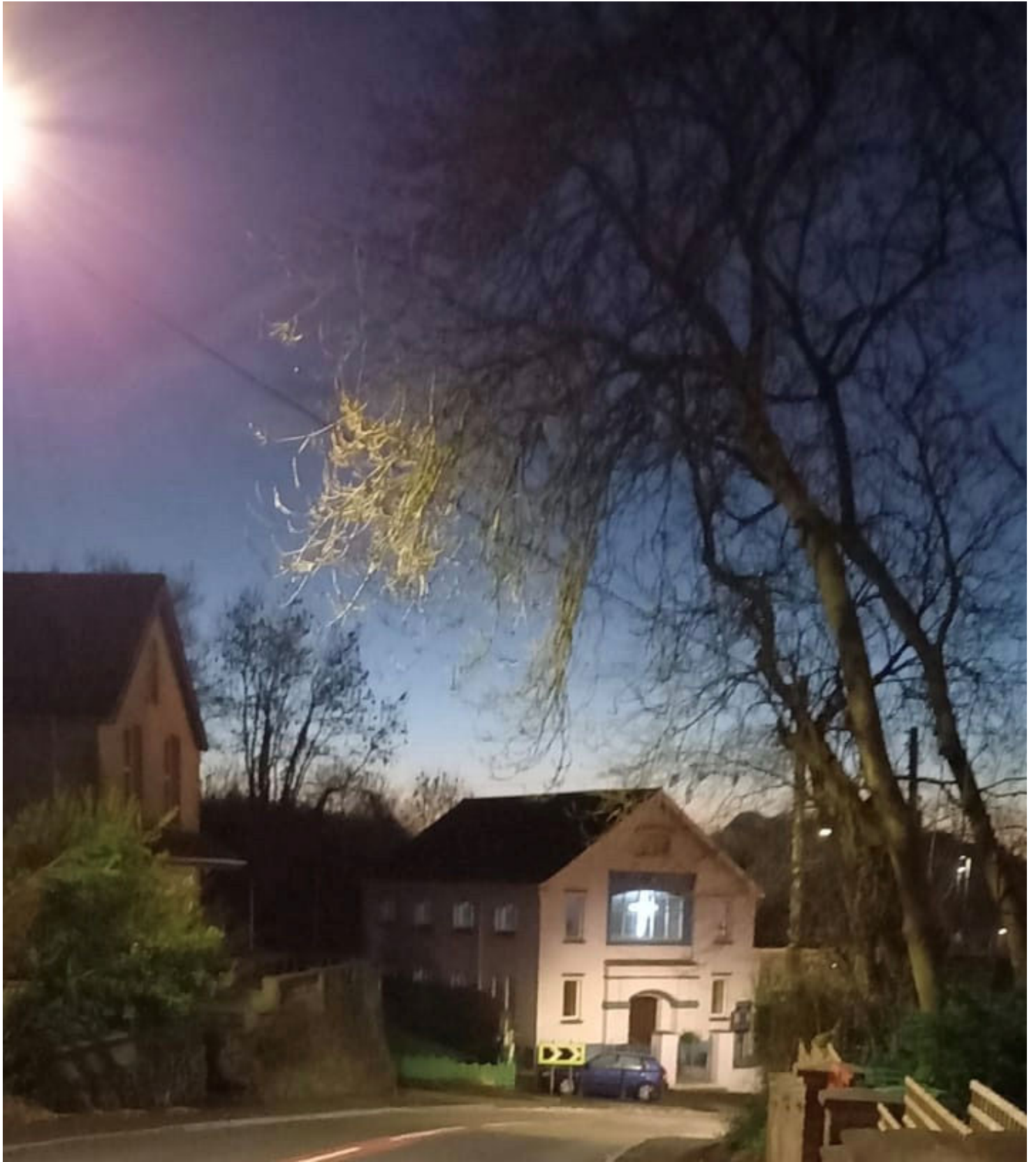
In some houses a wheat sheaf stands in a corner of the room and later these sheaves are taken into the fields where they serve as a charm to ensure a good fruit harvest and a feast for the birds. Cattle and horses are given second rations and in other parts of the country people carry wheat to church on Christmas morning and then give it to any chickens and birds they may see on the way home.

In Sweden a sheaf of corn is sometimes fixed to a high pole for the birds while in Finland special cakes are made and fastened onto the stable roofs perhaps because in the 13<sup>th</sup> century St Francis said that animals should be included in the "rejoicings for the reverence of the Son of God whom on such a night the most Blessed Virgin Mary did lay down in the stall between the ox and the ass."

## **The Rocking Ceremony**

In some remote villages in Bavaria the people will, on Christmas Eve, take part in the Rocking Ceremony. A special part of the house is set aside for the Christmas Crib. Some are big and expensive, some small and home-made just like you can make for yourselves. Half an hour before midnight the whole family- even the tiniest toddler- will get ready for the feast that is to come. First they must line up behind father as he sings the Rocking Carol and gently rocks the Christ Child's Cradle. Next mother takes her turn and they go on until even the toddler has looked on the model of the Baby Jesus and listened to the words of the carol, "We will give you coat of fur. We will rock you, rock you, rock you. We will help you all we can, Darling, darling, little man."

Kathleen Clark



Thank you Nelda for taking and sharing this lovely photo with us.