

# Babell Chapel/Capel y Babell Pensarn



## WINTER NEWSLETTER CYLCHLYTHYR Y GAELAF 2014

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Thanks to Mike Shephard for permission to do this.



Online at  
<http://www.llangunnor.net>

## Dear Friends

### There was no room for him in the inn

The majority of people are not against Jesus. Most admire him and will admit, if pressed, that the world would be a better place if we patterned our lives upon his teaching. People, generally, are not hostile towards him and, if anything, have a regard for him.

The problem is that their goodwill never translates itself into commitment, either to Christ or to the Church. The fact is that they are often too busy to follow him and can always find excuses for evading his challenge.

Such was the case with the Bethlehem Innkeeper. He was not an unkindly man. He probably had a wife and family who ran the business with him. He would surely have had some sympathy for a heavily pregnant woman who was close to giving birth. It was not churlishness that resulted in her plea for help being rejected by him. It was preoccupation.

*"A room! You want a room? Do you not realise that there is a census taking place and that every vacancy has been taken? With the best will in the world, there is little or nothing I can do. My house is crowded, my hands full, my mind preoccupied. I am not a hard-hearted man. There is the stable – you are welcome to it, if you care to use it; but that is the best I can do. And now I must get back to my work. My guests need me....."*

That was the innkeeper's response to Jesus, the response of preoccupation, a response the Child was destined to meet again and again during his life. Not fierce opposition, not furious hatred, but inattention and unconcern – secular priorities inducing apathy. And when his days on earth were over, what was this Messiah to the majority of his race? Neither an object of fervent devotion, nor a target of passionate animosity – but less than the dust beneath time's chariot wheels. He just did not matter at all. He could be ignored.

It is being given still, this answer. For still in the twenty first century as in the first there are multitudes for whom the faith is neither a miracle nor a menace, but simply an irrelevance:

*"You surely don't expect us to believe that a birth two thousand years ago has any bearing on our problems and bewilderments today? We are living in a totally different universe now, infinitely vaster, dizzyingly, staggeringly greater in time and space than the ancients who wrote the Bible ever knew, dwarfing all your traditional beliefs and pieties into the insignificance and irrelevance of an archaeological pedantry. We have no objection to your indulging in worship and prayer, of course. Keep your church wheels turning, for all we care. But don't ask us to take it seriously. What have churches, creeds and sacraments to do with us? The forgiveness of sins, the practice of the presence of God – all that is outside our orbit completely, not our line of territory at all. We realists have more urgent business on our hands than credulously waiting upon a God who perhaps does not exist. As far as we are concerned Jesus can be ignored."*

There is, though, a fallacy in that position. **Christ refuses to be ignored.**



The fact is that Jesus haunts the human race. Men and women have always tried to escape him and after all their trying he pursues them still. I know that if I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, I shall find him there. I know that whether civilisation climbs the steep ascent of heaven or plunges down to hell, it will find him there. The world may flout his laws, and trample his name in the dust of oblivion: I can wash my hands of him, like Pilate, and drug my soul in slumber and apostasy. But irresistibly and inexorably he comes back, our Judge and our Redeemer, our Tormentor and our Saviour, the pressure of Almighty God on your life and mine, he comes back and stands at the door and knocks.

He is there now – this Advent season – and he will not be ignored. “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

I wish you a Christ Centred Christmas.

MIKE SHEPHARD

## **FAMILY NEWS**

It is never easy to prepare a Christmas Newsletter in late September and early October but needs must. In November, as you all know, I seek sunnier climes and am very much an ‘absentee’ minister. That being so I have to complete some tasks ‘out of season’ or they will not get done at all. One drawback of this is that when the newsletter is circulated in December it will not contain comment on events happening in November, be they happy or sad. Please accept my apologies for this.

You will be aware that our return to the chapel, proper, will not be taking place until 19<sup>th</sup> October, the fact being that renovations are taking longer than anticipated. I began writing this on September 25<sup>th</sup> and outstanding tasks, at that time, included the sanding and staining of the floor and platform, the completion of the false ceiling, internal decoration, the erection of a cross to the left of the pulpit, the purchase of chairs and the, inevitable, cleaning of the building.

As of October 4<sup>th</sup> considerable progress has been made and the bulk of the work has now been completed. Our attempts to sand the floor have, sadly, met with failure and it has been necessary to revise our plans. In short, the area is to be carpeted, allowing us the flexibility, should we so choose, of giving further attention to flooring at a future date. The platform will not be carpeted but will, rather, be stained.

The cross, rough-hewn, is in position and will be a constant reminder of the extent to which we are loved by God. I am aware that our non-conformist forebears were opposed to having crosses in churches. A very good friend of mine, the late Edmor Phillips, once said to me: *“The place for the cross is not in the church but in the world!”* He believed that any form of symbolism in the church was a denial of our heritage. I am sure that there will be some of us who agree with him.

Conversely, there will be others who see a cross as an aid to worship and will wish to argue



that symbolism brings us closer to God. From a personal point of view I find it strange *not* to have a cross in a church. Whenever I look at the cross I seem to hear God saying: *"This is how much I love you! You can batter me and bruise me: you can put a crown of thorns on my head: you can drive nails through my hands and feet: you can plunge a spear into my side. It doesn't matter: I love you and nothing you can do will stop me loving you."* Whenever I see his sacrifice portrayed in such a way a corresponding love is kindled in my own heart. As the New Testament puts it: "We love him because he first loved us and gave himself for us." The cross was, of course, not the end of the story. It was followed by the resurrection of Jesus and an empty tomb, quite rightly, is as much a symbol of our faith as is the cross. This, for us, could well be symbolised by illuminating the cross, thus bearing testimony to light beyond the darkness and of a continuing journey. I do hope that, in time, we will experience the cross as a worship aid.

However, if after some months a majority of worshippers find it unhelpful I would be the first to suggest that it be removed and placed outside the church where it will be a witness to the community. It is important that people feel comfortable with a worship environment and it would be very wrong of me to force my own views on the wider church.

With regard to the outside of the building this, too, is very different. Do you approve of the colour? Reaction to the shade are varied and range from "stupendous!" to "appalling!" One friend remarked: *"I love the colour. Did you choose it after a few Sherries?!"* So mixed a response signifies that the building is being noticed and that must be a positive development. As one by-passer was heard to remark: *"I never noticed there was a church there before!"* When one of us is brave enough to admit that they helped choose the colour we will present them with a medal for insight and wisdom!

I just mentioned the *Passer by*. Wouldn't it be wonderful if people stopped passing the church and came inside? They will be so welcome! It would be an encouragement to all of us. I also know that were I to witness a growth in congregational size my spiritual batteries would be recharged. That, I think, is true of any minister and, indeed, of every one of us.

**Allow me, if I may, to appeal to every member of our church to support its work, not only with our financial gifts but with our presence. I say this, not in criticism of those who do not attend but with understanding as, at one stage in my life, I also opted out of church life and went 'walk about' for several years. You will be so welcome were you to return. You could be such a support to us. You might find a sense of renewed fulfilment as you assist us in reaching out to our community.**

We are certainly attempting to reach out to our community with the recent open day, at Yr Aelwyd, being an illustration of this. The event was aimed at older people and its purpose was to inform them of community resources and activities. Charmaine, Sian and Helen joined me in representing Babell and we were able to tell others of the work we are doing, both in the church and Friendship Centre. It was a real opportunity for making those all important links and, hopefully, it will bear fruit.

Additionally, in mid-September, Helen and I visited Llangunnor School and spoke with the acting head teacher, Aled Owen. We confirmed that the school choir would be participating in our re-opening service on 19<sup>th</sup> October which will also be the occasion of Harvest Thanksgiving. It was agreed, moreover, that in the New Year Helen and I would lead a bilingual School Assembly, on a monthly basis. What an opportunity!

Our Friendship Centre will have re-opened, hopefully, in late October. It is heartening to note that users of the centre have missed our Thursday get-togethers and cannot wait for it to become operational again. Please make the Centre known. It would help if church members attended, when able, and brought others with them. The old adage of a crowd attracting a crowd remains true. Whether our numbers be many or few the fact is that this work is very much valued by those who visit us. As one friend put it: "When I read that the Centre would not re-open until October I felt so sad."

We send our very best wishes to our friend, Roy Evans who, recently, spent a short time in hospital. Best wishes, too, to Trevor Lloyd who has undergone a knee operation. We also think of Bethan Morgan as she continues her recuperation after surgery. For your information I will be spending some time in hospital during January and may be out of action for two or three weeks.

We are glad that another friend, Bronwen Wilkins is so much better. We understand that she is quite prepared to teach Beginner's Welsh again, recommencing in December. Thank you, Bronwen. Please make these classes known. They will be held on a Thursday morning from 9.30 until 10.30.

Permit me to thank all the craftsmen who have worked on Babell during the past three months or so. A very big thank you to those of us who have worked behind the scenes in order to make the building a fitting place for the worship of God and for service to others. A special word of gratitude to the 'cleaning team' who worked tirelessly in preparation for the reopening service. Diolch yn Fawr!

In closing our Family News can I ask if you approve of Winter Flowing Pansies which greet you as you walk into church? Notice that I have tried to ensure that they complement our colour scheme. Better still, they are under-planted with crocus and tulips, the colour of the latter being Raspberry Ripple. Roll on springtime! I sometimes think that I should have been a gardener, the fact being that I am at my happiest when planting things. Being a minister is not that dissimilar, of course. I certainly want our church to grow. Your help in achieving that aim is so important . . . . .

MFS

## **THE COMPLETE LIFE**

J.B. Priestly, looking back on his boyhood in Yorkshire, once wrote: *"People like my parents – to use their own matchless phrase – attended places of worship. Now that I see the old phrase with a fresh eye, I see how astonishing it is. Places of worship! How much we have lost, we of the younger generations, by*



*having no places of worship! Perhaps this new world must remain desolate at heart until it achieves new places of worship. Then the spirit of men and women will come home again to the universe. . . . It is possible that we moderns will not live richly and deeply again, will continue to feel that there is something sterile and faintly desolating in our lives, until some central institution like the old chapel is created once more."*

Without God we will always feel homeless in the universe. For it is from God we came and only God is the true home of our soul.

### **CAN I SAY THE LORD'S PRAYER?**

I cannot say 'Our,' if I live in a watertight spiritual compartment; if I think a special place in Heaven is reserved for me or for my denomination.

I cannot say 'Father,' if I do not demonstrate the relationship in my daily life.

I cannot say 'Which art in Heaven,' if I am so preoccupied with the earth that I forget that I am also meant to be laying up treasure there.

I cannot say 'Hallowed be thy name,' if my speech and manner of living is unworthy of him.

I cannot say 'Thy Kingdom come,' if I am not doing all in my power to hasten its coming.

I cannot say 'Thy will be done,' if I am resentful of or disobedient to his will for me.

I cannot say 'On earth as it is in Heaven,' if I am not prepared to devote my life here to his service.

I cannot say 'Give us this day our daily bread,' if I refuse to help feed the world's needy people.

I cannot say 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us,' if I harbour a grudge against anyone.

I cannot say 'Lead us not into temptation,' if I deliberately place myself in a position where I am likely to be tempted.

I cannot say 'Deliver us from evil,' if I am not prepared to oppose evil.

I cannot say 'Thine is the kingdom,' if I do not offer God my allegiance.

I cannot say 'Thine is the power,' if I fear to take risks in his name.

I cannot say 'Thine is the glory,' if I am seeking glory for myself.

I cannot say 'Forever and ever,' if my horizon is bounded by the things of time.

I cannot say 'Amen,' if I do not also add 'Cost what it may.'

Submitted by Henry Wilkins



## THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

I wonder how grateful we would be if we received the gifts mentioned in the seasonal song 'The Twelve Days of Christmas?' Perhaps the young lady who received the gifts wrote letters of appreciation:

**25<sup>th</sup> December** *My dearest darling, What a lovely, romantic thought sending a partridge in a little pear tree! Bless you and thank you*

*Your ever loving Emma.*

**26<sup>th</sup> December** *My dearest Albert, The two turtle doves you kindly sent this morning are sitting happily on a branch of the pear tree. I am so grateful.*

*With love as always, Emma.*

**27<sup>th</sup> December** *My darling Albert, What an original idea! Three French hens as a Christmas present are most unusual. Thank you all the same, I do appreciate your thoughtfulness.*

*Your loving Emma.*

**28<sup>th</sup> December** *Dearest Albert, What a surprise. The four calling birds arrived safely this morning. They are very sweet but they make so much noise I can't make myself heard. I expect they will quieten down when they get used to their new surroundings. I am grateful of course.*

*Love from Emma.*

**29<sup>th</sup> December** *Dearest Albert, Fancy sending five gold rings – one for each finger. I much prefer these to the birds which are taking rather a lot of looking after. Perhaps I could use the rings to wring their necks! I do love the rings.*

*Love Emma*

**30<sup>th</sup> December** *Dear Albert, I didn't know what to expect when I opened the front door this morning but it certainly wasn't six geese laying eggs all over the place. Frankly I hoped you had stopped sending me birds. We haven't really any room for them and they have ruined the lawn. I know you meant well.*

*Love Emma*

**31<sup>st</sup> December** *Albert! I thought I said no more birds, but this morning I woke up to find no less than seven swans all trying to swim in our tiny goldfish pond. Please stop sending birds.*

*Your Emma*

**1<sup>st</sup> January** *What do you expect me to do with eight milkmaids and their cows? Frankly I prefer the birds. I'm afraid I no longer find this amusing.*

*Emma*

**2<sup>nd</sup> January** Now just look here, Albert, this has gone on for long enough! You call these nine people ladies? Judging by the way they are dancing round the Village Green they are quite shameless. The whole village is gossiping. If you value my friendship then kindly stop sending these ridiculous presents.

Emma

**3<sup>rd</sup> January** As I write I can see ten old men, leaping about in what used to be our garden. The neighbours are now trying to have us evicted. I shall never speak to you again.

Emma

**4<sup>th</sup> January** Right, that's it. You know very well how much I detest bagpipes. Eleven pipers are driving me mad. The council has just been round and declared our house unfit for habitation. Mother has been taken away in an ambulance. I hope you are satisfied.

**5<sup>th</sup> January** Sir. Our client Ms Emma Winters instructs me to inform you that when the entire percussion section of the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra arrived at half-past seven this morning she had no course left open to her but to seek an injunction to prevent you sending any more gifts. I am making arrangements for the return of all livestock.

I am. Sir, yours faithfully,

J. Snodgrass/ Solicitor-at-Law

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No wonder Albert's gifts were not appreciated. We should always give some thought to the gifts we give people. Is there a suitable gift we can give to God in return for his gift to us, of Jesus? A well-known carol provides an answer to that question:

What can I give him poor as I am?

If I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb.

If I were a wise man I would do my part,

Yet, what I can I give him, Give my heart

From 'One More Step' by W.J. Wilcock

### The mouths of babes





# The Real Meaning of "The Twelve Days of Christmas"

Much more than a haunting melody with nonsensical lyrics, "The Twelve Days of Christmas" was written by the English Jesuits during the 16th century as a catechetical device.

**by Father Edward T. Dowling, S. J | Source: Catholic.net**

I'm sure you have all heard the Christmas carol, "The Twelve Days of Christmas," with its haunting melody. The carol dates back to the 16th century and its precise author is unknown. It has generally been assumed to consist of twelve nonsense verses built around a pretty melody. But in a fascinating article in *Our Sunday Visitor* (12/20/92), Fr. Gilhooley, a chaplain at St. Mary's College, informs us that the carol was written by the English Jesuits of the 16th century as a catechetical device and it is far from filled with nonsensical verses.

The carol is akin to the apocalyptic literature of Scripture that used obscure symbols to hide its true meaning from the enemy in time of persecution. To understand the background that gave rise to the carol, let us look briefly at the history of Catholicism in 16th century England.

When Henry VIII was rebuffed by Rome in his bid to divorce Catherine of Aragon to marry Anne Boleyn, he declared himself head of the Church in England replacing the Pope and demanded that all swear an oath of allegiance to him as such. St. Thomas More, the Chancellor of the Realm, the equivalent of the Prime Minister today, refused the oath supporting the elimination of the Pope's authority and Henry had him publicly beheaded. Catholic convents and monasteries were closed and looted. The situation was worse under his son, Edward VI, and better during the short reign of Catherine's daughter, Mary Tudor. She was succeeded by her half-sister Elizabeth I, an ardent Protestant, the daughter of Anne Boleyn. The practice of the Catholic faith was banned. Priests were exiled and forbidden under pain of death from returning or performing the sacraments. It was a desperate, dreadful time.

But many priests risked their lives to come back and minister to the flock and many lay Catholics likewise risked their lives and fortunes to hear Mass and have their children baptized. Wealthy families built hiding places, called priests' holes, in their homes to hide priests in case their homes were raided by the secret police.

The story is told of one priest who was almost caught in a surprise raid. He had just time to squeeze into his hole before the police broke in on the family. The police had obviously received a tip because they went right to the fireplace where the priest's hole was located. But try as they might, they couldn't find the entrance. Then in their frustration they ordered a fire to be lit to drive out the priest. When he didn't emerge, because to do so would subject the host family to prison or death, they ordered more logs on the fire. Eventually all were driven from the room by the intense heat and the police left in disgust. The family rushed to get the priest out of the hole but he was already dead, baked alive. He gave his life under cruel circumstances to save those whom he had come to serve. And he was only one of many.

With this as a background we can see the need for secrecy and deception. "The Twelve Days of

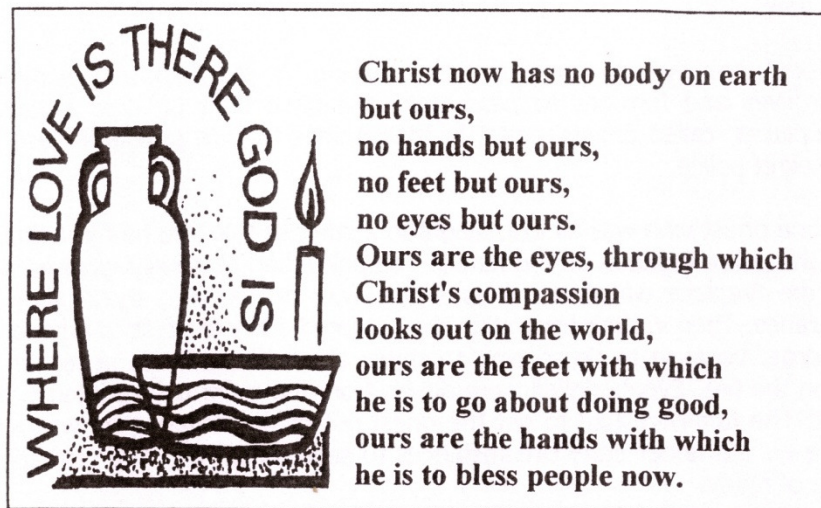


Christmas" was written to educate the faithful in the doctrines of the faith and yet not be obvious to the persecutors. The numbers are simply a mnemonic to help Catholics remember some basic facts. Recall the words of the song. "On the twelfth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me: twelve lords a leaping, eleven pipers piping, ten ladies dancing, nine drummers drumming, eight maids a milking, seven swans a swimming, six geese a laying, five golden rings, four calling birds, three French hens, two turtle doves, and a partridge in a pear tree."

"The Twelve Days of Christmas" celebrates the official Christmas season which starts liturgically on Christmas Day and ends twelve days later on the Feast of the Epiphany. "My true love" refers to God, "me" is the individual Catholic. The "twelve lords a leaping" are the twelve basic beliefs of the Catholic Church as outlined in the Apostles Creed. The "eleven pipers piping" are the eleven Apostles who remained faithful after the treachery of Judas. The "ten ladies dancing" are the Ten Commandments. The "nine drummers drumming" are the nine choirs of angels which in those days of class distinction were thought important. The "eight maids a milking" are the Eight Beatitudes. The "seven swans a swimming" are the Seven Sacraments. The "six geese a laying" are the Six Commandments of the Church or the six days of creation. The "five golden rings" are the first five books of the Old Testament called the Torah which are generally considered the most sacred and important of all the Old Testament. The "four calling birds" are the Four Gospels. The "three French hens" are the Three Persons in God or the three gifts of the Wise Men. The "two turtle doves" represent the two natures in Jesus: human and divine or the two Testaments, Old and New. The "partridge" is the piece de resistance, Jesus himself, and the "pear tree" is the Cross.

**Father Edward Dowling is the author of Have You Heard the Good News: Cycle A available through St Pauls – [www.AlbaHouse.org](http://www.AlbaHouse.org).**

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## **BABELL BAKE-OFF COMPETITION**

Here are the ingredients. The best cake will be awarded a prize. The sole judge is the minister! The cake will need to be baked by 21<sup>st</sup> December.

- a) 225g of Jeremiah chapter 6 verse 20
- b) One tablespoon of 1 Samuel chapter 14 v 25
- c) 225g of Judges chapter 5 v 25 (last item mentioned)
- d) 3 of Jeremiah chapter 17 verse 11
- e) 225g of chopped Naham chapter 3 verse 12
- f) 50g blanched and chopped Numbers chapter 17 v 8
- g) 225g of 1 Samuel chapter 30 verse 12
- h) A teaspoon of Amos chapter 4 verse 5, but not burnt
- i) Pinch of Leviticus chapter 2 verse 13
- j) Add Second Chronicles chapter 9 verse 9 to taste
- k) 450g of First Kings chapter 4 verse 22
- l) 3 tablespoons of Judges chapter 4 verse 19

### **Method**

Beat the first 3 ingredients in a bowl until soft and creamy.

Add d) one at a time, beating well.

Stir in e), f) and g). Sift together h), i), j) and k) before adding l.

Mix well.

Place mixture in a greased cake tin.

Bake gas mark 3 or 160\* C. It takes about 2 hours.

Turn out and cool.

Who will be the first to make the cake? HAPPY BAKING!

### **SMILE PLEASE**

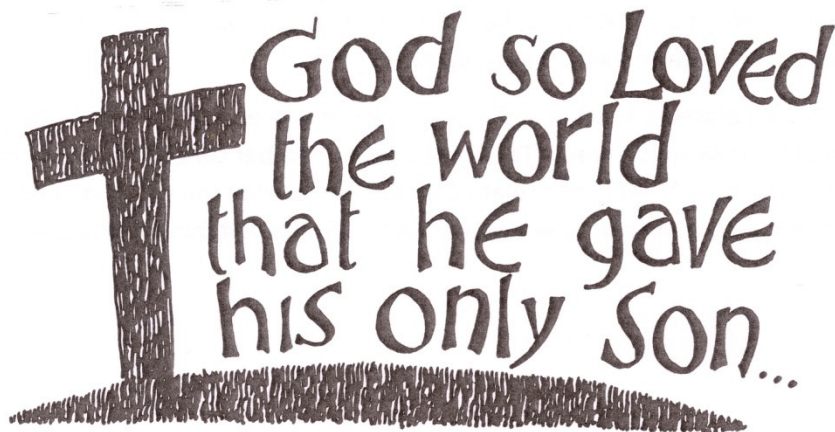
A Sunday School teacher said to her children: "We have been learning how powerful queens and kings were in biblical times, but there is a higher power. Can anyone tell me what it is? One of the children replied: "Yes Miss. Aces!"

The nun had placed a bowl of red, juicy apples at one end of the table. She propped a note against the bowl which read: "Take only one, remember God is watching." At the other end of the table was a bowl of chocolate chip biscuits. Beside the bowl, in child's handwriting, was another note. It said: "Take all you want – God is watching the apples."

## THE UNWELCOMED

People, Homosexual,  
Who wear the label, Gay;  
Doubters; Disbelievers;  
Those who seldom pray;  
Divorcees; Single Mothers;  
Couples who cohabit;  
Smokers; Alcoholics;  
People with drug habits;  
Offenders sent to prison,  
For their varied crimes,  
Released into society,  
Having done their time;  
People with black faces;  
Those from ethnic races;  
Folk with bodies pierced,  
In the strangest places;  
Those who don't dress nicely;  
Or who lack the means to pay;  
THEY HAVE ONE THING IN COMMON –  
THEY WERE NOT IN CHURCH TODAY!

Mike Shephard ©





## TALKING POINT

The reason why many Christians are strongly opposed to literalist approaches to scripture is not because they think they are intellectually confused, but because they have a damaging impact upon certain groups of people, such as homosexuals. There is a letter on the internet that captures the complexity of it all. It purports to be written by a troubled Christian to Dr Laura, a fundamentalist agony aunt. It triggers the kind of discussion in which every church should be involved and if it provokes thought it has done its task well. It is something to think about on the second Sunday in Advent/ Bible Sunday.

*Dear Dr Laura,*

*Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God's Law. I have learned a great deal from you and I try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I remind them that Leviticus 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination. End of debate. I do need some advice from you, however, regarding one or two specific laws and how best to follow them.*

- 1) When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odour for the Lord (Leviticus 1.9). The problem is my neighbours. They claim the odour is not pleasing to them. How should I deal with this?*
- 2) I would like to sell my daughter into slavery as it suggests in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age what do you think would be a fair price?*
- 3) Leviticus 25:44 states that I may buy slaves from the nations that are around us. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans, but not Canadians. Can you clarify?*
- 4) I have a neighbour who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself?*
- 5) A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an abomination (Leviticus 10:10), it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don't agree. Can you settle this?*
- 6) Leviticus 20:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle room here?*

*I know that you have studied these things extensively, so I am confident you can help. Thank you for reminding us again that God's word is eternal and unchanging.*

From 'Doubts and Loves' by Richard Holloway

Submitted by C.Penny

## LOSS OF INNOCENCE

*Guess what, Grampy?* Said the child:  
*I'm Joseph in the play.*  
Grampy thought he'd film it –  
Record those 'yesterdays.'  
*You can't do that!* A teacher cried:  
*All cameras are banned!*  
*And films and tapes and photographs*  
*Could fall into wrong hands.*  
He was made to feel unworthy –  
As if he posed a risk.  
The school, no doubt, in future years,  
Will have the audience 'frisked.'

He took the child, one Christmas Eve,  
To meet with Santa Claus.  
The 'Grotto' had, alas, been closed,  
In line with modern laws.  
The red-robed man is viewed, these days,  
As if predatory –  
A pervert who gets a thrill,  
When kids sit on his knee.  
We look behind the beard;  
Beyond his cheery smile;  
And see someone who might well be –  
A covert paedophile.

Gone are the days when Santa,  
Could into bedroom creep;  
And place his gifts upon the bed,  
Where little children sleep.  
He still comes down the chimney,  
Encumbered with a sack;  
But beneath the Christmas tree,  
His bounty must be stacked.  
The time cannot be far away,  
When presents from the sledge,  
Will be piled up, not indoors,  
But in the garden shed.

Christmas, like so many things,  
Falls victim to those few –  
Who target the very young,  
And 'groom' them for abuse.  
Jesus said such people,  
Should be drowned in the sea,



With a millstone round their neck,  
And shown no charity.  
There can be no forgiveness,  
For nought can recompense,  
For a ruined childhood;  
Or for lost innocence.

Mike Shephard ©

## **BURIAL OF THE PAST**

In one of my previous churches I worked with adults who had been hurt by life and who found it difficult to 'move on.' They just could not let go of the past. I counselled them as best I could but something more was needed – a ritual or ceremony to mark a new beginning in life.

O, how I wish for some wonderful place,  
Called the 'Land of Beginning Again.'  
Where all our mistakes,  
And all our heartaches,  
Can be hung like a dusty old coat on the gate,  
And never put on again.

It was then that we hit on the idea of inviting people to a service, conducted in our graveyard where the past was symbolically buried for ever. A small grave would be dug and into it a sealed envelope would be placed. It was a record of life's pains and sorrows, some of them inflicted by others; some of our own making. The envelope would then be burned and the grave filled in. The individual or family concerned would be invited to plant a shrub or tree in the loose earth, symbolising that all important new start. As part of the ceremony we would recite the following prayer. The words are mine but feel free to adapt them to your own situation. It is a fitting prayer for New Year:

*There are occasions, Father, when we would like to travel back in time and relive an event or change it for the better. We would change so much – our parentage; the environment in which we were forced to live; our mistakes; our pain; our hurt. We long to put so many things right.*

*Sadly, Lord, this is not possible. We cannot undo what has been done. It constitutes 'our' cross and we have to bear its weight.*

*What we can do, Lord, is to bury the past and destroy its power to hurt us. We can resolve, with your help, not to let the past cast a shadow over the present or future. We can bring the past to you and ask you to deal with it.*

*Lord, we bring you past wounds; past injustice; past cruelties inflicted upon us. We ask you to help us put the pain behind us. Not everything can be forgotten. Nor should it be. All we seek is sufficient grace to move on with our lives.*

*We bring our pain to you; together with our regrets for what should have been and was not.*

*Symbolically, we consign our pain to the grave for burning and burial.*

*Lord of New beginnings, deal with the things we cannot deal with; and grant us the opportunity for a fresh start. Bring good out of bad; grant joy where once there was grief. Give us your peace in our hearts.*

*You are our Father and we love you, Lord. We know that we are your much loved children and that we matter to you. Amen*

MFS

## **FAMILY NEWS UPDATE**

I write this on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2014, following our reopening service. Wasn't it a wonderful occasion? It is said that the easiest way to increase a congregation is to estimate how many were present! I am not exaggerating in any way when I say that there must have been close on 140 present. Not only was the downstairs crowded but the gallery was also nearly full. Many came to support the choir of Llangunnor Junior School and these children deserve to be supported. To the children and to their teachers – A very big THANK YOU for helping make the service so special. I had a word with the Acting Head after the service and asked if we could strengthen our links with the school by having the choir take part in our services on a quarterly basis. He readily agreed and we are now looking forward to repeating the exercise early in the New Year.

The success of the service was aided by our new surroundings. The chapel, without the pews, looked even more welcoming and it was lovely to see people 'enjoying' being in church. A word of appreciation, too, to those of our own members who took part in the service.

Helen, in thanking everyone else, omitted to thank herself. I do so now. She looked quite exhausted when she came into church and no wonder! After a very busy Saturday she still had to type out the order of service, think of a thousand and one other things and didn't get to bed until 3 am! Helen. Thank You!

MFS



## TREVOR LLOYD WRITES

*No doubt we are all aware that the EU has recently issued a directive that vacuum cleaners will not have motors over a certain size in future. Manufactures please note! This, we are told, will reduce our carbon footprint thus saving energy. However, it should be realised that if a cleaner is less effective it will take longer to do its job. This increase in hoovering time requires additional energy; result: net gain, nil. Who are these people?*

*Well their latest project concerns a common language throughout the EU. In fairness this is no bad thing as it would certainly reduce the need for a legion of translators and cut the amount of paperwork dramatically. But will we embrace it in Wales? Check it out, see what you think.*

### EUROPEAN DIRECTIVE – COMMON LANGUAGE

The dream of having a single European language has always been just that until now. At last the European Commission has announced that English will be adopted as the official language of the European Union rather than German (which had been under consideration). However, as part of the negotiations, Her Majesty's Government has agreed to certain minor changes to overcome some of the puzzling anomalies in the English language which could cause difficulties to our European partners. These changes will be phased in over the next five years, and when completed the language will be classified as Euro-English. The timetable is below:

#### YEAR 1 (2015)

The soft 'c' will be replaced by 's'. Certainly, this will make the sivil-servants jump for joy. The hard 'c' will be replased by the 'k', this should klear up konfusion and keyboards will have one less letter.

#### YEAR 2 (2016)

There should be growing publik enthusiasm in the sekond year, when the troublesome 'ph' will be replased by 'f'. This will reduse words like 'fotograf' by 20%.

#### YEAR 3 (2017)

Publik akseptanse of the new spelling kan be expekted to get to the stage where more komplikated adaptations are possible. Governments will enkourage the removal of double letters, which have always been a deterrent to akurate speling. Also, al wil agre that the horrible mes of silent 'e's in the languag is disgrasful and they should eliminat them.

#### YEAR 4 (2018)

By now peopl wil b reseptiv to lingwistik korektions such as replasing 'th' with 'z' and 'w' with 'v' (saving even mor keyboard spas).

#### YEAR 5 (2019)

During ze fifz year, ze unesesary 'o' kan be dropd from vords containing 'ou' and similar changes vud, of kors, be aplid to ozer kombinations of leters sush as 'ea'.

After zis fifz yer, ve vil hav a reli sensibl riten styl. Zer vil b no trubls or difikultis and evrivun vil find it ezi to understand ech ozer.

ZE DREM VIL FINALI KUM TRU



## THE CAROL SINGERS VISIT JOSEPH'S FARM - Laurie Lee

We approached our last house high up on the hill, the place of Joseph the farmer. For him we had chosen a special carol, which was about the other Joseph, so that we always felt that singing it added a spicy cheek to the night. The last stretch of country to reach his farm was perhaps the most difficult of all. In these rough bare lanes, open to all winds, sheep were buried and wagons lost. Huddled together, we tramped in one another's footsteps, powdered snow blew into our screwed-up eyes, the candles burnt low, some blew out altogether, and we talked loudly above the gale.

Crossing, at last, the frozen mill-stream - whose wheel in summer still turned a barren mechanism - we climbed up to Joseph's farm. Sheltered by trees, warm on a bed of snow, it seemed always to be like this. As always it was late; as always it was our final call. The snow had a fine crust upon it, and the old trees sparkled like tinsel.

We grouped ourselves around the farmhouse porch. The sky cleared, and the broad streams of stars ran down over the valley and away to Wales. On Slad's white slopes, seen through the black sticks of its woods, some red lamps still burned in the windows.

Everything was quiet; everywhere there was a faint crackling silence of the winter night. We started singing, and we were all moved by the words and the sudden trueness of our voices. Pure, very clear, and breathless we sang:

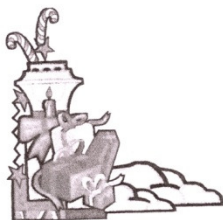
As Joseph was walking	He heard an angel sing;
'This night shall be a birth-time	Of Christ the Heavenly King.
He neither shall be borned	In Housen nor in hall,
Nor in a place of paradise	But in an ox's stall...'

And two thousand Christmases became real to us then; the houses, the halls, the places of paradise had all been visited; the stars were bright to guide the Kings through the snow; and across the farmyard we could hear the beasts in their stalls. We were given roast apples and hot mince-pies, in our nostrils were spices like myrrh, and in our wooden box, as we headed back to the village, there were golden gifts for all.

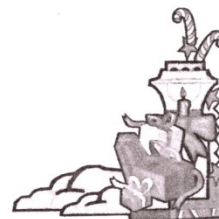
### Plum Pudding and Mince Pies

Plum pudding is so called because in days gone by prunes, which are dried plums, were used in the making of the Christmas pudding. Today we use currants, raisins and sultanas instead of prunes, but the other ingredients: suet, breadcrumbs, eggs and spices are the same as they always have been.

Mince pies were once called mutton pies, because finely chopped or minced mutton was one of the main ingredients. Like the plum pudding, the remaining ingredients were much the same as those we use today. Although we no longer use meat, we still add shredded suet, which is animal fat, in the making of both mince pies and plum puddings. Mince pies used to be oval, or cradle shaped, and not round as they are to-day. One book tells us that this was to remind people of the manger in which Jesus was born, and that the pies were to be eaten quietly as people thought about the infant Jesus. This is possibly why people today make a silent wish when they take their first bite, and why others consider it unlucky to cut a mince pie.



*gyda Dymuniadau Gorau am y Nadolig  
a Phob Hapusrwydd yn y Flwyddyn Newydd  
oddi wrth Linda a Trevor*





## **CREDO AND COMMITMENT**

At the beginning of each New Year I spend some time determining what I believe about the Christian Faith. I approach belief determined to accept only that which appears to me to be true.

I believe in God but when I meditate on his (or her) being a reverent agnosticism floods my mind. I believe that God is loving, all knowing and everywhere available but concerning his activities in his vast universe I have no means of knowing more than a minute fraction. Whether he is to be described as three in one or three million in one, who can say, and, if I may say so very reverently, what does it matter? Why should any body of ecclesiastics be allowed to debate the nature of God and then thrust their guesses upon others for all time?

I also believe in the divinity of Christ, though I do not know what divinity means. All I know is that the evidence about him suggests that he stood in a special relationship with God and reveals God as no other person has done. I would have difficulty in saying that Jesus was God in the flesh and would argue that such a statement is incorrect, if not heretical. It is a denial of monotheism and Jesus, as a Jew, would surely have been appalled by an awareness that, one day, he would be equated with God.

At the same time I believe that Jesus was and is the Saviour of the world, saving us, not from some vulgar hell, but from the despair which would fall upon men and women, if, conscious of their sublime possibilities, they saw no hope of attaining them. As to the manner of his saving I reject any association of forgiveness with the shedding of blood and experience a substitutionary atonement as unworthy and abhorrent. We pervert the idea of God if we allow ourselves to suppose that God could not forgive sins apart from the death of Christ. The cross, for me, is a demonstration of God's unending love for humanity and, more personally, for me as an individual. When I look at the cross I hear God saying, "This is how much I love you." The cross awakens a love for God in my heart.

The manner of his birth matters, in my judgement, not at all, and Mark, Peter, Paul and John never mention it. That said, I find the Christmas Story very meaningful and, by spiritualising the event, can hear God speaking to me through it.

I fully believe that Jesus survived death and that he is alive today. As to how it happened I do not know. What I am certain about is that he is an ever present friend and, spiritually, can be as real to me as he was to those who walked with him all those years ago.

I believe that the Bible is a marvellous library of writings which depict man's developing search for God. I believe the Bible to be a progressive revelation beginning with conceptions of God which are now seen to be crude and imperfect but which, ultimately, introduces us to Jesus who is the best clue to God's nature which has been anywhere received. I accept that some biblical writers were inspired by God but believe that no level of inspiration can prevent human error, prejudice or distortion. Some of the scriptures, in my view, are superb and are vastly superior to books such as the Koran. It must also be said that some parts of the Bible have little merit and I believe it would be improved were Pilgrims Progress inserted and the Song of Solomon removed.

I believe intensely in the Church but echo the thought of a bishop who once said, "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church and regret that it does not at present exist!" Its potential, though, is immense and, at its best, it is a force for supreme good in the world. Our divisions continue to be a denial of the Gospel, as does our refusal to adapt to changing times. I think it true to say that we sometimes extend so much effort on preserving structures that we lose sight of what the church is truly about – a worldwide fellowship, open to everyone and guided by the principle of love for God and justice for our fellow men and women. I believe the words on our notice board – "A broad based church serving the community." I believe that it will be a tragic day for every community when the last church building closes.

I believe in God's providence and care though, like us all, doubt it at times. In my dark times I remember that Jesus continued to call God father even when he was dying on the cross. I sometimes imagine a meeting of toddlers with a chairman aged five. I imagine an angry discussion in which speakers prove that there cannot be love at the heart of their homes. It is alleged by one speaker after another that parents allow the existence of cats with sharp claws, furniture and knives with sharp edges and paths covered with sharp gravel. How can love be said to rule when a toddler is put into a home situation carrying so many evidences that parents don't care or have no power to alter things? "Look at my cut knees," says the chairman, adjusting his bib. "Look at the scratch on my hand, and I only meant to play with the cat!" Whilst in no way wishing to make light of human sorrow I do believe that one day, when we are fully grown, we will see purpose where presently we see chaos and suffering. As Jesus once said: "You will understand hereafter."

I believe in prayer, namely that it is possible to have communion with God and that he can sometimes use our prayers to help others, when, with sincerity and love, we focus on them.

I believe that evil, from various sources is rampart in the world. I also believe in God's eventual victory over evil and hold that this is certain. I believe that when it is darkest we are best able to see the stars

I believe that the soul survives death and that after death our journey continues. I have no idea what heaven comprises but believe, wholeheartedly, that God's desire is to bring us all home in the end. I believe that our task here is to grow a soul – an appreciation of God – so that we will be better able to enjoy him forever.

I find the atheistic position untenable even though, at times, I doubt God. If I am 'certain' of God it is because I have *glimpsed* him in Jesus and, having reflected on Christ's life and teachings, am persuaded that he cannot be explained apart from God. If Jesus was wrong I will be wrong with him and go into the meaningless darkness too. I feel though, instinctively, that he was not mistaken and that, in his company, I shall experience a splendid dawn.

Such are some of my views. What do you believe?

MFS



## THE WINTER QUARTER/ WORSHIP ARRANGEMENTS

<u>December</u>	<u>7th</u>	<u>2pm</u>	Minister/ Communion
	<u>14<sup>th</sup></u>	<u>4:15 pm</u>	CAROLS BY CANDLELIGHT A bilingual service organised by Helen Gibbon
	<u>21<sup>st</sup></u>	<u>4:15pm</u>	CAROLS BY CANDLELIGHT A bilingual service organised by the minister and featuring the Llangynnor WI Choir.
<u>CHRISTMAS EVE</u>		<u>11:15 pm</u>	CANDLELIGHT COMMUNION
	<u>28<sup>th</sup></u>	<u>2pm</u>	Revd John Morgan
<u>January</u>	<u>4th</u>	<u>2pm</u>	Minister/ Communion
	<u>11<sup>th</sup></u>	<u>2pm</u>	Mr Hywel Hughes
	<u>18<sup>th</sup></u>	<u>2pm</u>	Minister
	<u>25<sup>th</sup></u>	<u>2pm</u>	Mr Hugh Waddell
<u>February</u>	<u>1<sup>st</sup></u>	<u>2pm</u>	Minister/ Communion
	<u>8<sup>th</sup></u>	<u>2pm</u>	Revd John Morgan
	<u>15<sup>th</sup></u>	<u>10:30 am</u>	Minister/ All Age Family Service
	<u>22<sup>nd</sup></u>	<u>2pm</u>	Minister

**NB** It is likely that I will be going into hospital for an operation sometime in January 2015. The arrangements for January may therefore be subject to change. I could be out of action for three weeks. MFS

Please note that our next Quiz will take place on Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> March commencing at 7pm. Our thanks, as ever, to Linda and Trevor.

**SUNDAY ATTENDANCE** On Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> October there were twenty nine of us in church. Had all regular worshippers have been present our congregation would have numbered thirty five. This is most heartening and is indicative of growth in excess of 50% over a two year period. Thank you for your support and encouragement.

### KILLED BY CHRISTMAS

I saw a stable in my dream:  
It was not mean and bare:  
A hundred thousand fairy lights;  
with timer switch was there.  
The thatch, bedecked with coloured bulbs,  
did glitter in the night;  
And people came from miles around,  
to view the festive sight.

The fabled star was anchored now.  
to stable's chimney ledge;  
And, bathed in light, sat Santa Claus,  
upon a plastic sledge.  
Another light; like laser beam,  
streamed forth from Rudolph's nose;  
It turned from green to amber;  
And then, as red, it glowed.

Above the stable entrance,  
were sprigs of Mistletoe;  
And just inside, upon the left,  
stood Christmas Tree on floor.  
And on its highrest, topmost branch;  
Amidst the silver balls;  
was a shining angel,  
who pointed to the stall.

To sound of Christmas Carols;  
Through Tinsel, oh so deep;  
I walked towards the cattle trough,  
where Mary's child did sleep.  
And there, beneath the trimmings,  
which hung round manger bed,  
I found a lifeless baby:  
**THE CHRIST OF GOD WAS DEAD!**

Mike Shephard 28/12/01