



St Ronan's Presbyterian Church
Eastbourne

Record

December 2022 – January 2023

4 December	Children's Pageant.....	9.30am
11 December	Graeme Munro (<i>Communion</i>).....	9.30am
18 December	Informal worship service.....	9.30am
25 December	Christmas Day (TBA).....	9.30am
1 January	Informal worship service.....	9.30am
8 January	Communion (TBA).....	9.30am
15 January	Informal worship service.....	9.30am
22 January	TBA.....	9.30am
29 January	Fellowship lunch with Doug Rogers.....	12 noon

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Power Hour – Sundays 9.30am
Breakfast Prayer – Tuesdays 7.45am
Mainly Music – Thursdays 9.15-11.15am

For pastoral care needs, please contact one of the Local Ministry Team
Rev Reg Weeks 027 491 5947, Simon Shaw 562 8772, Colin Dalziel 562 7238 or Sandy Lang 562 8753

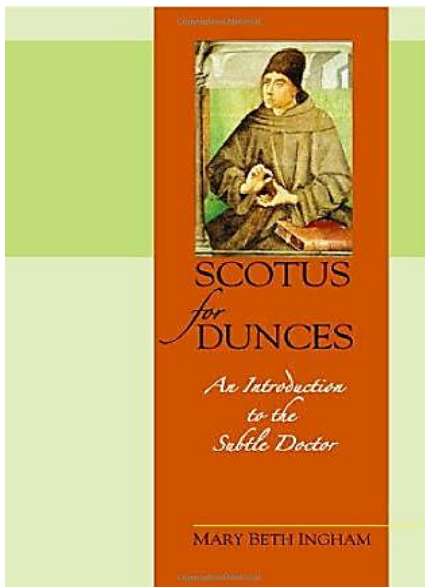
Witnesses?

While in the States, I came across this brief quote from Mark Strand, United States Poet Laureate and essayist, which provides a fresh perspective on the age-old question regarding the meaning of human existence. It resonates with the current developments in quantum mechanics and astrophysics and echoes a recurring theme in the Psalms of David.



"We're only here for a short while. And I think it's such a lucky accident, having been born, that we're almost obliged to pay attention. In some ways, this is getting far afield. I mean, we are - as far as we know - the only part of the universe that's self-conscious. We could even be the universe's form of consciousness. We might have come along so that the universe could look at itself. I don't know that, but we're made of the same stuff that stars are made of, or that floats around in space. But we're combined in such a way that we can describe what it's like to be alive, to be witnesses. Most of our experience is that of being a witness. We see and hear and smell other things. I think being alive is responding." Mark Strand

In his psalms, David was expressing the firm belief of his forebears, that the beauty of the world he saw around him, and humanity's place in it, to be the outworking of God's creative intention.



In the Middle Ages, a significant Franciscan theologian, John Duns Scotus (so called because he came from the town of Duns in Scotland) followed a similar line of thought and developed a relational understanding of God with a focus on the place of beauty. Interest in his thinking has been rekindled by Mary Beth Ingham, a Californian Professor of Philosophical Theology. Her book which Diane and I have read with appreciation, is a helpful guide to the theological and philosophical aspects of his work.

We agree with the publisher's comment that *"by organizing the book around themes that are both timely and urgent, Ingham invites the reader into thoughtful reflection, encourages lively discussion,"* and challenges us *"to consider choosing, always more consciously, lovingly, and freely, patterns of relationship that strive for goodness and beauty in all things"*

In other words, we need to be more than witnesses to the beauty of the universe but realise how *"the experience of the beauty and value of creation, the centrality of Christ, and the primacy of Trinitarian love"* can enrich our understanding of the faith, and the nature of human existence. **Reg Weeks**

Clerk's corner...

Sunday Afternoon Chamber Concert: The *Trio Muritai* concert, 'Spring into Summer', was held at St Ronan's on 27 November. A stunning performance of a lovely selection of music. People really enjoyed this concert. If you didn't, it was because you weren't there...!



For their encore, *Trio Muritai* played a stunning arrangement (by Rosemary Barnes, seen at the piano) of the beautiful carol *O Holy Night*. (1847, by French composer Adolphe Charles Adam 1803-1856). I'd like a recording of this...



St Ronan's stage area was lit as never before by new lighting (2x 100W LED lamps) recently brought with a grant from the Hutt City Council.



The *Trio Muritai* is:

- Rosemary Barnes (piano) - lives in Eastbourne and Auckland,
- Roger Brown (cello) - lives in Eastbourne and
- Rebecca Steel (flute) - would like to live in Eastbourne but lives in Te Aro instead...

Shared Communion Service: The next *Shared Communion Service* with the people of St Alban's will be on 5 February 2023 at their place (Wellesley), at their time 10am. More, closer to the time. People really seem to enjoy these 'Shared Communion Services'...!

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Sandy Lang

Christmyth Day...

A few Christmases ago I was somewhat taken aback when a preacher said Christmas is a time most preachers dread. He went on to clarify that there are only so many ways to tell the Christmas story. It's been told from every which way possible - even from the donkey's perspective! Where do you find a new angle? His words made me take another look at the story we tell.

We all know Jesus was born in a stable. The Bible says so. Joseph and Mary were turned away from the local inn because it was full. Right?

Sure, in Luke 2:7, the King James Version says "*...there was no room at the inn.*" But the New International Version (the one we mostly use today) says "*...there was no guest room available for them.*" I'm told this is a more accurate translation of the Greek word κατάλυμα (kataluma) in this context.

You have only to put yourself in Joseph and Mary's shoes to realise that Bethlehem was Joseph's hometown. They would never have gone to the local tavern. He would have had friends and family there with whom they would have stayed. But not every house would have had a guest room.



But, you say, the NIV talks about a 'manger' (food trough), so the stable story must be accurate? Well, nowhere does the Good Book mention a stable or animals. Could it be that their hosts, looking for a suitably sized infant bed, simply decided to repurpose a manger? There's nothing to say they didn't.

Then there is the Christmas stalwart, the story of the Three Wise Men - Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar. Their names don't actually appear in the Bible. These names seem to have come from a Greek manuscript, composed about 500 AD in Alexandria, Egypt and translated into Latin. Eastern branches of the Christian church have completely different names for these three men. But the Bible doesn't actually say there were three of them. Matthew 2:11 tells us only that they brought three gifts - gold, frankincense, and myrrh. It says

nothing about three people. I'm sure we've all at some stage, contributed towards a collective gift for someone – I have...

Nor does it mention their gender. In 2004, the General Synod of the Church of England decided not only that there was anything between two and twenty Magi but that (horror of horrors) they might even have included some wise women!

And just to round off, Jesus wasn't born in the year "dot". There was no year zero. The church didn't have the concept of zero till much later, so the counting leapt from 1 BC to 1 AD in 12 months, without passing through zero.

It is now generally accepted Jesus was born somewhere between 4 and 6 BC. For starters, we know He was born during the reign of Herod (Herod died in 4 BC). The census of Quirinius occurred in 6 BC. And there are a few pointers that suggest Jesus might have been as old as two when the Magi turned up - why else did Herod decree the slaughter of all boys under the age of two, rather than just new-borns?

And we have no idea of the day or of the month. The earliest source stating 25 December as the date of Jesus' birth is likely a book by Hippolytus of Rome, written in the early 300s AD. He based his view on the assumption that the conception of Jesus took place at the Spring equinox, which Hippolytus placed on 25 March, and he then added nine months to calculate the date of His birth. Pretty random...!



But does any of this make one iota of difference to Christmas?

Other than the salutary reminder that simply repeating something often enough doesn't make it a fact, no. It is always wise to fact-check everything.

Apart from that:

- Christmas should be a time when we celebrate the birth of the greatest person who ever lived;
- Christmas should be a time when we remember the things Jesus taught us; and
- Christmas should be a time when we share His love with family, friends - AND with those who might be a bit harder to love too.

When we do it and how we do it, doesn't really matter. What DOES really matter is that we do it...!

Merry Christmas, **John Harris**



A Cautionary Tale...

On 21 February I had my last COVID booster shot. Five days later I went down with some kind of infection. I have been unwell ever since. At least two bouts of cold/flu symptoms, each of over eight-weeks duration. These have kept me housebound for most of the winter. Any excursions have been limited: walking limited to a few hundred metres; car trips have been short and extremely tiring; any interface with people has been limited and short.

A visit to a doctor's 'respiratory clinic' yielded only an amoxicillin prescription. In October my cold/flu symptoms resurged, with coughing, nasal infection, fatigue and general debilitation, and driving became dangerous. I was

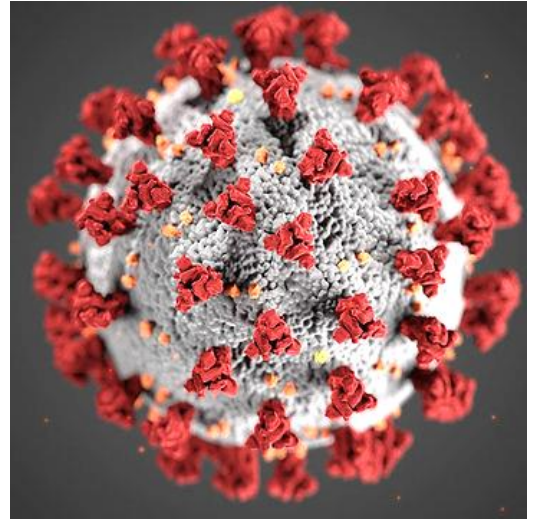
encouraged to take a RAT test. It showed COVID positive - two black lines. An internet check showed other recognisable symptoms.

I believe that I obtained the infection *as a consequence of* the covid jab on February 21, and that it has yo-yoed ever since.

I contacted a Health Department covid number and explained my story. They said there is no cure; muttered about "long covid"; the immune system will do its best; suggested supplementation with vitamin C and zinc.

Among the cautionary lessons:

- Being fully vaccinated is no guarantee that Covid won't get you anyway.
- If you have a "cold" or "flu", take a RAT test; that "cold/flu" may be something else.
- If you visit a GP, insist they take a RAT test to ensure your infection is harmless.



For the present I can do little more than sit quietly/helplessly in the sun, occasionally sipping lemon juice, or blackcurrant juice, and trusting that my immune system can eventually triumph over the insurgents.

Geoff Mann [7/11/22]

Update [29/11/22]

Note that I did not write that the February 21 jab infected me with COVID but rather that I was unwell as a consequence of the jab. The Health Department people I spoke to were sympathetic to my account and even used a term I had never heard before: 'co-incession'. [Ed. walking along together]

For the past three weeks I have continued my housebound existence, not even venturing out into the garden, and certainly not driving anywhere. So, I am thankful for New World's excellent online ordering and delivery system. Over the past week symptoms have begun to subside; appetite and taste are returning. Yesterday I drove to the Hutt to get a haircut and was able to enjoy the spectacular decorations in the mall.

If two weeks ago I was describing my status as 'very unwell', today I upgrade that to simply '(continued) unwell.'

Children's Power Hour – "Here I am Lord"

Learning about our unique gifts, enables us to direct how we might serve others. During the year the children have learned how some Old Testament heroines and heroes, such as Esther, Moses, Daniel, Nehemiah and Zechariah used their gifts when God called them to serve others.

We have also learnt about how Jesus, in his early student days, had his name called by his Rabbi teachers, to continue with his studies to become a Rabbi. By having his name called, it meant that he showed promise of doing much more that was worthy.



Following on from this theme of serving God with our gifts, our Power Hour currently closes with a themed verse which we share out loud together:

"Thank you, God, that you know my name and call me to help others."

This verse always makes us feel like we end our time together on a high, with great solidarity, satisfaction and positivity.

Now, here's our neat Advent news! Last week, the children all smiled and went "Yeah! Yeah!" when told that the following week they "had been called to help others" - by making the annual St Ronan's Christmas Cake batter for the congregation to stir.

They were looking forward all week to doing this creative church service. They were thrilled to do it!





Children love taking on responsibilities and being recognized for making a difference to others. They grow in self-awareness and self-esteem when their skills are appreciated. How else do children learn to hone their gifts if they aren't given a chance to exercise them?

They grow in faith when their actions are guided by following Jesus and showing their ability to love. "Thank you, God, for calling their names!"

Susan Connell

Phil's photo – Village faces...

Eastbourne is a fabulous place to live. Not only have we the bush (to the east), the sea (to the west), the lonely coast road winding its way out, to nature's wilderness of Pencarrow (to the south) and the main road winding its way in, from the urban wilderness of the Hutt (to the north) but we also have the smiling faces we meet most days in the village.





A fine community
of kind people...!



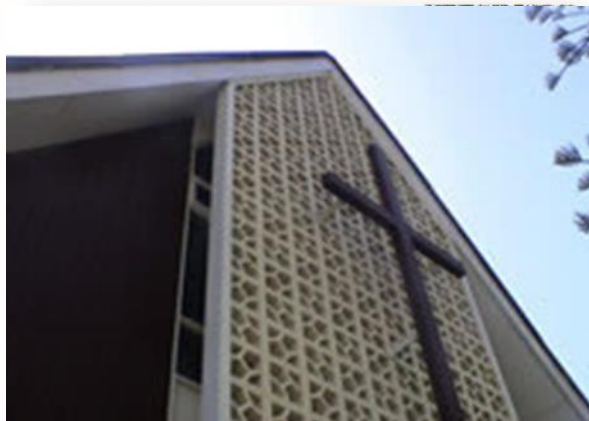


As they all wish us a 'Happy Christmas', so do we Eastbournites wish them a 'Happy Christmas' and a huge 'Thank you' for making their own unique contributions to the life of the little place we call 'Our Village'...

With blessings **Phil Bengé**

PS I really did enjoy doing this one...! 😊

PPS Space and time were limited. Obviously, I've failed to get everyone in. Enjoy those you see here but don't feel bad if I've missed you out. 😞



Our God calls us to worship and grow together and to show the love of Christ through serving our community.

Directory

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Contributions for the 'Record' are most welcome
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They do not necessarily represent those of St Ronan's Church

**And the closing date for our next *Record* for February 2023
is Sunday 29 January 2023**