

NewView

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Reconsidering the Christmas Story

Neil's Musings	2
Poem, 'Advent Event'	3
More Musings	3
Designer Babies, Pyramids & the First Christmas	4
Who is Joshua?	4

How Long God?	6
'Creatures' (poem)	7
Christmas at The Hub	8
Getting to Know You:	
Frances & John La Fontaine	9
Munch with a Bunch	11
GWUC Fete	12

Getaways at Marysville	14
Getting to Know Our Church:	
Badminton Club	15
Book Review	16
#Let Them Stay	17
Uniting Voices	18
Pastoral Notes	19-20

When I was a small child I was told, and believed, that the noise of thunder was caused by the big clouds bumping against each other. It was an explanation that suited my limited understanding and experience of my world. As I got older I realised this unscientific explanation was incorrect and I put away my childish belief (although I'm not sure my current understanding about thunder is much more specific!). It is a natural process I am still undergoing, as my understanding of my world expands. Likewise, I accepted the Christmas story of the baby born in a stable as historical truth. Many years passed before I thought to question the impossibility of a star from the heavens pinpointing with GPS accuracy, the location of a stable adjacent to an inn. (Even given the concept at that time of a 3-tiered universe, that star would have had to have been dangerously close!)

When I turned to the study of literature I made the exciting discovery that the birth story of Jesus was not unique! Centuries before the time of Jesus, the Greeks had already developed their myths about the origins of their gods. Perseus had been conceived by 'a golden shower' from the heavens which had impregnated his mother. Many scholars have observed the patterning of such mythical stories, and have noted that their 'truth' lies not in the literal details but in the wider significance of the life and accomplishments being reviewed.

Later still I formally studied the scriptures in preparation for overseas service with my church. Again I was confronted by the impossibility of accepting this loved and familiar story as historical fact. The situation was more complicated than I had thought. As Neil Peters points out (p. 2), the gospels of Mark and John do not even contain the story of the stable manger we celebrate; while the differences in the stories from the gospels of Matthew and Luke convinced me I could not be reading a historical account, since historians attempt to accurately record and interpret actual events. This, I realised, is a myth whose deeper truth is in accounting for a life of momentous significance! It is intended to confirm Jesus' credentials.

Jesus' story as recorded in Matthew and Luke is constructed in an already-known literary pattern, such as that used often in the stories of Greek heroes, where care is taken to trace a lineage from the kings (as occurs in Matthew and Luke) and conception and virgin births (like that of Perseus') arose from heavenly intervention. These Gospel writers are writing in the interpretive (rather than literal) 'midrash' tradition, but each with his individual point of view. Luke seems to focus more on the humble everyday origins of the parents, particularly on Mary. Matthew structures his story so that Jesus' birth can be seen as the fulfilment of Jewish prophecy. But it was not until about four decades after Jesus' death that the Christian community felt the need to provide this back-story for when his life had begun. In doing so, they follow the long-established literary practice already established in the Hellenic world.

So, how has this affected my faith? My belief in the Christmas story has undergone a transformation as my expanding knowledge has caused me to re-examine my earlier understanding of it. It has made me aware that my faith is not static, but is living and organic and therefore subject to change and adaption. It is the wonderful journey we all share, as we grow in experience and understanding. For me, the important thing about Christmas is that we celebrate the coming of a man whose life overturned the commonly accepted values of his time, and whose life and death, in demonstrating love and care for all regardless of status, still challenges us today to live with such love in the same way. The stories of the birth in the stable, the wandering star, the shepherds, magi and angels are familiar (and loved) but are secondary to this one fact of Jesus' coming and his life. That's why this period is called 'Advent'!

We are fortunate that in this issue many others have generously shared their individual understandings of the significance of Christmas, and we thank them. There is also much evidence of the many activities occurring in our community as we take this faith journey together. It is another cause for celebration!

Robin Pope

Neil's Musings

The Significance of Christmas



I love the season of Christmas and singing carols and the rich food and the desire for peace and goodwill to all. As a minister it can be quite challenging year by year coming up with something to say that is fresh and engaging and, dare I suggest, helpful for people.

Biblical scholars and historians do affirm that Jesus really did live and travelled as an itinerant teacher and preacher initially around the region of Galilee. A healing ministry was also attributed to Jesus. It can be unnerving to have a close look at the four Gospels and see the differences in relation to the beginnings of Jesus' life.

Each of the gospels is written into a context, and they are written to encourage faith in Jesus Christ. Mark does not have a birth narrative. From the first verse in Mark we are told clearly 'This is the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God'. Following the baptism of Jesus, Mark quickly launches into Jesus calling disciples and beginning his ministry. We hear that in Jesus the Kingdom of God has come near.

Matthew has a genealogy of the ancestors of Jesus. Matthew is writing to a Jewish Christian community and so being of the line of David is important and fulfils prophecy. Matthew is the only gospel to have the visitors from the East. Within the birth account we hear important understandings about Jesus being declared. 'You will name him Jesus because he will save his people from their sins'. A few verses later: 'He will be called Immanuel which means God with us'. It is this understanding that remains key for me in Matthew. People might experience God's presence in different ways today but I still feel I can affirm that God is with us, God stands with us in the good and the bad aspects of life.

Luke has the census (and there is discussion among scholars about whether a census happened at the time named in the gospel), a manger scene and the shepherds who visit the baby. There is great humility expressed in this birth story. No room in which to stay. The announcement of good news to the shepherds is that their Saviour is born. Jesus has come for hard working fringe dwellers. He has come for all people.

Sometimes our congregations look very middle class. The reality today, yesterday and tomorrow is that Jesus breaks down all barriers – barriers of age, gender, ethnicity, culture, economic advantage or disadvantage, people with special needs – all are welcomed, accepted and valued.

John, a later gospel, doesn't have a birth narrative. The writer affirms in rich language that the Word that existed before the world existed has become human and dwelt among us. In a mysterious and wonderful way God has come to us in Jesus. This is similar to the sense of Immanuel from Matthew's gospel.

Historians and Biblical scholars will question and raise issues from each of the gospels. I will always look to see what the author is trying to say to us about God, about Jesus, and about human beings and the world in which we live. What is being said to us for today? This Christmas, may God speak to you words to encourage you in your journey of faith and discipleship.

Rev Neil Peters

Reconsidering our Faith through the Christmas Story

Advent Event

The Transcendent

It has been,
was before,
is now,
and will be
again.

Celebrated at Christmas
the 'Advent Event':

My tradition,
what about yours?

The transcendent
was, is,
and will be;
experienced
in the imminent –
the beyond time
in time,
along life's journey.

The Door

Across
all creation;
the opportunity,
to manifest
elements of
the transcendent.

Where and what
is the door?
It was him,
and now
it's up to
you and me.

To be 'the way';
in the moment,
day and night,
in the dark
and in the light.

The Wind

Be aware,
in the present;
beyond
the filter of words,
across the Creation
ever
'a wink and a nod'.

Like the wind,
and the rustle
of leaves;
a flower opening,
the clouds in the sky,
a ripple on the pond.

P. G. Baker

Christmas seems to come earlier each year - the shortbread and mince pies were on display in the supermarket immediately after Halloween, and lots of merchandise appeared on the shelves well before Advent. The story of Jesus' birth gets lost in the commercialism and hype, and in the rush of family gatherings and end-of-year parties.

Yet, I also wonder if people now view that story as being in the realm of myth and fantasy, having no lasting meaning for their lives.

Increasingly over recent years, I have questioned the relevance of the imagery used, imagery that comes from a world long past. Through reading and discussion, and, yes, even TV programs, I'm learning more of the culture into which Jesus was born, about archeological discoveries in the lands of the Bible, and the history - and the politics - of the early church. It is fascinating to see how different ideas developed, decisions were made to adopt some and discard others, and how practices were absorbed from the surrounding society. There is, in fact, a simple example of how change can occur in the story of the Epiphany. Matthew [RSV] has wise men, or astrologers, coming from the East, but over the years, they have become three kings to whom we have given names and race, and given them camels to ride.

This learning is an exciting process, not only in reconsidering my faith, but also looking afresh at the Christmas story.

Alison Barr

Reconsidering our Faith through the Christmas story

Designer Babies, Pyramids, and the First Christmas

One of my favourite hymns is 'The Servant King', which can reduce many of us to tears. There is something grand in the lines – *From heaven you came helpless babe, And taught our world, your glory veiled, Not to be served but to serve, You gave your life that we might live...Hand that flung stars into space, to cruel nails surrendered.* The creator of the universe came to earth as a baby, died a criminal's death to show us what service, sacrifice, and love look like. We must be very important to God.

Some years ago I happened on a TV program where a U.S. politician was speaking at a scientific conference. As a Christian he suggested that God calls to scientists – Come, follow, and I will show you how I have put this universe together and how you can use the knowledge for the good of human kind.

Two dots joined for me recently. The American's words came to mind over a TV news item on the Three Parent Embryo Technique. The procedure promises to help children avoid often fatal genetic diseases passed on through their mother's DNA. The mother's defective genetic information is carried in her mitochondria. Now scientists are able to swap in healthy mitochondrial DNA from another woman. So many say of scientific discovery, 'This has gone too far. Scientists must stop playing God'. Instead, should we ask - 'Is God leading us in the search to improve the human condition?' If God is Lord of all creation and holds the whole thing together, and cares enough for us to enter our human lot as a baby, then maybe we shouldn't close our minds to what he might want for us. Jesus healed. Now, since the resurrection and ascension, we are the hands and feet of God.

The Great Pyramid of Giza was built for Pharaoh Khufu around 2,560 BC. In the twenty-first century experts are looking for hidden chambers deep inside the structure. They have discovered muons penetrate through rock to reveal, on exactly positioned photographic plates, voids in the construction. The muons or high speed particles, created by cosmic rays from collapsing stars, are used to estimate the size of cavities through millions of tons of rock. If the politician is right, what a God, who enables us to explore and satisfy our curiosity using something emanating from millions of light years away.

God has given us the ability to discover how he has put our universe together, how it operates, what we can do with what exists. Scientists have played an important role in history, whether they believe in their creator or not. We in turn must be careful not to adopt a 'Flat Earth' policy and persecute those who discover things about our world we aren't happy with.

The slippery slope lies in our motive for pushing scientific discoveries and for what purpose. Unfortunately there are always people who turn good things to bad use. The museum at Dachau concentration camp in southern Germany, is a case in point of the terrible use of experimentation on human beings.

The choice of what we do with scientific and other knowledge, God leaves in human hands. We have a grave responsibility. Of course we stumble, make mistakes. We're human. But then that's why Jesus (especially designed human/divine baby) came to the manger and hung on the Cross. Jesus the Servant King who paid the price out of love.

Anne Cook

WHO IS JOSHUA?

Our old white church up on the hill,
no longer rings with carols sweet;
no lessons read, no love, goodwill;
no pattering of the children's feet.

They've all flocked to Mall Overkill.

Opened their wallets to spread good cheer,
put mountains of presents beneath the tree,
bought lobster, turkey, pudding and beer;
trolleys weighted by a massive spree.

On Christmas Day, left all alone,

I climbed the hill to the old church gate,
an empty sadness chilled the air,
my sleeve was wet with tears.

The dilapidated building is abandoned now,
wind blows through the missing boards.

The old iron Cross up on the gable
leans all rusted with the years.

I saw that old man Joshua,
who wears a tattered overcoat.

He was sitting on a weathered log
beneath the gnarled gum tree.

In his hands a long French stick;
At his feet a bottle of wine.

Bright parrots chattered from a bough,
scattered red blossoms on his head.

Up on the leaning, rugged Cross,
a magpie warbled soft and clear.

The old man beckoned while I stood,
so I sat down by his side.

He said the world had passed him by,
dispensed with his carpentry skills.

Then he broke his long French stick
and we swigged from the bottle of wine.

Reflection

As a comment on our age, the narrator of the poem can no longer be a child or a woman. The risk of being alone with a stranger and sharing their food is too great. Who knows what they might do?

Christ, the Lord of all creation, born in a stable, laid in an animal food-trough. Friend of sinners. Rejected. Hung on a tree like a criminal. Who knows what he has done?

Love divine all loves excelling.

Joy of heaven to Earth come down.

Visit us with thy salvation.

Enter every trembling heart.

Jesus! What have you done?

Anne Cook

How Long God?

If you are a creationist, please read no further. You may find these ideas too far away from the position that you hold to be comfortable.

Have you wondered when it was that God finally revealed Himself to those of His Creation who could comprehend His magnificence? Not an actual date, of course, but at what point in the human era did God say, "Let there be light"? These are things pondered over, as I try to reconcile the story of creation as unfolded in the Old Testament and the story of evolution being revealed to us even now. Many scientists have struggled and continue to struggle with this apparent divide between their faith and their work.

Evolution

If we take the story of human self knowledge as not extending much further back than 65,000 years, as our own aboriginal people, and evidence from researchers show, we have a useful time frame. Within this time we can use radio carbon dating to find with some accuracy the ages of various human and proto human remains our archeologists have unearthed. Samples of these remains are Homo Habilis, Cro Magnon Man (Homo Sapiens), Neolithic Man and even Scarborough Man. We must also consider Australian aboriginal rock art, at least 40 000 years old (eg. Kimberley region, Mirrar people), as evidence of cultural sophistication.

These snapshots of early human existence all suggest a pre-literate human who communicated with his fellows, but without our linguistic or mental sophistication.

We can move from the earliest links between great apes and humanoids to human people whom we would claim kinship with, by using these time frames. There seems little doubt that the human branch of this family in time developed language, increasingly sophisticated. In parallel, humans developed thought processes about abstract concepts, the past and the future, all the while remaining linked genetically to their ancestors.

It seems that it was language and possibly an early form of writing which gave humans their ability to develop special relationships with each other and, probably later, with their creator. Language enabled the growth and expression of

such ideas as reverence, love, trust, giving, service and sacrifice. Writing made transmission of ideas across time and distance a real possibility.

At the same time, some humans saw, with even closer regard, that the world around them was marvellously made and that they were a part of this world. Maybe this was when humans also slowly came to understand that a higher being than any they perceived amongst themselves was at work in their world. The time for the first revelation and naming of the Creator was coming closer.

Revelation

We thus turn to consider this Creator, this holding-back God, ever responsive to His creatures. A caring Father, He never burdened them with knowledge they could not comprehend, but waited for them to be ready. And so He did not say, 'Let there be light' until humanity was receptive to a Creation story.

Every people has its creation myth, and its creator, from a rainbow serpent to the spittle of the gods. But only the Hebrews, as far as we know, developed a creation story firmly based around creation by a stern but loving God built like themselves. Only they saw themselves as the people of God, shaped and nurtured to spread knowledge of His Might amongst other peoples. It seems likely that many creation myths came before the Hebrew realisation that they were the chosen people.

The Hebrew understanding of their special role was also shaped by their historical circumstances as a minor, migratory tribe in the middle east. In seeking land of their own they travelled from ancient Iraq to Palestine, where they pushed out earlier tribes and established themselves at the centre of the known world. This was a good location from which to disseminate their special understandings. Even their years of captivity and slavery in Egypt and Babylon, portrayed in the Old Testament as tragic, gave them opportunities, such as told in the Book of Esther, to influence local opinion makers.

It was not until the third century BCE that the Hebrew holy books were begun (Mays, 1988) and even then they were compiled by many writers.

How Long God?

This suggests that, if the books were inspired by God, the contents were not written down until they could be understood and disseminated by those who could write and read. In other words, God withheld revelation of His creative and ongoing power until His people were prepared to receive it. We have all read of the bumpy relationship God had with the Hebrew people, their backsliding and His merciful forgiveness. They are rather like us! And yet He persevered knowing that that their leaders would in the end be faithful to their mission.

This brings us to the point of understanding that God reveals of Himself only what we are ready to know. It follows that God is still revealing His kingdom through the work of His chosen ones. It also suggests that predestination is unable to sit alongside free will. To allow predestination negates freedom of choice and makes us merely biddable puppets.

God's greatest revelation was through the person and knowledge of Jesus Christ. The words of Jesus shape a lot of what we believe about God. God breaks into human history, but only when circumstances are ripe. But that immense revelation of the Nature of God by and to Christ, while very important, is not the end.

A connection in us?

However imperfectly, with prayer we can also play a small part in showing the world our own understandings of what God means, and in bringing about His Kingdom. Simultaneously we can see, if we choose to look, that He is still very much an ongoing Presence amongst us. The mighty powers of revelation and evolution are met in us, but both also continue towards an end time in an unknown future.

Notes

Homo Habilis was discovered at Olduvai Gorge, Tanzania, in 1960 by Mary and Charles Leakey. The skull was probably at least a million years old and is the 'missing link' between the great apes and humans.

Homo Sapiens was discovered near Cro Magnon village in France in 1868. The date of the remains is not given but may be older than the last ice age which covered much of modern France with sheet ice until about 10,000 years ago.

Neolithic Man was discovered in Switzerland in 1864. He and his family date from about 5000 BCE and were lake dwellers.

Scarborough Man was unearthed in 1846. His intact skeleton can be carbon dated from about 2000 BCE.

There have been many other discoveries of prehistoric remains. It is interesting to see how interdependent the development of Darwin's theories and the recognition and presumed dates of ancient remains were.

James Mays (1988). *Harpers Bible Commentary*. Harper and Row, San Francisco.

Laele Pepper

Laele passed away in August 2017. She was a regular contributor to NewView and a prolific reader and writer. She submitted this article for publication before her death. It is published with permission of her family.

Creatures

Out of the sea a creature crawled
Seeking prey, its thoughts on food.
Eons passed.

Out of the swamp a creature
crawled
Dry land now home, its thoughts
on food.
More eons passed.

Humanoid, a creature scrabbled
Turning soil and throwing seed
To reap a crop. Its thoughts on
Female filled, young things
birthed, food.

And eons passed.

Merely a million years ago,
Belly full, manlike, a creature
fashioned stones
to beg crop certainty.
Looked up beyond the soil, its
food,
and knew its limitations.
At last, God said,
'Let there be light.'

Are we progressed so far
that now it's muzak we prefer?
Squabbling, shouting, fighting?
Anything to drown that still small
Voice
Of the Creator known within?

Laele Pepper

Nativity Scenes at The Hub



'You will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths'
Isabella as Mary



'There were shepherds out in the field keeping watch over their flock by night.'
Zachary, one of the shepherds, and Moore (right), one of his sheep



'And an angel of the Lord appeared to them' (Ayla)



'And the angel said, 'Be not afraid for I bring you good news of great joy'
(Charlotte)



'Wise men from the East came...'
(Sam and Chloe)

Photos by Geraldine Fleming & Jenny Vass

Getting to Know John and Frances La Fontaine

Frances and John La Fontaine have faced their fair share of ups and downs during the course of their long lives, but determination to tackle new situations with flexibility has seen them overcome them all.

Frances was the fourth of her parents' five children, born 91 years ago in Korumburra and living on her parents' dairy farm about 8 km out of town. Her family regularly attended the local Anglican church at Jumbunna, but being only a small hamlet there were no other activities provided, so she attended Sunday School run by the local Salvation Army. When she reached school age, Frances joined her older brothers and sisters and the children from two nearby farms to walk to the Jumbunna Primary School, 11 of them making the daily trip together. She recalls once being dared to pick an apple overhanging a fence on the route, and a stentorian 'No!' from the other side of the fence stopping her in the act. She remembers too how in such a small close-knit community, news of any such childhood misdemeanours reached her parents' ears before she had even arrived home from school!

Frances completed her Merit Certificate at the early age of 11, but since the school leaving age was 14 she was obliged to continue attending school, doing lessons through the correspondence school, until she reached 14. Then she began her long and interesting adult working life, beginning with a position at the Jumbunna store-post office as post mistress, and then moving to the Korumburra exchange as a telephonist. At age 20 Frances married a young man working in the dairy industry, and they had three children - two girls and a boy. Soon after the birth of her first child Frances suffered a detached retina. At that time the treatment to repair such damage was a ban on any physical activity at all, so she was admitted to St Vincent's Hospital where she spent a



month lying prostrate, not permitted even to move her head. On discharge she had to have help to care for her baby, whom she was not allowed to lift for six months. Fortunately the inactivity enabled the retina to reattach.

Her husband's employment required a shift to Drouin, then to Laver's Hill, Fish Creek, Tallangatta and Robinvale. Tragically, when her children were aged 5, 8 and 11, Frances' husband died and she had to return with her children to Korumburra where her parents were still on the farm. Frances recalls that she thought the world had ended, but she also knew that somehow she had to pick herself up and go on, being solely responsible for her three children. Although her family was wonderfully supportive, she determined to take on any job which brought in an income. She was on her own with her children for 9 years, and in that time she studied to acquire secretarial skills, to give herself a greater scope for employment opportunities. Many of her jobs were as a secretary - in a solicitor's office, a high school, and latterly working with the Uniting Church at Broadmead and Overton, and travelling around relieving at other locations. However, adaptability is evident in other work she took on in retail work, as a waitress, and as an ambulance driver transporting patients. John remembers suggesting, when they married, that she might like to stay at home now, but the idea

Getting to Know John and Frances La Fontaine

fell on deaf ears! She did not retire from paid employment until age 67.

While Frances was growing up in Korumburra, John was in northern Victoria, with his younger brother and sister. John had been born in Kew, but when the Great Depression of the 1930s came, his father had had to move his family back up to Tallandoon, where he was close to his own parents and he could obtain work cutting timber for the sawmills. John remembers there wasn't much money, but they were fed and clothed and had a happy childhood, spent in the company of many cousins, and attending the local Methodist Church. When John was 8 his father obtained permanent work on the railways and the family moved into Tallangatta. After completing 6th grade at Tallangatta Primary School he moved on to Wodonga Higher Elementary School. But John was sick of school by age 15 so left and got a job in a garage, where he learned his trade in the automotive field. It was to be a lifelong interest and occupation, and with a partner he eventually bought out the business where he had first started work. When the Hume Weir was being constructed Tallangatta was relocated to enable the old town site to be flooded, and John's business, along with their homes, moved to the new town in 1956.

In the 1950s Frances, with her husband and family had lived in Tallangatta where they had met John's family, and subsequently kept in correspondence with his parents. Eventually Frances was invited to visit and she and John began a friendship which led to their marriage in 1967. However, in 1973 they were on holiday in Western Australia when John became ill with a respiratory problem and they had to abandon the holiday to fly back to Melbourne for treatment. A further complication with John's heart meant he had to sell his business and take 12 months off work to recuperate. By 1974 he had recovered sufficiently to return to work as an automatic transmission repairer. Frances had been working to help support them during his illness. At first they lived in a caravan at Crystal Brook and after spending a cold month there they were pleased to move to a flat in Glen Iris. John loved living in the flat where there was no garden to tend after work! They were eventually able to buy a house in East Burwood, and when John's work transferred to South Melbourne they moved again, to East St Kilda.

In 1978 John took extended leave so they could tour around Australia with their caravan. But when they reached Port Hedland they learned that John's father was ill with cancer, so they abandoned their holiday and returned to Victoria. On his return to work, John was surprised to be offered the manager's job - as a reward for leaving, or returning? he wondered. A change of job to RACV in 1985, and subsequently to its Noble Park location resulted in another shift of house, this time to Wheeler's Hill. It was while they were there that they joined our Uniting Church congregation, and Frances became a foundation member of the Waverley Ladies' Probus Club, where she was membership secretary. They stayed in Wheeler's Hill until 2000 when they downsized to their current unit in Glen Waverley.

John retired in 1994. In 1986 they had had a holiday house built on Philip Island, where John was able to engage in water sports; but they sold this soon after John's retirement so that they were free to follow their greatest love, travelling with their caravan. They feel very privileged to have seen so much of Australia. A map on their wall highlights the many journeys they have taken to the out-of-the-way parts of our country. They have always made it their practice to find out when church was held at the towns they visited, so they could still regularly participate in worship. Although now coping with limited mobility and unable to travel as before, their link with our congregation continues with attendance each Sunday, and John, despite advancing years, is still on the cleaning roster.

They both recall with thankfulness the support they had from their families and friends when times were tough for them. In their turn, they were glad to be able to care for elderly relatives who needed assistance later. Their marriage has navigated many changes. Health problems and work variability have been difficulties they have often had to overcome. Tragedy has also touched their lives, in the deaths of Frances' first husband, and then of her elder daughter in 2012. But they have faced it all with the philosophy that you have to simply 'get on with it', and have adapted to their changing circumstances as life required. Their partnership will have spanned 50 years on December 30, 2017, and they will have plenty to celebrate at their Golden Wedding Anniversary!

Robin Pope

Munch with a Bunch Lunch



On November 12, Munch with a Bunch kicked off the silly season by joining together to share their end-of-year meal. Guests were seated at tables brightly decorated for the season. Entertainment was provided by a group of our talented younger folk: Matthew Boldiston, Jacob Davey and Michael Boldiston, and the guests shared in a Kris Kringle distribution of gifts. Thank you to the organisers, helpers and entertainers for this warm, friendly and melodious occasion!



GWUC GRAND FETE ON



When the blossom comes out on the crab apple trees we all know it's time for the Grand Fete. Months and months of planning, collecting, canvassing, sewing, cooking, shopping, knitting, woodworking and selecting what can be given takes place, followed by a couple of days of frenzied activity delivering and setting up the goods for sale. The time has arrived! We are ready to open our doors! We, and our customers, can browse through our offerings and find that bargain to take home, or perhaps rest awhile, listen to the music and have a refreshing drink or some food. Here is a small pictorial record of the day, when we raised an amazing \$29,683.52!



OCTOBER 21, 2017



Getting Away at Marysville



In late November, 15 GWUC Getaways gathered together in the leafy surrounds of Marysville, some in their caravans, others in the caravan park cabins. On the Saturday some attended the opening of the rebuilt Anglican Church, a highlight for the town after years of work following the 2009 bushfires.

Visitors from GWUC joined us on both Saturday and Sunday. There was enjoyment of shared walks, food, admiration of local scenery and bird life, relaxed conversation and recollection of earlier years and friends. We were ably led, organised and hosted by Jo and Michael Boldiston and Margaret Lemke, to whom we offer our heartfelt thanks for this respite!

R. Pope



Getting to Know Your Church: Badminton & Table Tennis Club

There may be some members of the church who may not have heard that Glen Waverley Uniting Church has a vibrant Badminton and Table Tennis Club which meets weekly on Monday and Thursday nights at 8.00pm. We have a permanent membership of more than ten people who are joined weekly by a varying number of occasional participants, with a large number coming from the community nearby and outside of the church.



The following are observations of the Badminton Club from an interview with Mr Onn Chin.

NV: How long do you believe that the Club has been running?

Onn: **I joined in 1995 and it was going for a good while before that.**

NV. From your recollection, where was the first venue of the Club where the sport was held?

Onn: **In the hall as we are now, but the floor was not done up as well then. We used lines drawn up with chalk and the net was strung up from the wall with poles pulling it down at the court edge. [Much different from the well regarded tiled floor and mobile net poles of today]**

NV: Who were some of the current GWUC members who were joined by you in the early days of the sport?

Onn: **Ian McMillan, Glen Laub, Charles Sim, a guy from Property who worked in school repairs [who has] now left us. Can't remember his name. [It was Mr Phil Dawkins]**

NV: In a Utopian dream for the Club future, and with limitless resources, what two changes could we make to strengthen the Club?

Onn: **We could use more courts and table tennis space.**

NV: How many people do we currently have on the records for membership that you hold?

Onn: **We have about 25 now with transients of around 10.**

NV: When did you first start playing badminton?

Onn: **When I was 10 in 1955 I started to play.**

NV: Where did you first start to play?

Onn: **I played In Ipoh, N. Malaysia.**

NV: Why is badminton so readily pursued as a sport in Malaysia?

Onn: **Badminton is seen as cheap and we played out in the open on sand. This makes the sport accessible to all.**

NV: How many of the Club members were in the Club when you first started playing?

Onn: **I think 6-8 people but you can ask Ian McMillan.**

NV: What relevance does the Club have with the wider work of the church?

Onn: **We now outreach more to the community and external groups.**

NV: What are three tips you would give to others to improve their badminton game?

Onn: **I recommend consistency, practice and to take some coaching.**

Andrew Hosking

Book Review

V. H. H. Green [1961] (New ed. 1974), *Luther and the Reformation*, Mentor Books.

The book, *Luther and the Reformation* by VH Green was first written in 1961 and reprinted in 1974. Luckily, history books tend not to date, but they do reflect the author's interpretation of significant events. Later scholars may add to this.

Martin Luther, son of a north German farmer, undertook university studies at Erfurt in Saxony, then an independent German principality. His major studies were in logic and in 1505 he joined the Augustinian Order of monks, as many undergraduates did. In time he rose to the rank of professor and divided his time between lecturing in nominalism at Wittenberg and working with the Augustinians at Erfurt. He found nominalism a sterile discipline, a good training in logic but of itself backward-looking and medieval, taking no account of changing ideas. Luther later felt these years misspent, but was not yet ready to put forward any attack on the monolithic Church under which he served.

In 1510 he was one of a deputation sent to Rome by the German Augustinians; here he may have mentally contrasted the strictness of the German order with the ostentation and laxity of papal Rome. He gradually moved away from orthodox nominalist teaching with its commentaries and glosses towards the Holy Scriptures as the central feature of his thinking and understanding. A key declaration of his was that we are born sinful but are 'accounted righteous by God through faith'. In lecturing he abandoned the medieval schoolmen of his upbringing, Thomas, Scotus, and Aristotle, in favour of St Augustine and his own views, based directly on the Testaments and Pauline letters. At the same time he criticised the gap between the purposefulness of the early church and the worldliness and moral laxity of its priests he now observed.

Indulgences originated at the time of the Crusades. The theory was that the Church held a treasury of merits, accrued by the infinite merits of Christ and the apostles, which could be distributed to the pious or faithful. In time indulgences became tradable items, even benefiting souls in Purgatory. Luther was upset to find that the sale of indulgences to the laity was helping to pay for the new St Peters in Rome and the debts accrued by the installation of the local Archbishop of Mainz.

In 1517, he placed his 95 theses on the door of Wittenberg castle, declaring his intention to defend them by academic disputation. These theses criticised indulgences and proved them contrary to the Gospel. Grace could not be cheaply bought. The pope and his backers were furious.

Luther was not alone in fanning the bonfire he had created. While the Reformed Church was becoming organised, other ministers were teaching and preaching unforeseen implications of his basic teaching, notably Zwingli in Switzerland and the Anabaptists throughout North Germany. Congregations who rebelled against the secular authorities in the name of religious freedom found themselves confronted by the Holy Roman Emperor, whereas Luther's position was that church and state were all subordinated to God, and therefore secular authorities were to be obeyed by churchgoing people. (This unwillingness to separate Church and State powers, after their paths had diverged, led to some appalling injustices in parts of 20th century Europe but Luther cannot be blamed for these.)

Close knowledge of German politics of the period would help in filling out details which are hinted at but which show the struggles of the Lutheran Church to gain recognition against Roman opposition. Luther himself became less active as he aged (he died in 1546) but others such as Calvin took up the cause of the Protestant revolution. Luther's robust pamphlets written against adherents to conservatism are set out in fuller detail in the book. Close reference to many of his own sermons, books and pamphlets give this account an authenticity which less meticulous writers lack. Although in places not an easy read, this book opens to us a time and reasoning now gone, but seminal to the foundation of the Protestant Churches of northern Europe.

Laele Pepper wrote this with 2017's celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in mind.

#Let them stay - again!

From the Justice and International Mission Unit, Victoria-Tasmania Synod, November 2017

The Federal Government is coercing people who have come seeking asylum to leave Australia by ensuring they are destitute.

In August 2017 leaked government documents showed they intended to transfer hundreds of people seeking asylum to 'final departure bridging E visas', including children born in Australia. After being prohibited from work or study for up to four years, people were transferred onto these limited visas, with income support payments ceasing immediately and then being given three weeks to move out of community detention housing, source new jobs and accommodation and find jobs.

The government removed their access to case management support, while demanding they make arrangements to leave Australia either to off-shore detention or to the countries from which they have fled...

The group affected by these changes are people seeking asylum who have been held in offshore detention sites until being evacuated and flown to Australia for medical treatment. The medical concerns included high risk pregnancies and acute mental health issues, medical conditions that have been confounded due to the poor treatment and stress of indefinite detention. Many of these families have been members of Australian communities for several years, of whom nearly one third are children who are going to school in Australia. Also in this group are 20 women who had been sexually assaulted in offshore detention.

Removing access to support systems and income safety nets is a cruel act that risks forcing people back to dangerous situations. The policy comes more than a year after the successful 'Let Them Stay' campaign that prevented Minister Peter Dutton's first attempt at removing this group back to Nauru and Manus Island. Hundreds of thousands of us around the country rose up to say #LetThemStay, and forced the Federal Government to allow this cohort to remain in Australia. We need to once gain call on our Government to 'Let Them Stay'.

Using a similar tactic , the government announced in May 2017 that people seeking asylum who had

arrived by boat between August 2012 and January 2014...had until 1 October 2017 to apply for protection. The government warned that those who have not submitted an application by this arbitrary deadline would never have their cases for protection heard, would be banned from Australia, have all financial support cut off and be subject to removal from Australia.

When the 1 October deadline was announced, 7,500 people had not yet lodged their applications and around 23,000 from the same targeted group had applications waiting to be assessed. The tireless efforts of pro bono, social legal aid and refugee advocacy services helped lower the number of people who had not submitted applications for protection in Australia to 71 as of 1 October.

Between 2012 and 2015 people seeking asylum were prohibited by law from making an application for protection. Further, as GetUp's Human Rights Director Shen Narayanasamy points out, 'Asylum claims are incredibly long, torturous documents... And what Peter Dutton has failed to tell you is that he has denied them interpreters and access to legal assistance.'

Lawyers and social organisations fear that the 71 people who have missed the 1 October deadline and are exposed to removal are those most vulnerable, those that fear prosecution, with past trauma and limited understanding of the numerous policy changes targeted at them.

The government's harsh measures do not reflect Australian values of fairness and decency and certainly do not reflect the Biblical values of welcome and hospitality.

You can write polite respectful letters or emails to

The Hon Malcolm Turnbull
MP
Prime Minister
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Salutation:
Dear Prime Minister

The Hon Peter Dutton MP
Minister for Immigration and
Border Protection
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Email:
Peter.Dutton.MP@aph.gov.au

Salutation:
Dear Minister



Our service of Carols and Lessons on Sunday morning, December 17, was a bittersweet occasion. There was joy in the familiar story of the prophecies and their fulfilment in the birth of Jesus through a moving selection of readings and beautifully rendered musical offerings. But there was also sadness in the knowledge that, with the retirement of the joint conductors Elwyn Pederson and Barbara Hurst, and their pianist Noela Bartlett, this might be the final performance of 'Uniting Voices' if they are unable to find a replacement conductor. We thank the choir members for their contributions to our services over many years and trust that their search for new leadership will be successful so that they can continue to share the joy of making music together and enhancing our worship.

Robin Pope

(continued from p. 17)

Points to make in your letters or emails:

- Express deep concern about the government's actions to cut off social security payments and housing support for people seeking asylum, leaving them destitute in Australian communities.
- Express deep concern that policies targeted at people seeking asylum are attempting to use harsh and coercive measures to force them from Australia and back to dangerous situations.
- Ask that the federal government provide these people with legal and language support to apply for protection in Australia and then process their claims. Ask that they be provided with financial and housing support while their claims for asylum are processed.
- Request that they allocate at least 5,000 visas under the family stream of the Migration Program for refugee and humanitarian entrants.

You can also send emails to the Prime Minister and Minister Dutton using the Uniting Church, Synod of NSW.ACT website: <https://socialjusticeforum.good.do/letthemstay/letthemstay/>

Pastoral Updates and Notes

Our Annual Remembrance Service

The evening of Tuesday 28 November 2017 again saw a sizeable gathering for the celebration of the church's annual Remembrance Service. The congregation was drawn from members of the church and the wider community who wished to remember family members and friends who have passed away.



The lighting of candles of remembrance for loved ones and the floating of rose petals formed a highlight of the service with times for reflection and reverence.

A light supper followed the service with some warm fellowship. This service is held in the lead up to Christmas each year. Why not consider this date for your diary next year?

Andrew Hosking

Organ Fund Update

Due to further generous donations, the Organ Fund now stands at **\$18,500**. This money helps to replenish the general parish funds originally used to purchase our instrument. The Fund remains open to accept donations, and specific stops can still be sponsored.

Geoff Willis

A Message from Ian Smith

Dear Friends at Glen Waverley Uniting Church,

Thank you for the warmth of your sympathy following the death of our darling Gladys.

As you sense, we are feeling her loss greatly, but there has been, and continues to be, so much for which we are thankful. We are humbled and proud of the number of people who have reached out to us, bringing home to us the impact Gladys had on their lives.

While there were significant challenges when we were at Glen Waverley, it was a very special period in our lives. Your tribute which included reference to Gladys' 'quiet nature and her uncanny ability to notice the newcomers to worship' is so true of her own humble and effective ministry wherever we have been. Thank you for acknowledging our partnership within the Congregation's life and work.

We are so confident that 'the feet of God walk with us...'

May the Lord you and we love and serve, bless you with the Spirit's gifts.

Ian Smith

And from Sammy Stamp:

It's the season to be jolly...and to save your stamps for processing in the new year by my willing volunteers.

Just take care to leave 3mm of envelope around each stamp.

Many thanks and good wishes for the festive season from

Sammy

(aka Dorothy Graham)

for everything there is a season
and a time for every matter under heaven...

We record with sadness the deaths in the past months of members of our church family and we extend our support and sympathy to their families

Thomas Boase Howells

We celebrate the marriage of

Teoh Chin Soon & Nur Izzati Lojimin bt Abdullah

We record with joy the baptism of

Zachary Harold Wieden