

MARK'S MESSENGER



*The Parish Magazine of
St Mark's Church, Broomhill and Broomhall, Sheffield*

Winter 2024



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ADVENT, 2024

As the days grow shorter and we find ourselves in a darker, colder season, we enter a special time in the Church year. Advent is a season of anticipation, reflection, and preparation. It spans the four Sundays before Christmas and invites us to pause and prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ. The word 'advent' means 'coming' or 'arrival', and during this season, we focus on two significant aspects of our faith. First, we look to the gospels and the prophetic texts foretelling the birth of Christ. Second, we look forward with hope to the promise of God's kingdom bringing peace, justice, and healing to creation.



Advent also marks the beginning of the liturgical calendar. It can feel slightly out of sorts to be talking about December as the start of the year. We more usually look to January as the New Year, or September as the beginning of the academic year. But this year I am finding the turn to an advent new year helpful.

This time last year my father died after being ill with terminal cancer for the previous year. Over this past year as I have grieved, the year has been marked by several 'firsts' without him (first birthday, first Christmas etc). On these special days I have felt his absence more intensely, and yet over the year, the passing of time has been healing. A good friend gave me a book by Emma Mitchell called *The Wild Remedy* and suggested I read it slowly over the year. The book is a beautiful nature diary marking the passage of time, through words and paintings, as the author describes the nature she encounters as the months and seasons change. It has been a gentle companion this year drawing my attention to the life which continues all around us in each season we find ourselves in. In these cold months as autumn turns to winter it can become increasingly hard to get outside, to walk, to breathe in the air, and feel the winter sun on our skin. But it can lift our spirits and help us to look up and to look outwards.

Now as I move into this season of advent, I find myself preparing for several new beginnings. Life has changed significantly to this time last

year. As a family we are in the midst of preparing to move into the vicarage. And I will take up new roles at St Mark's and St Mary's following the licensing service on the evening of January 15th. In our busy, often rushed lives, advent encourages us to slow down, to wait, and to prepare. I don't imagine I will find much time to slow down or to be still over the next few weeks, but in the painting, the packing, moving, and unpacking, we will be preparing for the new season which is upon us.

I hope that you will have time to connect with God during this season, whatever your advent looks like. And that you will have time to consider how you are preparing for the new seasons you find yourself in. So let me end with this blessing by Jan Richardson which is inspired by this verse in Mark's gospel: *'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way' (Mark 1:2).*

Beth Keith

Blessing the Way by Jan Richardson

*With every step
you take,
this blessing rises up
to meet you.*

*It has been waiting
long ages for you.*

*Look close
and you can see
the layers of it,*

*how it has been fashioned
by those who walked
this road before you,*

*how it has been created
of nothing but
their determination
and their dreaming,*

*how it has taken
its form
from an ancient hope
that drew them forward
and made a way for them*

*when no way could be
seen.*

*Look closer
and you will see
this blessing
is not finished,*

*that you are part
of the path
it is preparing,*

*that you are how
this blessing means
to be a voice
within the wilderness*

*and a welcome
for the way.*

HAZEL ELLIOTT-KEMP

Editor of the Messenger, 2010 – 2015



Frances: At Hazel's funeral on 24 August the choir sang Bach's wonderful Advent hymn *Wachet Auf*. It wasn't, of course, Advent – but that didn't put her off choosing it. She loved Bach, and anyone who, as her son Nick says, 'still holds the European record for the 'Membership of the Largest Number of Choirs – eight church choirs, Goldsmith's Choir, London Bach Choir, London University Choir, Sheffield Oratorio Chorus Choir, Sheffield Bach Choir' – is entitled to have any anthem they like. A song that repeatedly urges you to get up, to speak out was very much her cup of tea. A minister's daughter who grew up in a small Welsh mining town followed by London,

Hazel was a lifelong Labour voter. In 1945 she helped her father to leaflet their constituency in Tulse Hill and always remembered how long they had to wait for results in a time when many voters were still away in the Forces.

Hazel liked to tell the story of how she met her husband John on a train in 1952 – the night train to Munich, where they got chatting when they found themselves both reading Dostoyevsky. They were married the following year, and both worked in Germany, teaching in the British Forces Schools. They arrived in Sheffield in 1966, with their three children. Hazel taught in schools and later privately coached GCSE maths. She also produced a range of English teaching resources.

David: In 2010 our new vicar, Ian Wallis, chaired a meeting about the future of the Mark's Messenger. It had been edited by Michael Burn, husband of our Associate Vicar, Sue Hobley. But Michael and Sue were leaving. We agreed that in future the Messenger should be edited by a team consisting of Pauline Miller, Hazel and myself. For the next five years, Hazel was a highly competent and imaginative editor, drawing on her wide cultural interests, and an excellent and collaborative team member. In 2015 she decided to retire. We were sorry to lose her but grateful she persuaded Frances Gray to take her place.

Frances: I met Hazel in the choir and she told me that she had played God when St Mark's staged the York Mystery Plays – no surprise, as she had a lovely and authoritative speaking voice. I promptly recruited her to read

some beautiful prose by John Piper when we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the church with a play. I thought she might like to broaden her range and when I put on a play about human trafficking called Talk to the Future, Hazel played the cleaner in a brothel in Ancient Greece. (She brought her own mop.) I was delighted to take over the Messenger from her - I could always rely on her for a contribution.

Eve: Hazel was for many years a faithful member of the Bach Choir, resigning only when she felt her voice and energy were no longer up to it's demands.

She missed it greatly, so one day while chatting together we hatched a plan. Hazel would offer space around her roomy dining table for about a dozen people, and provide, as we soon discovered, more than ample refreshments, and I would approach possible singers to come monthly on a Friday morning for a couple of hours.



It didn't take long to find a balanced group of senior singers, but what would we call ourselves? Hazelnuts was the popular choice, not favoured by Hazel, but in the end this was the name that stuck! We had a few years of fun and enjoyment together, singing through a variety of beautiful and quite varied music without any pressure of concerts. Our only public performances were to entertain the St Mark's Lunch Club members after their annual Christmas lunches, which we all enjoyed greatly. Sadly, Covid and Hazel's declining health brought all this to a halt. The memories though, will remain clear, not only of the music and the companionship **of the group, but of the amazing quality and** generous quantity of Hazel's post-singing 'coffee and biscuits'

which resembled a delicious lunch more than anything else. We tried our hardest to dissuade her from providing such variety, but in vain – she clearly loved doing it and we felt much blessed to be on the receiving end of such loving generosity. Thank you, Hazel, you will not be forgotten.

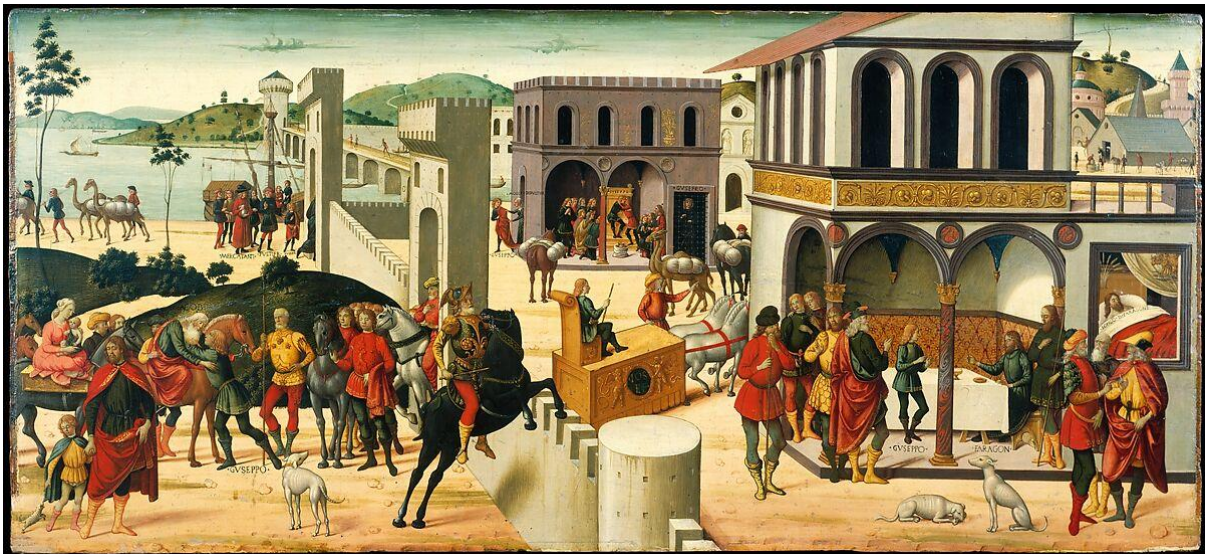
Hazel's son Nick has written a brilliant memoir of his parents which you can access at: <https://nickkempblogweb.wordpress.com/>.

***Frances Gray, David Price, Eve Saunders
With special thanks to Nick Kemp***

In Advent four candles are lit – for the patriarchs, the prophets, John the Baptist and Mary. The Messenger has opted for neon lights.

ADVENT LIGHT 1 – THE PATRIARCHS JOSEPH AND THE AMAZING TECHNICOLOR DREAMCOAT

It is easy to see why, in a society that was only semi-literate and had yet to invent the printing press, the medieval Church should turn to music and art to reinforce its message. The biblical story of Joseph inspired a painting by the Italian artist Biagio d'Antonio showing Joseph being sold into slavery, fleeing the advances of Potiphar's wife, interpreting the Pharaoh's dream and greeting his father and brothers on their arrival in Egypt. It was a story found not only in Christianity but also in Judaism and Islam.



Joseph by Biagio d'Antonio

A few centuries later, Handel's oratorio, *Joseph*, focused on his motives and character. Was he the virtuous and charitable overseer of the Bible or was he an ambitious and unscrupulous man who had weaselled his way into Pharaoh's favour?

Then, in 1968, along came Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice with their musical, written originally as a 15 minute "pop cantata" to be performed by young pupils from a London school. Webber has said that he had chosen to use a story from the Bible because he would 'rather take a true story and an untrue one.' Is it a true interpretation of the Bible story,

though? It does not portray the original themes of the biblical story such as repentance, faith and reconciliation and there is no mention of God at all. It's more about growing up, jealousy and forgiveness. It certainly doesn't preach to its audience; its main aim seems to be to entertain.



Benjamin, Joseph's baby brother (16th Century print)

As a young child at Sunday School I remember finding the story of Joseph rather confusing. It certainly didn't seem to fit with the lesson we'd had a few weeks previously about 'turning the other cheek'. And the bit about interpreting dreams certainly didn't seem to match with anything I'd experienced. But then *Any dream will do* does not seem to relate to what the Bible story is saying, nor is it a very helpful piece

of advice. Or am I missing the point? Perhaps any dream will do as long as it contains a famous name (Donny Osmond) and gets bums on seats and cash in the till. By the way, it's on at the Lyceum from 8th - 12th July. Will you be going?

Dez Martin



Light by AB Lentz

COMPARING NEW LABOUR AND CONSERVATIVE IMMIGRATION POLICIES

1. Opening New Immigration Removal Centres (Detention Centres)

Labour plans to establish new immigration removal centres as part of their strategy to streamline deportations, which has drawn criticism for its similarity to Conservative policies. Detention centres have been criticised for inadequate conditions, with investigations highlighting abuse and ‘prison-like’ environments that harm detainees’ mental health. Labour’s plan to cap detentions at 28 days signals an effort to improve, yet still maintains an enforcement-first approach akin to the Conservatives.

2. Increased Deportations of Asylum Seekers

Both Labour and Conservative governments have prioritized deportation to manage immigration, with Labour proposing a new enforcement unit to expedite removals. This continuity between parties has raised human rights concerns, with advocates questioning the ethical implications of mass deportations, especially for individuals from conflict zones.

3. Asylum Housing Conditions

The reliance on temporary hotel accommodations remains prevalent under Labour, a practice that has been costly and criticised for insufficient living standards. Labour’s focus on quicker asylum processing and relocation away from hotels mirrors Conservative measures, with limited progress on developing alternative housing solutions for refugees.

4. Racially Motivated Attacks and Anti-Racism Measures

The rise in racially motivated violence toward asylum seekers has continued under Labour, with no robust initiatives aimed at reducing xenophobic incidents in high-density migrant housing areas. Activists have pointed out Labour’s lack of substantial anti-racism measures in their immigration policy, aligning with Conservative responses that tend to downplay such racial tensions.

5. Backlog of Asylum Applications

Labour’s aim to reduce the backlog of asylum applications involves procedural changes and an emphasis on faster processing times. However, critics argue that Labour’s approach could lead to quicker rejections rather than systemic improvements, failing to address wait times that have left some applicants in

limbo for nearly two decades – a recurring issue under the Conservative government.

6. Continued Hostile Environment Policies

Labour has yet to propose significant changes to the Conservative-led ‘hostile environment’ framework, a series of policies known for limiting migrants’ access to services and legal protections. Human rights experts argue that Labour’s minor reforms do little to alleviate the hostile environment’s impact on asylum seekers’ quality of life and access to essential services.

These areas illustrate the limited departure Labour has made from Conservative immigration practices, raising questions about the potential impact on migrant welfare and integration. There is widespread concern among academics, charities, and activists regarding human rights implications of UK immigration policy, with many arguing that these policies increasingly fail to meet international legal standards and treaties.

Organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, alongside legal experts, warn that current immigration measures may contravene agreements like the 1951 Refugee Convention and the European Convention on Human Rights, both of which the UK is signatory to. These agreements require fair treatment of asylum seekers and prohibit arbitrary detention, as well as unfair deportation practices, yet many argue that policies fail to adequately align with these principles.

One significant area of concern is the prolonged detention of asylum seekers and their placement in immigration removal centres. Reports indicate that detainees face difficult conditions that could violate their basic rights. Additionally, the government’s restrictive deportation policies and backlog in asylum applications continue to leave individuals in precarious, long-term uncertainty. Charities such as Refugee Action and the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI) have repeatedly called on the government to reduce these backlogs and ensure humane treatment of migrants. Efforts to reform immigration policies to better reflect human rights standards remain ongoing. Many activists argue that without significant policy shifts, the UK risks undermining its longstanding commitment to international human rights law, particularly in regard to the protection of refugees and asylum seekers.

Manuchehr-SYMAAG

ADVENT LIGHT 2 – SINGING THE PROPHETS



Handel

Handel was known as a composer of Italian operas and had great success with a long series of productions before his arrival in London in 1712. In eighteenth century London it was not permitted to perform operas during Lent. Handel took the opportunity to write Oratorios – biblical dramas without sets, props and costumes, presented as concert pieces. These could be performed in theatres or in churches.

Handel collaborated with Charles Jennens, a rich landowner, patron of the arts and Shakespeare scholar. In July 1741 Jennens gave Handel his inspirational compilation of mostly Old Testament biblical texts for *Messiah*. The three parts correspond to the acts of an opera: Part one – Prophecies of Messiah; birth; life; Part two – Crucifixion; resurrection; ascension; redemption; Part three – Victory over death.

Messiah
an Oratorio

Title Page of Handel's autograph score

William Cavendish, Duke of Devonshire and Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, a patron of the arts and friend of Handel's, had travelled to London to give the king his annual report. He was acutely aware that Ireland was starved of culture, and urged Handel and his actor friend, James Quin to visit Dublin for the next season.

Handel composed the score of *Messiah* in just 24 days in August and September. The fine libretto prompted Handel to secure a balance between soloists and chorus which he never surpassed. He is reported to have said, "I did think I did see all Heaven before me and the great God himself," as he finished the score. At the end of the manuscript he wrote 'SDG' – *Soli Deo Gloria* ('To God alone the Glory').



Susannah Cibber

Handel arrived in Dublin on 18 November, followed three days later by Christina Maria Avolio, a soprano who sang for him throughout his stay in Dublin. A week later he was joined by the outstanding contralto of the time, Susannah Cibber. She was none other than the sister of Thomas Arne of *Rule Britannia* fame and had married Theophilus Cibber, son of Colley Cibber, a playwright, theatre manager and poet laureate. Her father-in-law gave Susannah acting tuition and shaped her as the most celebrated tragedienne of her time. She played leading

Shakespearian roles with David Garrick in addition to taking the role of David in Handel's *Saul* and singing in many of her brother's productions, though she did not have a trained voice and didn't read music. She was universally acclaimed for her ability to move audiences emotionally both as an actress and vocalist.

Her marriage was not a happy one. Her husband spent wastefully, and they took in a lodger, William Sloper (later a member of parliament), with whom she ran off and had a daughter, Molly. Her husband pursued her through the courts, but she survived the scandal, portraying herself as a victim of her husband's cruelty and greed.

The first of Quin's season of plays met with an empty house. Provincial Dublin society were not sure they ought to patronise a woman who could not show her face before decent people in her own country. The Lord Lieutenant, remembering his promise of support, came to the rescue and announced a command performance of the second play a few days later. Reassured by this ducal sanction, Dublin's gentry turned out to see the exile, and the season then played to capacity crowds..

Susannah had promised Handel that she would be in Dublin for the premiere of *Messiah* and he composed *He was despised* with her voice in mind. It has a line based on declamation rather than cantabile (which Handel would have used for a trained Italian voice) and depends more than any other part of the oratorio upon the singer's expressiveness rather than vocal skill. It is also the longest piece in the whole oratorio.

The text comes from Isaiah 53:3: "He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" – foretelling Matthew 26:56 "Then all the disciples deserted him and fled." Handel breaks up the text into a stammering "He was despised – despised and rejected – rejected of men – despised – rejected", the words interspersed with rests as long as the words, as if exhausted. Soft sighing motifs from the violins, an echo of the singing, drop into these rests, depicting Christ's abandonment. The two quavers at the end of each segment provide a 'sigh'.

The middle section is also full of dramatic rests, but now the voice is set against a ceaseless agitated pattern of fast dotted notes in the instruments, illustrating the hits of the smiters.



The New Music Hall, Fishamble Street, Dublin

This is a 'Da Capo aria' (Da capo –To the beginning; literally – To the head), where, at the end of the second section, the musicians are instructed to go back to the first section and play it again.

Charles Burney described this number as: “The highest idea of excellence in pathetic expression of any English song.”

Handel also transposed other movements originally written for Soprano, which he considered suitable for Susannah Cibber – *He shall feed his flock* and *If God be for us*, meaning that Mrs Cibber was given the final aria of the oratorio – usually reserved for the Soprano.

Handel was not known for his patience, but he sat at the keyboard with Susannah and taught her all the notes of her recitatives and arias.

The New Music Hall was intended to accommodate an audience of 600. The public dress rehearsal of *Messiah* was so popular that the newspapers appealed for “the ladies to come without hoops and the gentlemen without their swords.” By midday on 13 April the hall had 700 souls packed in, who paid half a guinea each for their tickets. It was a charity concert, raising funds for the Society for the Release of Imprisoned Debtors, the Mercer’s Hospital and the Charitable Infirmary. The proceeds were about £400 – nearly £100,000 today – which was shared equally between the three charities.

After Mrs Cibber had sung *He was despised*, Rev Dr Patrick Delaney, Chancellor of Christ Church Cathedral, leapt to his feet and exclaimed, “Woman, for this be all thy sins forgiven thee!”

Lord Kinnoul complimented Handel after the performance for giving the audience a “noble entertainment”. Handel replied, “My Lord, I should be sorry if I only entertained them; I wished to make them better.”

There was one further performance of *Messiah* in Dublin, this time for the composer’s benefit, and Handel returned to London.

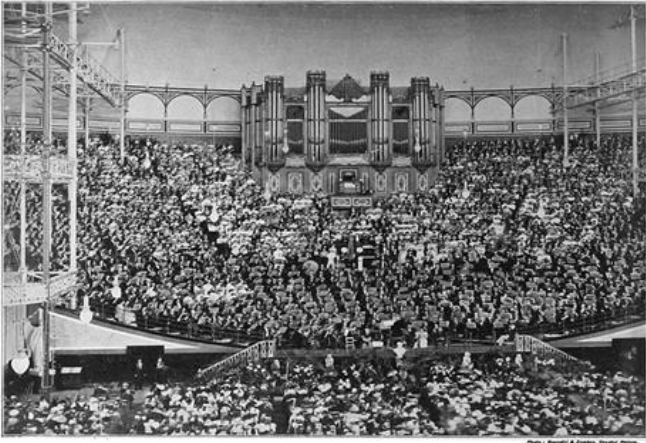
The first *Messiah* performance in London was not so successful. But the work’s popularity quickly increased and the year 1750 saw the institution of an annual performance at Captain Coram’s Foundling Hospital which continued



The Foundling Hospital Chapel



Handel Festival 1857



Handel Festival 1897?

to Handel's death and beyond. Handel was present for a performance at Covent Garden on 6 April 1759, just eight days before his death.

Clearly, *Messiah* was considered a work for Lent and Easter, but in the nineteenth century Advent performances became increasingly popular, as did the use of vast choirs and orchestras – encouraged by the Great Handel Festival started at Crystal Palace in 1857 when a chorus of 2000 was accompanied by an orchestra of 500!

Mozart added trombones, horns, flutes and clarinets to Handel's orchestration, and many others have produced orchestrations suitable for accompanying large choirs, including Ebenezer Prout (1902) and Eugene Goossens/Thomas Beecham (1959). Current trends favour a return to Handel's original. Despite all the meddling, *Messiah* has survived with undiminished popularity.

David Sanderson



LIGHT BY AUSTIN CHAN

BOOK REVIEW:

***Cuddy* by Benjamin Myers** (Bloomsbury Circus, 2023)

A little over 55 years ago, I took up residence for a year in a rondavel which was part of a house called Lindisfarne in a remote part of Cape Province. At the time I'd not seen the wonderful skyline of Holy Island from the east coast main line. Nor did I know anything about Cuthbert, to whom the parish – recently created from a former mission station – was dedicated. Despite having studied a great deal of church history as an undergraduate, there were vast gaps in my knowledge, especially from about 450CE to the break of the sixteenth century.

Nevertheless, from then on Cuthbert became part of the background to my life: though never seen, he's always been a light along my way, someone whose holiness I could admire (far removed though it was from parish ministry in the twentieth century), though never aspire to.



Continuing encounters with his presence have occurred: the shock of delight at seeing his pectoral cross in Durham Cathedral (it was used as what we would now call the logo of the parish), and the sense of Holy Island as such a thin place once the waterlogged causeway has caused the day trippers to retreat. And by magic chance I have started



reading *Steeple Chasing*, Peter Ross' journey around Britain by church. And there, in chapter two, who do I meet but Cuthbert, and Durham Cathedral? Writing of the view of Lindisfarne from the train Ross hits the nail on its head: 'the magnetic pull of Lindisfarne is strong. It makes iron filings of the soul.'¹

But this appreciation is of a different encounter with Cuthbert (and Durham Cathedral) in the shape of a novel by Benjamin Myers entitled *Cuddy*.

This is a terrific book. It's complex, compelling, lyrical, multi layered and allusive. It's not a historical novel in any sort of traditional sense. In fact, it's quite episodic, with glimpses into different ages of north country history, each of which contributes to the creation of a sense of what Cuthbert meant – or means – at different times.

¹ Ross, P. 2023. *Steeple Chasing*. London: Headline Publishing Group

Myers uses a variety of literary devices and styles to draw the reader into the story. There is poetry. There are collections of illuminating quotations by people from eighth century Bede to the recently deceased Sister Benedicta Ward; there are wonderful imagined conversations between characters and Cuthbert; there's a section about the 1827 opening of his tomb which has resonances of M R James' ghost stories; there's even the script of a playlet in which Durham Cathedral itself speaks the voiceover. The novel ends in our own times, yet always evokes the shadow or presence of Cuthbert/Cuddy. And through it we recurringly meet the boy with the owl eyes, who turns out to have the surname Cuthbert.



Of major importance in the texture of the book is Durham cathedral itself (another unforgettable skyline from the train). Starting with the search of the haliwerfolc² for a suitable resting place for Cuthbert (though not actually mentioned, their wanderings once took them to Fishlake where Cuthbert looks out from his niche in the west tower), which in the visions of Ediva, their cook, was of a great mountain of a building to house Cuddy, which then becomes a mason's construction site (twice), in the process ironically becoming a monumental memorialising of a man who actually at the end of his life sought simple solitude on Inner Farne.

I'm also grateful to Ross for something else he writes – and perhaps here my northern blood rather than my southern upbringing shapes my response to Cuddy (man and book): 'The relationship between the people of the North of England and their saints is... rooted in companionship rather than reverence'. And, particularly after reading the first section of the novel, I was left with a much greater appreciation of Cuthbert himself, the keeper of sheep who became a Celtic style missionary: '[the] sheep man [who] does not wait for his flock to find him', and who throughout his life 'walking and thinking/praying and fasting,' engages in 'the endless act/of facing yourself.'

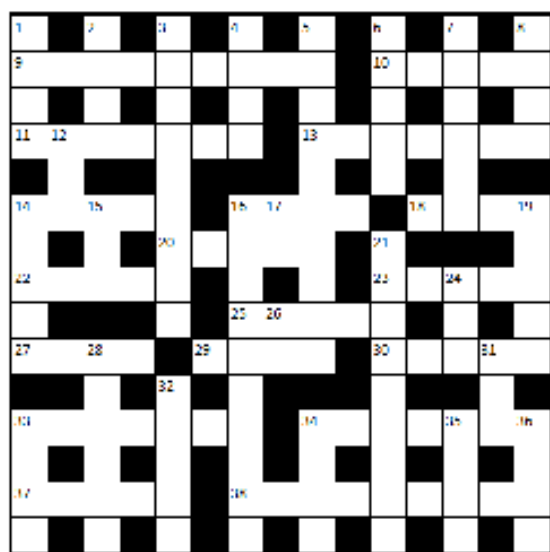
So Cuthbert: friend, seeker out of sheep and souls, searcher for solitude, singer of silence, defender of (cuddy) ducks and equal treater of all creatures, confronter of cold water in the search for God, leaver of comfort, purpose of pilgrims, waystation of wanderers, holy in humility: *ora pro nobis*.

John Schofield

² Haliwerfolc were those who followed St Cuthbert's body from Lindisfarne and settled in Durham.

CRYPTIC CROSSWORD

There is a theme – but it doesn't have anything to do with Christmas.



Across

- 9 Flier showing advert for item of jewellery (9)
 10 Man from Edinburgh mentioned he was an author (5)
 11 Wooded area in Californian city (7)
 13 Tees? Just one northern river that was once associated with paper manufacturing (7)
 14 Self-indulgent activity sees intern almost quitting new enterprise (5)
 16 Old king's love for wine's beginning to increase (4)
 18 Leading exponent of performing arts (4)
 20 Quite slim, following almost 90% reduction in calories (5)
 22 Time to work on stage production (5)
 23 What is *The Real Thing*? Well: firstly, Coca-Cola ought to be included (5)
 25 True freedom in Kenya diminished by a ship's officer monitoring radio messages (5)
 27 Church reverses its education policy in Keswick, cutting core elements (4)
 29 Animals depicted in tapestries (4)
 30 This woman will remove the peas from their pods (5)
 33 Bunch of flowers for publishing first novel (7)
 34 Expressed approval for *Paradise Lost*, with one exception (7)

- 37 Essentially, backward looking council eroded an ancient custom (5)
 38 Lacking very basic building materials, unskilled labourer's initially trapped in a basement (9)

Down

- 1 Repeat three chords endlessly? (4)
 2 Apse is suitable for drama (4)
 3 Vehicle breaks down, creates a tailback at first (6,3)
 4 Rub surface off bark (4)
 5 Greedy guts only out to get stuffed, (though leaving last of turkey) (10)
 6 I escape from an Oxfordshire village (5)
 7 Ice froze around the world (6)
 8 Easily find article on energy (4)
 12 Snake biting head off insect (3)
 14 Pioneering paediatrician talked endlessly about first stage of childhood (5)
 15 Deer first observed during middle of trek (3)
 16 Summon one's strength and paddle towards source of river, although source of river can't be found (3,2,5)
 17 Ramesses sacrifices a great deal to his god (2)
 19 Set down gold from the East, befitting a king (5)
 21 Walk about while visiting Sweden, collecting a little of anything that can be collected (9)
 24 Signal you received in church (3)
 26 Gasman (2)
 28 Capital featuring in works of Chekhov (6)
 31 Run away, heading off to find shelter (3)
 32 Your cocoa's regularly put away in a pot in the kitchen? (5)
 33 Point to book resting on counter (4)
 34 American writer takes months completing a set of verses (4)
 35 Starts to stir up local unrest in Philippine province (4)
 36 Drop production of *Hamlet* in South Africa (4)

SOROPTIMISTS – CHANGING THINGS FOR WOMEN SINCE 1921



A lot of people haven't heard of Soroptimists. What do they do exactly?

Soroptimist International of Sheffield is part of a worldwide organisation of professional women which is linked to the United Nations.

How did you get involved, and what sort of activities have you been part of?

I became aware of SI Sheffield after one of my Sixth Form students suggested that I should become involved when I retired in 2019. She had been part of the Share Our Skills Project at King Edward V11 school and had participated in a Fashion Show amongst other Enrichment activities.

Since retirement, I have been involved in a variety of fundraisers for local charities such as Mums In Need and the Snow Drop Charity for the victims of trafficking and violence against women and girls.

And who did you meet?

At the local level, I have built up good relationships with our civic dignitaries who always support our projects in addition to the CEO's of our nominated charities. At regional level, I have met some really inspiring Yorkshire women who are determined to make a difference.

What sort of things are happening at a local level?

We support the Winn Gardens Food Bank ; three Sheffield Refuges; MIN ; and we hold an Orange Café monthly in Waitrose café. The latter is a UN initiative and the colour orange symbolises hope for the future of the victims of domestic violence.

And what are the current big projects?

In 2025 we hope to repeat the successful "Orange the City" poster competition which we organised with the help of three local schools.

Do tell us if there is anything special happening for Christmas?

On 2nd December, SI Sheffield will be sponsoring a tree at the Sheffield Cathedral Christmas Tree Festival to highlight the challenges of tackling violence against women and girls.

We will also be providing Christmas gift bags to the women and children in the refuges we already support.

If anyone would like to join, what do they need to do?

Visit <https://sigbi.org..sheffield> Or have a word with me after the 10:00 am Sunday service.

Email = suegodley4@gmail.com

Sue Godley

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL:
Write for Rights Greeting Card Campaign, 2024**



Each year St Mark's commemorates human rights on the Sunday nearest 10 December (United Nations Human Rights Day). This year that is Sunday, 8 December.

Anyone can take part. Supporting human rights is achieved by joining Amnesty International's annual Greeting Card Campaign, 'Write for Rights'.

How does it work? After careful research to ensure the true facts, Amnesty has selected twelve cases of human right infringement. Details of each case are posted to Amnesty's website.

What you have to do:

- (1) Download details of cases from the Write for Rights web site www.write4rights24.
- (2) On the basis of the information given for each case send greetings cards to prisoners, and
- (3) Write letters to the authorities and governments responsible.

This pressure often leads to injustice being put right. If you are not on the Internet, copies of the Write for Rights booklets will be available at the back of church on Sunday, 17 and 24 November and Sunday, 1st December.

Robin Story

ADVENT LIGHT 3 – JOHN THE BAPTIST



Light by Luis Smit

The third week of Advent belongs to John the Baptist – and St Mark's has its own take on John. In 1999 John Earwaker – an honorary member of the St Mark's clergy – wrote a musical for the Broomhill Festival, *Cousin John*. The witty lyrics portray him as young, lively and passionate, an educated man rather than a hairy eccentric; trapped in prison after insulting Salome's dancing and pointing out the sins of the king, John gradually becomes aware of how his cousin Jesus, who has taken over his disciples almost by default, is transforming his own harsh message into one of radical love. Here is John at his own Advent moment of expectation, about to meet (and rebuke!) the king, who wants him to preach as part of his birthday entertainments.

IS THIS THE MOMENT?

JOHN:

Is this the moment I've been waiting for,
The nation's been stagnating for?
The dawn that ends the night?

Is this what God's been all this time creating for?
The moment when things start to come right?

You can't help thinking of the danger -
Who knows what Herod will do?
His summons could hardly be stranger –
Seems he's called for an interview!

Is this the moment I've been waiting for,
The nation's been stagnating for?
It feels like the first day of Spring!
This is something I was not anticipating, for
I'm going to confront the king!

Who would have thought it would happen like this?
The king inviting me to tea!
A messenger coming all this way
Just to speak to me! My mother said, "Why must you throw it away?
Your chance to be a VIP?"
But everything's turning upside down,
So it seems to me!

If I tried to get an audience with royalty
It's unlikely I would get beyond the gate,
There'd be questions to make certain of my loyalty,
Yet here's my invitation – on a plate!

THE CHORUS:

Who would have thought it would happen like this?
The king inviting him to tea?
You never know – perhaps the king will change?
There's no guarantee,
But just suppose he's converted by John!
And then the whole of Galilee!
John always said we'd get a new regime
Just you wait and see!
Just imagine if King Herod joined the movement!
What amazing transformation would we see!
There would surely be a wonderful improvement!
In the quality of life for you and me!

John Earwaker

SURVIVING DISILLUSION



Surviving Santa

I don't look happy. Not at all. This isn't surprising. Christmas 1950 was not exactly a blast. Lots of things were still rationed – you never got chocolate, only boiled sweets and other tooth-wreckers. My father was away working in Greenock Docks at the other end of the country. At that time the Scots didn't do Christmas bank holiday – instead, the dockyard said he could have Hogmanay off to come down to Portsmouth and be with me and Mum.

None of that really got me down, though, because like all post-war kids I didn't know that things could be different. What makes me look so shell-shocked in this photo is Santa. My mother had decided that she'd have a photo of me taken with Santa and have it made up as a calendar my father could take back to Scotland with him . Which was a lovely idea. Only Santa was not exactly my idea of the spirit of Christmas.

Austerity was still very much a thing in 1950. So Santa's red robe was a flimsy old dressing-gown rather than the velvety extravaganza you see on Christmas cards. And maybe there was a cotton wool shortage? This might explain the photographer's choice of a guy with his own long white beard to play Santa. The trouble was, it didn't occur to the photographer to smell him first. Santa stank. The beard wasn't white, it was yellow with nicotine that came off him in waves, along with a definite whiff of something I recognised as the stuff we'd stirred into the Christmas cake – navy issue rum (this flowed briskly around Portsmouth at Christmas because all dockyard personnel were issued with it). By the time we made it to his grotto, Santa was definitely the worse for wear. Even scarier, the photographer had put on a pixie hat with bells and was chanting "Watch the Birdie!" like a stuck record while popping in and out from under the black cloth that shrouded his camera. (A lot of people hate clowns. I feel that way about amusing hats with bells.)

Christmas stocking-wise, the handiest chimney in our house led directly to the Victorian fireplace in my bedroom. I told my mother that I didn't want Scary Santa coming in – door or chimney. Or any pixies for that matter. Sensibly, she told me that Santa was just a story and that there would be presents anyway. And there were.

When I went to school a few years later, she suggested that it would be a good idea to keep the news of Santa's non-existence to myself because it was a pity to deprive children of a bit of magic. (She forgot to recommend similar silence vis-à-vis Where Babies Come From, but that's another story.) In the meantime, though, I had evolved a sort of mental image of the spirit of Christmas – our fruit and veg man, Charlie Parvin. Not only did he come round to deliver the ingredients of Sunday Dinner every week with an actual horse and cart (green before his time, although I think the reason was petrol rationing) – he had also heard about my Dad coming home for Hogmanay and how we were going to have our family Christmas at the New Year. So he suggested that we might like to have his Christmas tree. We weren't well off and trees were eye-wateringly expensive – and of course Charlie, with his fruit and veg contacts, had secured a brilliant one for personal use. He brought it over after Boxing Day, and it was up there sparkling for our belated Christmas. It definitely drove out the spectre of Drunken Santa – in fact when I think of childhood Christmases, that one really stands out. If I was any good at sewing, I'd make a little fruit and veg man to hang on my tree.

Frances Gray

ADVENT LIGHT 4 – MARY



Light by Britney Burnett

The Mother of God

The threefold terror of love; a fallen flare
Through the hollow of an ear;
Wings beating about the room;
The terror of all terrors that I bore
The Heavens in my womb.

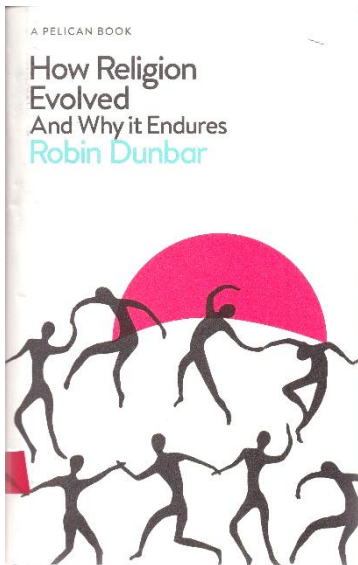
Had I not found content among the shows
Every common woman knows,
Chimney corner, garden walk,
Or rocky cistern where we tread the clothes
And gather all the talk?

What is this flesh I purchased with my pains,
This fallen star my milk sustains,
This love that makes my heart's blood stop
Or strikes a Sudden chill into my bones
And bids my hair stand up?

William Butler Yeats

BOOK REVIEW:

How Religion Evolved and Why it Endures* by Robin Dunbar



This is an interesting readable book examining the phenomenon of religion from a psychological aspect. Written by the Professor of Evolutionary Psychology at Oxford University, it looks at the personal and communal benefits conferred by religion in relation to the development of ways of living and community size and bonding. Religions differ in their emphasis on *doing* and/or *believing*, and also between mysticism, having a personal sense of divine transcendence, perhaps falling involving into trance, and shared communal beliefs: “In other words, beneath the surface veneer of doctrinal rectitude lurks an ancient foundation of pagan mysticism.” It is impossible to know what ancient humans thought or believed before written records exist but the evidence of careful burial and large ceremonial(?)

sites hints at beliefs in an afterlife, or the need to perform communal rituals, but some form of religion seems to occur naturally in every society and to evolve gradually into more complex systems as communities grow in size as e.g. we became agrarian (interestingly the major monotheistic religions originated in the northern fertile sub-tropical zone). Hunter gatherer groups often have shamans responsible for dealing with life uncertainties and with healing.

Religion gives benefits such as event explanation, community bonding and cooperation, and indeed the social support of religious membership correlates with longer healthier life, and religious people tend to be happier, more trusting and generous. Our large primate brains enable wider friendship and cooperation, partly because we have higher ‘mentalising’ capability, i.e. the ability to reflect on mind states of oneself and others; humans can do this on average to about five levels of remove (women are generally better than men!) to understand what others think and believe. This in turn also enables us to imagine a God and to relate to one. Group size has an impact related to friendship range; on average we tend to have up to 50 good friends and 150 ‘just friends,’ and this has a bearing not only on early village sizes but also the stability of religious congregations, with around 150 being optimal for cohesiveness. The function of shared ritual, singing and dancing is examined and related to endorphin release. There are fascinating chapters on Cults, Sects and Charismatics and on Schisms and Divisions – as an aside Trump’s followers have been likened to a religious cult with a charismatic, and latterly self-claimed Messianic, leader. All in all this is a very good read.

Michael Miller

*Library section O

FIXING A DATE FOR EASTER SUNDAY

"When is Easter this year?" is a question many of us ask ourselves when trying to plan for the future. When I was teaching it had something of an impact on how I organised my lessons, because A Level and GCSE students would be aiming to sit mock exams or other tests in the second half of the spring term, and I found we had a lot less time to prepare in some years compared with others. It also had a knock-on effect on how students completed their supervised coursework, even though the deadline was always 15 May: progress on a project would be interrupted if the Easter holiday came early.

The date of Easter also influences some important aspects of life, such as planning for family gatherings and holidays. I have often found myself thinking that things could be so much easier if Easter Sunday were to be fixed so that it falls during a set weekend each year, in the same way clocks go forward on the last Sunday in March.

The current process for determining the date of Easter appears very complicated to me. Since I was quite small I have known it has to do with phases of the moon, and it struck me that this was possibly a rather superstitious practice. However, there is more to it than that, so the following provides only a basic explanation:

Early Christians naturally wanted to celebrate Easter so that it coincided with the Jewish Passover, as Jesus was crucified during that festival, and there are parallels between the two, rich in symbolism. Some scholars have tried to narrow down the date of the crucifixion, using historical clues found in the Gospels and elsewhere. Of course they knew it was on a Friday, during Passover, but they could also take into account the fact that Pontius Pilate was Governor of Judaea and Caiaphas High Priest, (the dates they held office are recorded in almost contemporary documents), as well as various other things. The general consensus is that it happened on Friday, 3 April AD 33, although Friday 7 April AD 30 has also been suggested.

The question arose: should Easter Day itself be firmly linked to Passover each year, even though it might not actually fall on a Sunday? Or should a system be adopted whereby it would always be on a Sunday, so that events of Holy Week can be commemorated on the respective days when they occurred?

For Jews, Passover begins at sunset on the fourteenth day of the spring month of Nisan. Hebrew months are aligned to the solar calendar, beginning at the new moon, and Passover always coincides with a full moon. But it might be on a Tuesday or a Saturday, for example, and any time between the fourth week of March and late April.

Early Christians adopted different ways of fixing Easter in relation to Passover, until the current system was standardised at the Council of Nicea in 325. They decided that Easter Sunday should be the first Sunday following the Paschal* full moon, that is, the first full moon on or after the spring equinox, 21 March. However, lunar months unfortunately don't conveniently match up with particular dates of the year, hence the complications alluded to above. Furthermore, Western churches follow the Gregorian calendar, but others, including the Eastern Orthodox Church, use the Julian calendar, which is why Easter is celebrated at a different time in Russia, for example.

After a gap of a mere 1638 years the issue was once again debated by leading Roman Catholic bishops and theologians at the Second Vatican Council in 1963. They provisionally discussed fixing Easter Sunday so that it falls on the first or the second Sunday in April each year, but progress on a final decision has largely stalled.

However, in 2016 Justin Welby announced that negotiations had begun between Anglicans, other Protestants, Roman Catholics, Coptic Christians and members of the Orthodox churches, with a view to deciding on a possible joint fixed date, and he hoped that a decision might be made within a decade. Time would now seem to be running out as regards that aspiration.

Could the Church of England make the move unilaterally? I think this unlikely, as it would undermine relations with our ecumenical partners, and I imagine there would be furious debates in Parliament over the issue. Personally, I hope worldwide consensus can be achieved sooner rather than later, but I confess I'm not feeling particularly optimistic.

Andrew Sanderson

* *Paschal* means "relating to Passover," or "relating to Easter," and is derived from *Pesach*, the Hebrew word for Passover.

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