



THE DOME

Winter 2016

THE MAGAZINE OF PETERSFIELD CATHOLIC PARISH

The True meaning of Christmas



by Father Peter Hollins

Christmas is a special time for children. They get caught up in the stories and school decorations. Tinsel, trees, cards and gifts, families together, and festive foods and lots of chocolate. As a young child I was completely taken with the Christmas season and especially the large crib that was laid out in church.

The teenage years were so very different. I had to turn up at family gatherings rather than be out with friends. Gifts were still welcome, but everything else was part of a childhood left well behind. The sweet Bible stories were for young minds: how can a star hover over a house, and shepherds be entertained by choirs of angels? It felt as though Christmas belonged to everybody else.

The early adult years were only a little better. I learnt to enjoy the delight of my niece and nephews and their young friends, and family gatherings were not so bad. Though the gospels meant a great deal, the infancy stories remained in the shadows.

One year, at the beginning of Advent, put together and printed a hymn book for Fr Sheeran, the priest in a neighbouring parish. He thanked me and handed over a book entitled 'The Birth of the Messiah'. It is a detailed commentary on the gospel infancy stories about Jesus. It struck the right chord! I realised that the infancy stories are a profound and mature proclamation of the gospel. It was possible to share the astonishment and joy of those people in Bethlehem who heard the message relayed by shepherds, 'I bring you news of great

joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord.' (Lk 2:11)

Sometimes radio and television commentators are so careful to avoid mentioning Ch*****s. Advertisers announce bargains for a Happy Holiday! Seasonal markets wallow in Victorian nostalgia. You may indeed shake your head in frustration and ask, 'What about the true meaning of Christmas?'

The true meaning of Christmas cannot be forced on people. Let everybody rejoice and celebrate, even though they do not know why. Let us have faith that God has a way of preparing us to receive his message in the circumstances of our lives – sometimes when it is least expected. May we all come to rejoice in the generosity of the heavenly Father who sends us so wonderful a Saviour! May our lives reflect something of that generosity this Christmas.

Good We Shall Be

I was watching 'Star Wars VII – the Force Awakens' the other day. One of the characters delivered a short speech on the nature of Evil: - 'Trade Federation, Republic, Empire and now the First Order but always the same dark power.'

The film is all about the hunt for Luke Skywalker by his twin sister Leia Organa to help her fight the evil First Order. At the end, Luke is traced to the place where the Jedi order began, and the final frame is the heroine handing him his light sabre on the wonderfully remote Skellig Michael, which in real life is to be found off the west coast of County Kerry. The ancient beehive huts of the early Christian monks stand

by Tim Concannon

in for the place where the Jedi religion began.

I have, of course grown up with the Star Wars franchise, which is so influential that in England and Wales 390,127 people (almost 0.8%) stated their religion as Jedi on their 2001 Census forms, surpassing Sikhism, Judaism, and Buddhism, and making it the fourth largest reported religion in the country. Of course, the 'High Priest' of the Jedi was our very own Alec Guinness, who in fact hated Star Wars and also all the fan mail it generated.

Whilst many people think of it as entertaining hokum, like those other



well-known franchises, Harry Potter, and Lord of the Rings, it taps into something very deep in the human psyche. We love our arcane ancient wisdom, great heroes who emerge from obscure origins, big, showy villains and the ultimate triumph of Good over Evil.

'Star Wars' throws in some really cool machines and fantastic life forms that adds to its appeal.

It is fitting then, that the film-maker used a Dark Age Christian monastery in the Atlantic Ocean as the place where the whole thing began. Like the Jedi, the Celtic monks spread the Good

continued on page 2

Good We Shall Be

continued from page 1

News of our redemption across a sceptical and hostile northern Europe. There are stories of their 'magical' feats of healing, their asceticism and their heroism.

In our own backyard, Hampage Wood near Winchester has the ancient stump of what was once a great oak tree, surrounded by iron railings. Marked on the Ordnance Survey maps as 'Gospel Oak', it is remembered as a place under which St Augustine of Canterbury preached. It may be the very place where he had a meeting with the British Bishops of the Celtic tradition as recorded by the Venerable Bede. Part of the conference was taken up with the rival factions attempting to intercede for a blind man, and,



according to Bede, it was Augustine's prayer that was successful and the man was cured.

So, as our own magical season approaches, I am comforted that in a world which seems to feature great Evil, influential film makers have no difficulty in recognising Good and Evil and can make a small, green Jedi Master deliver a first-class guide to behaviour: 'Yes, a Jedi's strength flows from the Force. But beware of the dark side. Anger, fear, aggression; the dark side of the Force are they. Easily they



Stone 'beehive' monastic huts on Skellig

flow, quick to join you in a fight. If once you start down the dark path, forever will it dominate your destiny, consume you it will, as it did Obi-Wan's apprentice.'

Even though Sir Alec hated the whole thing, it still delivers a universal message, which is wholly compatible with membership of the Church in Spirit. So, the next time I see, or hear someone preaching hate, death and destruction, I shall remember Yoda. Good we shall be. Yes.

CONGRATULATIONS! CONGRATULATIONS!

THE AMAZING TECHNICOLOUR BLANKETS!

The Knitting Club made their own tribute to Mother Teresa of Kolkata, canonised Saint Teresa in September, when they displayed to the parish their colourful blankets knitted during the last year.

The 20 blankets were collected on Remembrance Day by Sister Chantal and Sister Imelda, Mother Teresa Missionary Sisters based in Kilburn, and will be distributed to the homeless in London.

Ludmilla Borwell said, 'It was important to Saint Teresa that not only her missionaries but also lay people take part in her work for the poor.

Volunteers from all walks of life, of all denominations, nationalities, races and ages can join in this 'Mission of Peace', as Saint Teresa called it.'

Ludmilla, a Lay Missionary of Charity, started the blanket-knitting circle to help the Sisters in London. She added, 'Each of us knit six inch squares to be later joined together as one. Our aim is to do this work of love for those whose lives and spirits are broken and to let them know that there are people who care.'

If you are interested in joining the happy knitters please contact Marion Voller via the Church Office.



Ordinand Ian Cornford receives the Paten of unconsecrated bread from Bishop John Wilson

Many congratulations to Ian Cornford who was recently received into the Ministry of Acolyte at a special Mass.

The Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster and Titular Bishop of Lindisfarne, Bishop John Wilson, told Ian and the other acolyte candidates, 'As you share the one bread with your brothers and sisters, so you form one body with them. From today onwards, you have a new and specific duty in the service of Christ and His mission given to the Church. You are to carry Him sacramentally to the sick and weak. You are to expose the Blessed Sacrament for Adoration and Praise. As you take a step closer towards the Altar you also move closer to the priesthood. Let the Holy Spirit speak through your life, in your words, in your actions, in your witness. As you continue to discern the Lord's call never doubt that whatever you need will be given you when you entrust everything to Jesus. He is not just merely enough; He is superabundantly enough.' Ian said, 'It was an extremely humbling experience for me, as well as being one filled with gratitude and joy!'

You can read more about Ian's journey to the priesthood on page 7.



From l to r: Kay Smith, Candy Halloran, Kate Sleet (foreground), Sister Imelda, Sister Chantal, Lindsay Axton, Marlene Clark, Elizabeth Lynnam and Ludmilla Borwell.

CONGRATULATIONS! CONGRATULATIONS!

Many congratulations to Monica and Derek Taylor who celebrated 50 years of marriage this year and to Kate and John Sleet celebrating 10 years. At the Significant Wedding Anniversaries' Mass at St Bede's Church in Basingstoke in July, they joined 89 other couples totalling 3753 years of marriage!

A DAY TO REMEMBER

by Kate Sleet

The satnav did a great job, we found St Bede's easily. We soon spotted Monica and Derek. Always good to see familiar faces. We walked in together and there was tea being served on arrival; the place was abuzz. The fountain in the centre of the cloister area was simply lovely, and cooling on such a humid day. A very kind and patient man agreed to take some photos of us there, so we could share some of the day with you all.

Music played as we sat in church, accompanied by the odd little birdsong.

The homily was about Amoris Laetitia (the Pope's recent document) and a man from 'Explore' spoke about the work they do speaking to young people in schools about marriage. The wedding march played as we left the church, then we were showered with confetti. It was such fun, like getting married again without the nerves!

Afterwards, we went through to the hall for wine, Pimms, juices and all sorts of goodies to eat. It was a friendly atmosphere.

Bishop Egan said, 'There is a cake that needs cutting but I don't think I



Derek and Monica Taylor with Kate and John Sleet at Wedding Anniversary Day at St Bede's Church, and inset, Bishop Philip celebrates Wedding Anniversaries' Mass at St Bede's Basingstoke.

should be the one to do it!' so he chose one of the couples. He spoke to everyone and shook our hands. I think he was enjoying himself as much as we were!

A massive well done to Kristina Lloyd who collected £1,360.99 in a fortnight for the Poppy Appeal at Waitrose this year by making her hand-crocheted poppies again.

Kristina said, 'I crocheted about 150 poppies and 30 head bands in advance, but as the poppies flew off the stand I started to crochet at Waitrose and continued at home. When the demand was even more, I decided to take orders. After a rest and supper, I started crocheting again until as late as midnight sometimes making another 150 poppies.'



Well done to Paul Nickell for his 12 years' sterling work with the Red Boxes.

LITTLE BOXES, LITTLE BOXES...AND THEY ALL LOOK THE SAME

by Paul Nickell

What is a Red Box? It is a small red moneybox kept by a family into which loose change is put to support the Missions and, in particular, the Association for the Propagation of the Faith (APF), Mill Hill Missionaries and Missio, the Holy Father's official charity for overseas mission. November is the time when the money put in each Red Box throughout the year is counted and sent off to the Missions.

I took over from Jane Manners in 2004 to co-ordinate the work of the APF in the parish. With the help of a loyal band of Promoters, the boxes are emptied and resealed, and the cash counted and banked as a parish contribution to the Missions. During the year, Missio Magazines are distributed at the back of our parish churches giving news of the mission work being undertaken. We now have 67 box holders in the Parish and I would be very grateful for more box-holders and volunteers to help as Promoters.

In July, when Father Liam came from the Mill Hill Fathers to thank the Parish for their support and invite



Paul Nickell receiving his award from Father Liam Cummins, a Mill Hill missionary

more of us to have a Red Box, he very kindly presented me with a medal and a certificate of appreciation and gratitude for my efforts over the years. I was very happy to receive this certificate but the thanks are really due to all the parishioners who contribute in any way to the Red Box initiative.

If you would like a box, please contact Paul (01730 231599) or the parish office.

PARISH EVENTS

1566 and All That

by Neil Dobinson

It was a fitting choice that our Summer Outing this year was to the magnificent palace of Hampton Court. Earlier in the year, on February 9th, Hampton Court's Chapel Royal had staged the first Catholic service for 450 years, when Archbishop Vincent Nichols had celebrated vespers, largely in Latin. It was the first occasion since the Reformation. Our visit was in late July, which had the added benefit of viewing the superb gardens in spectacular display to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the birth of Lancelot



1. Church of the Holy Name, Esher 2. Georgian wing of William and Mary, Hampton Court 3. In the Magic Garden at Hampton Court

'Capability' Brown. He had been appointed by King George III to the position of 'His Majesty's Chief Gardener' at Hampton Court in 1764. The visit was truly rewarding for both the eye and the mind.

As is our Summer Outing tradition, we followed the visit with Mass, celebrated by Father Peter, and this

year we were guests at the very beautiful modern Church of the Holy Name in Esher. The generous weather of the day remained with us and the inviting church gardens were a perfect setting for refreshments and relaxing conviviality to conclude the day – a very important and enjoyable feature of our excursion gatherings.

Damian Hinds MP – Climate and Energy visit by Ann Saunders

Climate change is one of the greatest threats to both UK and global security, and there is an overwhelming scientific consensus that it is being caused by human activity. The global causes and consequences of climate change, coupled with the long term and persistent nature of the impacts, highlight the need for government intervention. The Climate Change Act 2008 and the accompanying Impact Assessment provide the rationale for taking action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions – and to reduce UK emissions by at least 80% by 2050. (Department of Energy and Climate Change's Impact Assessment of the Fourth Carbon Budget)

Our energetic CAFOD representative Kevin Fry invited East Hampshire MP Damian Hinds to St Lawrence's in October to mark CAFOD's week of action on climate and energy. Mr Hinds talked about the Government's approach to climate and energy and answered questions from an audience which also included Green Party members and scientists. Mr Hinds linked the Government's policy on Climate Change to its Overseas Aid policy which commits to spending 0.7% GDP – the rationale being that many of the poorest countries, such as Bangladesh, are also those that could be seriously affected by climate change. Mr Hinds stated that the Government has one of

the best records in the world for tackling the issues, second only to Denmark. He said that not only does the Government need to continue to develop its energy plans but also to change the way people think about energy and climate change. Priorities are:

1. Ultra-low emissions in vehicles
2. District heating systems
3. Buildings to be more heat retentive
4. Carbon neutral growth for aviation by 2020 (NB aviation is responsible for 12% of CO₂ emissions compared to 74% in road transport)
5. Improvements in batteries' technology
6. Intermittent power sources eg wind, tidal and solar power
7. Concentration on gas and nuclear power generation for when renewables not available eg wind not blowing or sun not shining
8. Transfer of energy from countries which have an energy surplus



Local CAFOD representative Kevin Fry introduces Damian Hinds MP at St Lawrence Church Hall for a discussion on climate change and energy.



During a question and answer session, a quarter of the audience said they were in favour of fracking. Mr Hinds assured those present that UK has one of the toughest health and safety regimes and safety would be paramount in this new field of development with coal being phased out.

Buzz words:

A solar cell, or photovoltaic (PV) cell: an electrical device that converts the energy of light directly into electricity by the photovoltaic effect. PVs are normally made up of silicon. Solar cells are the building blocks of photovoltaic modules, otherwise known as solar panels.

CB5: Fifth Carbon Budget covering the period 2028-32

Follow CAFOD's One Climate, One World Campaign at: www.cafod.org.uk

Find out how big your environmental footprint is at: www.wwf.org.uk/ClimateChange

5 ways we can help the planet:

- Use up to one mug of water to clean your teeth rather than leaving a tap on
- Use your own shopping bags whenever possible
- Compost kitchen waste, if possible
- Re-use wrapping paper and trimmings
- Walk/bike instead of using the car

PARISH EVENTS

Justice and Peace Group

by Kirsty Thomas

The Petersfield and Liphook Justice and Peace group continues to meet monthly and, as ever, has had a busy few months.

In unison with the Children's Liturgy Group, who have linked with a community in El Salvador via the CAFOD Connect 2 project, we held a 'Romero' evening in September with some 50 people in attendance. The evening began with a relaxed shared supper with generous donations of a variety of dishes including some with a South American theme.

Supper was followed by a viewing of the biopic film 'Romero'. This is certainly one of the most incredibly thought-provoking and moving films I have seen, and it continues to resonate with me. Just over

35 years after his assassination, Oscar Romero's voice still needs to be heard. During the brutal regime in El Salvador in the 1980s where the military were oppressing the human rights of the citizens, Catholic Archbishop Romero was outspoken in defending the needs and rights of the poor and gave many courageous speeches challenging the United States' support for the Salvadoran government. He also urged soldiers to disobey orders to fire on



civilians. Romero was beatified on May 23rd 2015.

The evening ended in silence as we were all left in deep thought after the film. I feel we can often be reminded of Romero's words:

'The great need today is for Christians who are active and critical, who don't accept situations without analysing them inwardly and deeply. We no longer want masses of people like those who have been trifled with for so long. We want persons like fruitful fig trees, who can say yes to justice and no to injustice and can make use of the precious gift of life, regardless of the circumstances.' March 9, 1980

Our next focus is on Pope Francis' Encyclical *Laudato Si'*: Care for our common home. This Papal Encyclical offers us an opportunity to reflect on the world around us and respond to the signs of the times. We are called to open our eyes to see how God is present through creation and to bear witness to the reality facing many of our sisters and brothers across the world who are being pushed into poverty due to changing climate. Whilst climate change is critical, it is one symptom of a much deeper problem about how we organise our common home. Pope Francis invites us to a change of heart – individually, as a community, and at an international level. *Laudato Si'* is a profound invitation to everyone, and its influence will be felt for many years to come.

The Justice and Peace group have been leading talks during Advent which reflect upon *Laudato Si'*. The last one is on 13th December at 7.30pm in St Laurence Hall.



Archbishop Romero

A fond farewell to Frank Hinds who is leaving us to move to the Andover area. We thank Frank for all his help leading the Communications Group and for his contributions to The Dome in the past. We wish him every happiness with his new wife-to-be.



Sister Wendy Beckett:
'We have only to be still and let the sunlight of peace shine upon us.'

Back to our roots

History was made at Froxfield Green in July at St Peter's Church when 40 Catholics, as well as Anglican parishioners, attended Mass celebrated by Father Hollins. This was the first time Mass had been said on the site of the original 12th century church since the Reformation. The 'new' St Peter's was built in 1884. Kate Sleet reported, 'We had the warmest of welcomes from St Peter's which has a beautiful peaceful setting and it was a rare sight to see sheep grazing in the graveyard! The church bell was even rung during the Consecration alongside the handbell. In all, a wonderful evening.' Mrs Jenny Toomer hosted a reception afterwards at Ventham's Farm and parishioner David Lentaigne kindly supplied the wine.

Summer Vigil Masses were also held at: Holy Rood, Empshott, All Saints, East Meon, and St Peter's, Colemore.



Frances and Paul Nickell presenting the Gifts to Father Hollins at the Froxfield Mass.



Father Peter Hollins celebrates Mass at St Peter's Church at Froxfield.

'A little help is worth a lot of pity.'

PARISH EVENTS

News from the Pews

St Agnes

by Margaret Effenberg

St Agnes Church has been busy since our last article for the

Dome. The Parish had a very successful Harvest Festival in October which was held in the Village Hall in Liss. The proceeds went towards the education of young people in the Holy Land.

A space has recently been provided at the back of the church for parishioners who are unable to kneel so well. A bench has been removed and individual chairs erected in the space instead with even room for a wheelchair.



Outside at the back of the church the garden has been simplified with less maintenance required. Our hope is that the new plants will grow quickly once Spring is upon us!

As ever more volunteers for the flower, cleaning and gardening rotas are needed and if you can spare a couple of hours every few months I am sure you will enjoy meeting other volunteers.

There are a few new faces at Mass on Sundays and if you are new to the parish, please let us know so we can get to know you.

Please pray for the sick in the parish and all parishioners who have died this past year.

Mother Teresa: 'Peace begins with a smile'



Does anyone remember a parishioner called Ryall?



St Lawrence's Vintage Postcard c1905, bought by Caroline Welch in Midhurst

Called and Gifted

by Kate Sleet



The Called and Gifted process is firmly rooted in Catholic theology and ecclesiology. Bishop Philip is keen for as many people as possible throughout the Diocese to have the opportunity to start discovering their charisms.

(Portsmouth Diocese Website)

Kate attended the diocesan pilot Called and Gifted Course:

The literature for Called and Gifted, was provided by 'The Catherine of Siena Institute', which is a 'programme of the Western Dominican Province'. 'The Catholic Spiritual Gifts Inventory' was one of the publications and its purpose is to help Catholics 'succeed at a primary discipline of the Christian life: discerning, developing and using their spiritual gifts (charisms).'

Our workbooks were for navigating the discernment process which were very comprehensive. Some of the charisms are: writing, wisdom, pasturing, missionary, teaching, and intercessory prayer. Charisms cannot be forced, but are granted to us by the Holy Spirit.

I found the publications to be extensive and very helpful. If you wish to move forward in your spiritual life, this could be one way of doing so. I highly recommend this course and if you would like to borrow the publications you are welcome to do so via the Parish Office.

There is a follow up one-to-one session with someone trained to help you discern your particular charism/s, also small group sessions.

There was a six-week period when we focused on our gifts, to 'test' them out, in a way, and to see whether our gifts were fruitful. We also met up in our different groups and had a meeting together towards the end of the course. Each person in our groups, seemed to be at a different stage of discernment, which to me really proved how the Holy Spirit works in a special way through us all.

Do you think you have a gift that can be used to channel God's work? If so, why not attend the next Called and Gifted course? It may set you on a new and more meaningful path.

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Out and about



A Seminarian's African Experience

by Ian Cornford



Ian is a fourth year student for Priesthood in the Portsmouth Diocese at Allen Hall as reported in a previous edition of The Dome. He spent three weeks in the summer on placement in Luanda (near Lake Victoria) in Kenya. He writes:

The parish of St Joseph's was built by Mill Hill missionaries in the 90s, and has a large central church, able to hold around 800 people. The parish has five outstations served by three priests. There are 36 small communities and due to the large number of these, each community only hears Mass once a month. These communities have been established for many years and are a great source of spiritual nourishment for the people. We were able to visit around five of these communities, as well as going on many house visits.

Interestingly, the Catholic population in the area is only 2%, as there is a high proportion of Protestantism there, mainly Church of God, but the faith is widely accepted and people tend to work well side by side.

Ian also met young people in Korogocho, one of the largest and most congested slum areas of Nairobi. These children are part of the St John's



Sports Society Project which aims to transform the area by using sport to mobilise the community. Working in partnership with CAFOD, the Society is also supported by Oaklands School in Waterlooville.

All Creatures Great and Small - A Centenary Celebration by Jan Grey



Rupert and I were at a gala dinner near Thirsk on 1st October celebrating the 100th anniversary of the birth of 'James Herriot', often called 'The Most Famous Vet in the World'. Herriot's name was really Alfred Wight, known as Alf. The stories he wrote were translated into numerous languages, made into two films and the TV series 'All Creatures Great and Small' which brought him millions of admirers around the world.

The stories were all based on events with friends, family, colleagues, farmers, incidents and places in North Yorkshire, which Alf loved, so it was very fitting the anniversary was celebrated there by so many who had known and respected him - Jim and Rosie, his son and daughter, their children, vets, farmers, pet owners, locals, and admirers from afar, as well as the actors who played the central characters on the TV series. Jim and Rosie had kindly invited the children of Alf's three closest friends to the party, two of them from the Petersfield area!

My father was Alf Wight's lifelong veterinary partner, Donald Sinclair,

aka Siegfried Farnon. Very different characters, but very close friends who had total trust in each other's integrity; both completely but unselfishly devoted to their patients and clients, working all hours of day and night, with occasional mild expletives, but a marvellous gift for laughter. A night spent on the freezing floor of a byre delivering a troubled calf would be recounted in the morning with every ounce of humour they could extract from their own failures or success, the bovine mother's lack of collaboration, the farmer's gratitude, but sometimes not.

It was a warm and wonderful evening celebrating a lovely man who gave pleasure to millions, but who modestly and quietly continued in his lifelong task of caring for sick creatures, and for those to whom they mattered.

The other Petersfield honoured guest was Mrs Lynne Edleston, who describes 'Uncle Alf' as being like a second father to her. Lynn's father grew up with Alf in Glasgow together before the Second World War.



1. Alf Wight and Donald Sinclair's name plaques at the popular World of James Herriot attraction in Thirsk 2. Actors Christopher Timothy and Robert Hardy playing James (Alf White) and Siegfried (Donald Sinclair) 3. Donald Sinclair (middle) and Alf Wight (right) with Donald's brother, Brian Sinclair (left)

God's Mercy is Jesus by Jean Halliday



This special Jubilee Year of Mercy has come to an end but we know God's mercy is eternal and the birth of His Son is one more sign of that mercy. He shows He wants to be with us: 'to delight to be with the children of men.' (Prov. 8:31.)


He enters into our world, our history, another revelation of His great mercy. The birth in Bethlehem brings God to us in reality: He will live, work and suffer with us, showing us the way to the Father, 'that we may walk in His ways, so that we may walk in His paths.' (Is. 2:3)

St Mary of the Angels writes 'how great is your goodness, my Jesus! Although I have so deeply offended you, you still wish to clothe yourself with human flesh and to take on yourself all my sins in order to obtain their pardon for me. I deserved to see you sitting in the


tribunal of divine justice as a judge... instead I find you in the bosom of Mary, a Saviour full of indulgence for my sins.'

Unworthy as we are, He comes to us to join us on our journey to God, saying 'Be merciful as your Heavenly Father is merciful' (Luke 6:36). The Old Testament was the beginning of the journey, now we are at the crossroads, as Jeremiah says, we must take the 'good way' and we will 'find rest'. (Jer. 6:16) Christ's birth is the turning point for us, it is here we must decide to follow in faith, unafraid, because our 'light has come and the glory of Yahweh has risen on you.' (Is. 60:1) That is, the light of God's mercy.

Extracts from: The New Jerusalem Bible, Saints Devotional Edition.



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CHRISTMAS in the TYROL

by Ludmilla Boswell



It is Christmas Eve. The land is breathtaking in every season. Today with the lofty mountains adorned with snow, it looks more beautiful than ever. The streams that in summer rush so joyfully down from the glaciers rest silent now, sleeping beneath a clear mirror of ice.

This morning, Papa has cut the Christmas tree, still bearing the distinctive keen scent of the pine-forest, and to be decorated in readiness to declare with joy the arrival of the Christ Child. The children unpack the crib-figures and arrange their friends, Mary and Joseph, the shepherds and sheep, the three Kings, the ox and donkey, but the best is to place the crib with baby Jesus into 'God's corner.' Every Tyrolean home has a 'God's Corner', still existing since ancient times.

Early in the evening Papa prepares to bless the home and farm. He places hot cinders on to a little metal dish and sprinkles incense on them. Followed in prayer by Mama and the children, he blesses everywhere, as the story of the Nativity comes to life.

Later there will be the sound of a little bell, to enter the room with the crib and the Christmas tree. In the darkness, dazzling sparklers and glow of the candlelight, the presents are revealed under the tree left by the Christ Child. (Not Father Christmas – he visits on the day of St Nicolas.)



1. Christbaum 2. Christmas Tree
3. Crib scene 4. Tyrol in the snow

It is said that Tyrol has 365 days and one night, the Holy Night, when the whole village is invited by the joyful ringing of bells to celebrate this climax of the year. Making your way on the lonely, winding mountain road to Midnight Mass we come together like the shepherds to worship at the cradle of the Infant Child. Sitting hushed in the darkened church, suddenly lights blaze forth, revealing the glory of the baroque frescoes, the gleaming altar, and the traditional crib to celebrate the wonder of God.

On leaving the church all hear the clear sound of 'Silent Night', played by a village boy on his trumpet from the illuminated church tower, echoing around mysterious, ageless peaks. This night it is the joyful faith, declaring to the world the miracle of Christmas Eve – Christus natus est.

John of the Cross:
'Where there is no love, put love'



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