

SHALOM

in the HCUC

No. 21

For 11 Dec 2016

Dear Friends

The weeks have rushed by and here we are at the end of the calendar year. At the same time it is the beginning of the Christian year with its seasons of Advent, Epiphany, Lent, Easter and Spirit. Life is a continuous stream of endings and beginnings. Personally I have felt for a long time that this season of Advent could be regarded as an adventure—a journey, a time of discovery or rediscovery of things we have lost sight of because they are so familiar.

Away back in 1998 I found the words of the writer Marcel Proust and wrote them into the fly-leaf of a diary:-

“The real journey of discovery consists not in seeing new landscapes but in having new eyes.”

As we get towards Christmas the landscape is very familiar.

- school holidays, excited children, shopping, presents and preparations, getting more special food, a tree in the lounge, lights in the window...

For some it is excitement because family member will be home for Christmas, for others it is a time of sad memories because a loved one died at a previous Christmas time. (Sit quietly and allow the glad and sad experiences to flow through your memory doors.)

So how do we get new eyes to look at this familiar landscape of Christmas? I'm blessed by all those who have seen the familiar with new eyes and have opened me to a fresh understanding, a wider vision, a greater depth of meaning. Sometimes the newness has come in stillness and the silence of meditation. Times when I wasn't even trying “to see” meaning or truth or connections. In this issue I share some of the words and insights from Joy Cowley's work. Here's the first one.

“This then is the journey; from the head to the heart; from the city of learning to the field wide open to the sun and rain; from music dots on paper to the sound of a Chopin nocturne; from the structure of words to the mystery beyond their meaning; from the smallness of a manger to the love that holds the universe in being.”

Sincerely - Lester

- * This extra page comes with this issue because it is the last for 2016.
- * You will find there is (with this No. 21) an extra leaflet with the daily lectionary taking it through December, January and February 2017. Remember it is a selected pattern of reading suggested for your encouragement, faith, hope and love. It doesn't mean you can't open some other story, psalm, or book in the Bible and do your own exploring.
- * This is a good point to express our gratitude and thanks for the brilliant work of Gwyn Rogers with assistance from her husband Doug, for the task done with skill (especially the selection and simplifying of lectionary details) and so graciously—we thank you.
- * At this point in my life I am looking to 'having a go' at a 2017 series of Shalom. Now for a couple of quotes from some of the bits I have gleaned from here and there.

Parish Bulletin Bloopers:

- ⇒ Ladies, don't forget the Bring and Buy stalls—a great chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Bring your husbands.
- ⇒ Don't let worry destroy your life—let the Church help.
- ⇒ Potluck meal on Sunday at 5pm followed by prayer and medication.

Prayer of Tim (6 year old):

*Dear God, if you are at church next Sunday
I'll show you my new shoes.*

A Celtic Blessing:

*Deep peace of the running wave to you.
Deep peace of the flowing air to you.
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.
Deep peace of the shining stars to you.
Deep peace of the Son of Peace to you.*

... To the Mystery beyond the meaning of the Words

At Christmas time we sing the carols and hear again the stories surrounding the birth of Jesus. If we have grown up with them they can be as reassuring to our souls as our favourite comfortable lounge chair, or cosy winter slippers. But even these familiar bits of life take us on a journey which has an outer and an inner dimension.

John's gospel begins with words that echo the very first words of the Bible ... ie In the beginning ... Both passages focus on words, such as God said "Let there be light" and surprise, surprise there it was. In contrast John writes that the Word was with God, and the Word was God. It can be mind-blowing trying to grasp the meaning. That's not a bad thing. It pulls us towards the realization that behind whatever the words mean to us there is a mystery—a dimension that is beyond what words mean. Words great or simple are mere cups dipping into the ocean of reality and truth. A tiny sample of what is infinite. We may argue the meaning of our words and get angry and frustrated. On the other hand we can with 'new eyes' see it as a reassurance that our lives are firmly rooted in, and forever able to depend on something far greater than our smallness, far wiser than our deepest understandings, far more caring and loving than our pains (and pleasures) might seem to indicate.

It's a moment of insight to see that one translation of John 1:14 has — "And the word became flesh and pitched his tent in our camping ground, right beside us ..."

[That opens out into all sorts of images and meanings. No room here to expand—but make room for your own contemplation and reflections.]

When we hear again the words about stables, shepherds, angels, lights, travellers from the East, are we stopping our journey at these signposts? Are we content to read the menu hoping it will satisfy our hunger?

There's an ancient saying that "The finger is pointing at the moon. Once we see it we no longer need to keep looking at the finger."

We might also remember that when the sun rises we don't need our lighted candle.

Look Now! Wonder, Awe, Mystery, Adventure

Look now!
It is happening again!
Love like a high spring tide is
swelling to fullness and overflowing
the banks of our small concerns.

And here again is the star, that white
flame of truth blazing the way for us
through a desert of tired words.

Once more comes the music, angel
song that lifts our hearts and tunes
our ears to the harmony of the
universe, making us wonder how we
ever could have forgotten.

And now the magic within us
gathers up gifts of gold and myrrh,
while that other part of ourselves,
the impulsive reckless shepherd, runs
helter-skelter with arms outstretched
to embrace the wonder of it all.

We have no words to contain our
praise,
We ache with awe,
We tremble with miracle, as once again
in the small rough stable of our lives,
Christ is born.
(Thanks to Joy Cowley)

Remember -
When the sun rises,
it rises for everyone.

The greatest steps in the
progress of humanity have
been the products not of
wound-licking, but the acts
inspired by awe.

The openness to fascination
and the willingness to
adventure for it at great risk
have been the essential mark
of the uniquely human.

What we choose to incarnate
(in flesh and blood and body)
will be determined finally not
by reason, nor even common
sense, but by infusions of
excitement, by visions that
fool us out of our limits.

(Joseph Campbell)

God's ways begin with
mustard seeds.
With a child in a manger.
With local shepherds,
And among animals
in a stable.