

BISHOP ROBERT'S CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

This morning, Helen and I bought and decorated our Christmas Tree. The farm where we always buy our trees didn't have many left. The farmer said that post-Covid people have been buying their trees earlier, even at the end of November!

Certainly, this year I reckon we need more than ever a sense of Christmas cheer. During Advent the Church has been reading through the book of Isaiah. It's a book which contains powerful themes of longing and pleading and lament, "Oh that thou wouldest Rend the heavens and come down. Wake up, put on strength, oh arm of the Lord." But out of that lament arises a sense of hope. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations, they shall repair the ruined cities and with this prophecy that a child will be born who will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, the Prince of Peace.

One of the nice things about being Bishop in Europe is being able to collect Christmas decorations from different countries in the diocese. Many of our tree decorations are from Moscow. The star at the top of the tree is from Kyiv, Ukraine, and then this year, when we visited Leipzig the Chaplain's wife gave us a handmade Medallion of Peace. These decorations reflect the bringing together in my own heart of Russia, Ukraine and the longing for peace.

December 2023 witnesses a time of global anguish with terrible conflict in Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan and so many other places less in the headlines. Lives are devastated, cities destroyed, the land ruined. As we pause this year to celebrate the birth of Christ, we do so in the midst of turmoil and complexity. Actually we do that every year, but this year the Christmas cards I've received indicate an especial awareness of the danger and disorder that currently beset us. And amongst the wider global distress and uncertainty, I'm also keenly aware of personal and of family life, of those battling with serious illness, of folks spending their first Christmas without a close family member, and I'm aware that for some, Christmas is the loneliest time of the year,

The Ukrainian star on our Christmas tree has on its reverse side a crib, and this cribsignifies God's real and tangible commitment to the world through becoming a vulnerable human baby. The Christmas story isn't an escape from the harsh reality

Reflections from our Chaplain Chris

'Please take a moment to read the safety instructions'

Happy New Year! I pray and hope that each and everyone connected with St. John's finds and experiences deep blessing this year.

We are blessed that over the holiday period, we can visit Sarah's family in Vancouver. It's a long way but it's always a joy to reconnect with family and friends, and to see (hopefully if it's not raining too much) the beautiful winter mountain backdrop on this coastal city. Such wonderful natural beauty.

As we prepare for take-off, we will hear the standard announcement that those of us who fly are familiar with: 'Please take a moment to read the safety instructions!'. They will tell us about things we must or mustn't do now, and what to do if we get into trouble.

I have never been someone who likes to follow rules! I like to live life to the full and follow life-giving principles and model examples, but not rules! One of the attractions for me of the Christian faith is that this is what Jesus offered – he condemned excessive legalism where it contravened the life-giving principles by which he lived. And he brought a rule of life through simple focused principles; love God and love your neighbours as yourself. There is something for me here about living 'in the presence' of God and others, and letting the rest follow from that.

As we got on the plane, the safety instructions will only be part of the point; the thrill will be the journey; and seeing loved ones and those oceanside mountains again!

Here is a poem I recently read and liked:

Coast Road

by Julie Fuggle (published in 'Reaching for Mercy', 2018, Provost, UK)

On the edge of the world
we cling to the wet road
slipping between our wheels,
spitting spray over our feet.

Savage winds rip through
our clothes, our bones,
muscles taut with tension and chill.

Engine roars with sudden surge
but we do not escape the sullen sea,
following as we fly the curves,
suspended in the elements,
sea to right, hills to left,
under weight of whistling wind.

Man and machine respond together,
power in harness.
But in this scene we sense ,
in wordless worship
One who bridles with a word, wind and wave.

May you know you are not alone as we journey into 2024. God Bless.
Chris

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**WHAT NEW YEAR?**

New Year's Day is January 1, isn't it? Well, until 1582 the whole of Europe celebrated it on March 25, but then most countries adopted January 1 like the Romans had. But England didn't adopt it till 1752.

Various religious groups keep different dates: the Jewish new year falls on the first day of the month Tishri, which varies between September 6 and October 5; the Chinese new year varies between January 20 and February 20; Muslims reckon time by a year of 354 or 355 days so their new year is always changing.

**FOLLOW THE STAR**

January 6 is the Feast of the Epiphany when we remember the Wise Men who followed a star to the stable at Bethlehem. At Christmas we sang about "The Three Kings" but we don't really know much about them – you can check the details in St. Matthew's Gospel chapter 2. It doesn't say that they were kings, or how many there were, or where they came from – all we know is that some wise men came to visit the baby Jesus. We probably imagine that there were three of them because they brought three gifts – gold, frankincense and myrrh. (3)

**ST. JOHN'S ENGLISH LIBRARY NEWS**

After the Christmas and New Year break,

- **the Library re-opens** on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2024 with an **exhibition of Menton inspired paintings by Linda McCluskey**. Please come to the vernissage which will include music by the **vocal duet "Chic Chanteuses"** who are based in Nice.
- **Calling all Scrabblers** – Come on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2024 for a friendly game of Scrabble in the Library from 10.00.
- **'Poetry Please'** will return in the Library on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2024 from 18.00-19.00, followed by refreshments.

**Library open hours are: Wednesdays 14.30-17.30  
Saturdays 9.30-12.30**

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"May it please Your Honour. . ."

A collection of court-room howlers reported in the Massachusetts Bar Association Lawyers Journal. The following are questions actually asked of witnesses by attorneys during trials.

"Were you present when your picture was taken?"

"Were you alone or by yourself?"

"How far apart were the vehicles at the time of the collision?"

"You were there until the time you left, is that true?"

"How many times have you committed suicide?"

Q. "So the date of conception of the baby was August 8th?"

A. "Yes"

Q. "And what were you doing at the time?"
