



Summer 2021

"How long, oh Lord, how long?" Craig's call brings with it hope and trust that perhaps the end is in sight. It is my hope that your contributions to this Newsletter can reflect this.

Two powerful events, remote in time and place, are worthy of reflection at this time of Christmas. The first is the story "O Tannenbaum, the WW1 Story of the singing across the line" and the second is the story of little Cleo in W.A.

Under the past difficult and relentless times, I am especially grateful for Rod's calm, skilful and insightful gifts as our Producer and I thank Rosemary for her willingness to learn the ropes!

Christmas is remarkable for the way in which people get together with their family and friends and for stories that are particular to this time. One of my favourites is the story that centres around the carol "O Tannenbaum", or in English "Oh Christmas tree". This story centres on the western front during WW1. One night, two warring sides could hear each other across the line and the English were startled to hear the Germans singing a familiar carol. We do not know for sure what effect this had on the German side, but the legend has it that the young men took time off from fighting and sang together.

The second story brought to my mind, is the safe return of Cleo after 18 days of abduction, and it occurs to me that this Christmas parents all around Australia will be looking at their children with renewed thankfulness and wonder. Surprisingly, the media was helpful and not sensationalist, showing restraint throughout. More than that, the people of Australia seemed galvanized into expressions of support. There were notices in police stations, shops and private homes and everyone was talking about it. Cleo's rescue in Cup Week even kicked the Race off the front pages of the newspapers. While not a Christmas story, our concern for Cleo brought out the best we are capable of despite differences that are between us and society.

Back to Christmas!

Suzanne Yanko, Editor

From the Minister

by Craig Thompson

The last 18 months have taught us many things we previously knew little or even nothing about. And so we know more now about epidemiology, modelling, graphs, trends, forecasts, mutations, transmission rates and states of emergency and the politics of their implementation and extension. With our newly-gained knowledge, of course, we have been tempted to play epidemiologist, or prime minister or premier, and probably not very well.

At this time of the year – Advent – the church’s reading of Scripture shifts to texts which look like new knowledge and forecasts for a previous time. These are usually apocalyptic texts, in which New Testament writers call us to read the “signs of the times” to recognise what is about to happen and act accordingly. This we are less inclined to do these days on the information provided, not least because many before us have attempted to play prophet here and not done very well.

But the end-time visions and expectations of the New Testament are not like those which consider the course of a virus. A virus is quite unpredictable in any instance but confidently predictable across many instances. We know that 1000 people (give or take 150) will contract COVID-19 in Melbourne today, but we won’t know who until they catch it. Viruses act according to the peculiar “uncertain certainty” of statistics.

God is not an uncertain certainty – at least, not for the church. We begin not with “whether” God will come over the horizon but with God “has” come over the horizon. The future to which pre-Christian apocalypticists looked is already come in a manger in Bethlehem, in a stable flooded with resurrection light – flooded, that is, with revealing, apocalyptic light.

What is revealed there is God’s being with us, in all things: in whatever is uncertain – statistically or otherwise – and also in what seems certain.

A COVID Christmas may not seem like Christmas, but Christmas is properly just a marker that in Jesus our time is made God’s time, that God’s time might finally be ours. Whatever shape our Christmas takes – omicron pending – let’s be mindful that God doesn’t move any closer or further away with the virus. “Omicron” – o-micron, the small “o” – finally gives way to the omega – o-mega, the big “O” – who is Jesus, Alpha and Omega, embracing all things.

May all your Christmases be Omega.

News from Church Council

By Tim O’Connor, Chair of Church Council

It’s been just two months since our last news, so we have relatively little to report, but what there is will keep you abreast of what has been happening in Church Council and the Congregation.

- After much planning, the welcome return to worship in the church occurred on 7 November, when Mannat Pahwa was baptised, with her elder Gaye assisting Craig. Morning tea resumed that Sunday, and from 12 December communion wine will be offered again. On 14 November Rosemary, John and Gaye could finally be commissioned as elders.
- On 12 December Church Council presents the Mark the Evangelist and Hotham Mission 2022 Budgets to the Congregation for approval as well as the 2022 Focuses for Mission and Ministry. In Council meetings we have regularly reviewed progress on the focuses. Some such as the New Testament Studies led by Craig, and the justice and peace initiatives led by John and others could happen online. Others that had been planned, such as regular feedback on worship and a workshop on leading the intercessions, have had to be postponed to next year.
- Craig’s Weekly Updates by email and the morning teas by video following worship online proved vital for keeping the congregation connected, until worship resumed in the church. The quarterly editions of Mark the Word, prepared by Suzanne, Rosemary and Rod, have provided members with a deeper way of knowing each other through their written contributions.

- At our December meeting we approved the annual report on the appraisal of the Administrator of Mark the Evangelist, Greg Hill, held by Tim, Rod and Mark with him. The meeting commended Greg on his outstanding work this year, as he supported Craig and other Councillors in managing responses to the pandemic for the Congregation, and led the Mission in safely maintaining as many services as possible under very difficult circumstances.
- The postponed Scenarios Workshop of the Mark the Evangelist Futures Project – for all members of the congregation to attend – will now be held in the afternoon of Sunday 13 February 2022.

Comments, queries and suggestions are invited by the Church Council:

Gaye Champion (Elder), Mark Duckworth (Chairperson of Hotham Mission Board), John Langmore (Elder), Rod Mummary (Elder and Treasurer), *Tim O'Connor* (Elder and Chairperson of Church Council), David Radcliffe (Elder), Craig Thompson (Minister), Rosemary Wearing (Elder) and Alan Wilkinson (Mark the Evangelist Futures Project Coordinator).

Initiative for Peacebuilding Major Activities 2021

by John Langmore

Melbourne University established the Initiative for Peacebuilding in December 2020. Dr Tania Miletic was the first appointment, as Assistant Director. Her first major task was to share hosting of ANZ Rotary Centenary Celebration at Melbourne University in April, on the theme of 'The Future of Peace Leadership'.

Many Zoom roundtables have been held, four about Myanmar on how to motivate movement towards restoration of democracy. South Sudan, Afghanistan, and the influence of the AUKUS nuclear submarine agreement on the Non-Proliferation Treaty are other major subjects. Another consultation was about lessons which could be learnt from the Cambodian peace settlement agreed In Paris 30 years ago.

We held an international conference on Environmental Peacebuilding in November at which 14 researchers presented papers about aspects of the relationship between climate change and conflict and means for addressing those issues. Principal issues discussed were about the reasons for successes (and mistakes), how those contributed to the negotiation of the Paris Accord and to developments since then. We are launching a report on possibilities for peace on the Korean Peninsula on 14th December.

We are supervising five PhD students one of whom is receiving a scholarship paid for by a generous donor. Dr Miletic has been awarded three consultancies to review peacebuilding by the Cambodian Peace and Conflict Studies Centre. Establishment of an Australian conflict and peace studies network is underway.

Fundraising has been a major requirement during the year. A submission we made to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee inquiry into Funding for public research into foreign policy issues used many of the points we made in their report. The Committee commented that, in the absence of much philanthropic interest in international issues or foreign policy, government should increase support for high quality, non-partisan research. It also mentioned that peacebuilding was one of the areas where support was needed. Let's hope the Government adopts their recommendations!

Shining a Light on Asylum in Australia

by Kerry Phillips



The Inner Melbourne UCA Justice Coalition hosted an online seminar titled “Shining a light on asylum in Australia” on Sunday 24th October 2021. The key presenters were Sr Brigid Arthur and Pamela Curr OAM, with Kerry Phillips, giving some background statistics and definitions. Just over 50 people attended the Zoom event.

Sister Brigid spoke at first to say that over 100,000 people from Afghanistan have applied for humanitarian visas and that only 3000 visas are available.

Pamela Curr spoke of the despair felt by families who are separated and cannot be reunited because of the conditions that apply to their visas. She also spoke of the positive decisions made by the courts to award people their refugee status and freedom from detention, but which the Minister refuses to follow. Pamela also mentioned that there are 11 men from Bangladesh who have been held, locked detention for 10 or 11 years, with no release date in their future.

Sister Brigid then explained that an underclass of people now exists in Australia, people who have no work rights and no money at all, who live in destitution, entirely reliant on charity. She described the heartbreakng conditions of one family who have been traumatised by events in their home country as well as the detention camps and their subsequent traumatising experiences in our community.

If you would like to help those in need and/or receive a copy of the information from this seminar, please email justice.uca@gmail.com or contact me at kphillipstw@gmail.com.

Memories of Christmas

Following the theme of connecting threads across generations, time and place, we have sought memories of Christmas from our congregation as they reflected on memorable past Christmases in different parts of the world, sometimes minus the next generation, and other times with three generations of families; memorably in the UK (Cambridge for the Blackwoods and London for the Radcliffes), and Port Moresby and Canberra (for the Wilkinsons).

Peter and Sue Blackwood

On December 23rd we arrived in Cambridge. We had spent the last seven weeks in France, Ireland, Wales, and Scotland and were determined to spend Christmas in Cambridge.

An early night was in order. Peter woke before 4am on the 24th and set out to stand in line outside King's College Chapel. I tried to sleep in, but there were others in the B&B having breakfast at 5am. Despite the chaos at breakfast, I was on my way by 7.30am.

When I arrived outside the Chapel the queue consisted of people who were well organised with chairs. Peter was number 15 in the line. [The man in first place was from America and he had been in the queue for 3 days!] I was some way back near the steps under Gibb's Arch. People in my vicinity had travelled from Liverpool, Portsmouth, Washington, and Holland. At 9.45am we all took part in the BBC Service of the Day. This was Broadcast live from the steps under Gibb's Arch.

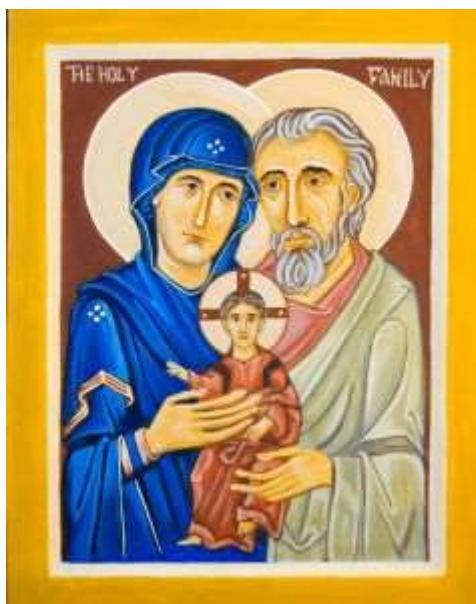
Time went very quickly, and we went to get coffee and something to eat. There was no problem with coming and going. Those in the line recognised that we each had a place and could come and go as we needed. Peter and I managed to ring home and talk to our offspring who were having pudding and hard sauce, (typical Blackwood Christmas fare)!

We were standing in sunshine looking towards the Cam and the occasional punter, when just before the Chapel was opened, we were entertained by the Choristers [a la the King's Singers]. At 1.30pm we were 'loaded' into the Chapel. Peter had a front seat next to the Choir, and I was up towards the Alter. The windows were very beautiful, the Rubens triptych magnificent, and as the candles got brighter and brighter the excitement grew. When the solo voice started singing *Once in Royal David's City*, we knew that Christmas had arrived.

The service went for more than one and a half hours. Over a thousand people in the Chapel meant that it was filled with sound, from organ, choirs, and congregational singing. I did not want it to end and when it did, I found I was in tears. We were back at our B&B by 6.30pm and it felt like 10pm.

On Christmas morning we again set out for King's College Chapel to line up for the 11am service. We were fortunate enough to be in the front very near the Alter. Again, the service was 90 minutes, and the organ and choirs were just as magnificent as the day before. It was then off to the Rat and Parrott Pub for our Christmas Dinner!

A very memorable Christmas.



Icon painted by Peter Blackwood,
modelled on an icon by Aidan Hart

David and Vicki Radcliffe

This is the tale of two gatherings of family, a generation apart, in London at Christmas.

In September 1974, a year after being married, Vicki and I moved to Glasgow so I could do my PhD. The contrast between subtropical, sprawling, suburban Brisbane with its elevated wooden houses and the gritty, industrial, urban environment of Glasgow could not have been more stark. As winter approached, it was difficult to adjust to going to and from work, in Vicki's case, and Uni for me, in the dark. Sunrise came after 9am, not that we saw the sun very often through the perpetual grey skies, and it got dark soon after 3pm. But the bright Christmas lights in the main city square lifted our spirits, countering the constant drizzle and the dreary city streets as Christmas approached.

However, we celebrated our first Christmas in the UK in London. The younger of my two sisters, her husband and their baby son were living there, and my parents decided to fly from Australia to join us. We made the five-hour train trip to London and proceeded to Trafalgar Square. We had arranged to all meet up at St Martin-in-the-Fields on Christmas Eve. On arriving, I strode up alongside my mother, and said hello. Always prone to being easily startled, Mutti, as she was affectionately known, almost jumped out of her skin. We still laugh about this incident. When we came down for breakfast at the Morgan Hotel, Bloomsbury on Christmas morning, we were taken aback by garbled stories from the proprietor that “a town in Australia had been wiped out by a huge cyclone”. In a world before the internet and instant global communication, we were left in the dark as to which town. Was it Brisbane?

Subsequently we learned it was Darwin. Later that day, we shared a scrumptious English-style Christmas dinner with all the bells and whistles at my sister’s flat in Hackney, requiring a long walk afterwards. A few days later we dined out at Bloom’s kosher deli in Golders Green, in part because nothing else was open. It amazed us just how much London shut down, including no public transport on Christmas Day.

Fast forward to 2011. Vicki and I had moved to West Lafayette, Indiana, our daughter, Sarah, was living in London and our son, Dylan, was in Melbourne. We decided to all meet up in London for Christmas. We gathered at Borough Market on the south side of the Thames, sampling the seasonal treats. On Christmas Eve, we attended the “family crib service” at Southwark Cathedral, which is nestled alongside Borough Market. Intended for children, this was a somewhat chaotic affair replete with a manger and live animals. Christmas morning, we returned to the Cathedral for a more conventional service. With no public transport still being a feature of a London Christmas, we walked through the deserted streets to Sarah’s small flat in Walworth, south of Elephant and Castle, for lunch. As we sat around the TV with heavily laden plates, awaiting an appearance by Her Majesty, the scene brought back memories of our family Christmas thirty-seven years earlier in Hackney. Yet much had changed. Back then tourists in London seldom ventured to the south side of the Thames, with the exception being that of going to Waterloo Station. The whole area has been totally transformed. Similarly, the East End as we first knew it, a place of Pearly Kings and Queens, and winkles and jellied eels, has passed into history.

While places change, memories and associations remain. From the 1970s onwards, each time we approach the Waterloo area, be it Christmas or other season of the year, Vicki always breaks into the lilting strains of “Dirty old river, must you keep rolling, flowing into the night? ... Terry meets Judy, Waterloo Station, every Friday night ...”. The melody and lyrics of [“Waterloo Sunset”](#) flow through our lives, from our teenage years, before we met, until today.



Alan and Ann Wilkinson – Christmas with our non-religious Family

Possibly like some others of our generation in the church, Ann and I find ourselves with four children who have chosen not to be associated with the Church. So, what does Christmas mean for our annual gathered extended family of around thirty? And how did we end up there?

In the first two decades of their lives, our school aged children accompanied us to church each Sunday, first in Canberra and then in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. Their experience of our joint Methodist, Presbyterian, and Congregational Church (later Uniting Church in Australia) in South Woden, Canberra, was quite varied. At times they were part of a traditional Sunday School in which some leaders focussed on children’s bible stories while others gave more attention to relationships and values within the Christian community. Their most memorable worship experience is still the ‘Mouse and Elephant’ stories presented in a lengthy series by our imaginative Minister. Their most memorable Church relationships were formed out of an initiative in our congregation to set up ‘family clusters’ – three or four families who met monthly for a meal and a religious activity involving both adults and children.

We moved to Port Moresby in 1977 when our children's ages ranged from 12 to 6 years. While transferring to the United Church of Papua New Guinea, it was not long before our family linked up with five or six expatriate families in our congregation whose parents were keen to meet weekly over a meal and explore theological issues. Our 'house church' would also often go camping on holidays together. In this way our children built a new set of relationships within our expatriate Christian community alongside those that were forming within their primary and secondary school settings.

Things changed as we returned to Canberra in 1985. By then, our children's ages ranged from 20 to 14 and they began to leave home and become independent. Even the younger two teenagers still living with us were reluctant to accompany us as we returned to our previous South Woden Uniting Church.

Leaping forward to 2021, we and one of our children (plus his family) will return for 'Christmas' to Canberra where two of our children and some of our grandchildren live. Our fourth child and her family are grounded in Western Australia on account of COVID travel restrictions. We will have around thirty members of the extended family together for Christmas lunch.

On Christmas morning Ann and I will join the South Woden congregation to which we formerly belonged. Often one child and one grandchild will accompany us, drawn by the memory of friends from the 'family clusters' of the seventies. The attraction of the Christmas service with its familiar story line and carols may also be a factor. We will return to the growing clan gathering, the warm (post-COVID) greetings, and the shared lunch preparation. During the afternoon we will take time in one large group to give and receive – one by one – our Kris Kringle gifts to each other, most of which will be handcrafted.

There will be little of the remembering of the birth of Jesus on this day. But values we would associate with the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ around community, caring, and sharing will be very clearly in evidence in what is a very close family.

We have often wondered why it is that our and so many other 'church children' have not continued their association with the church. We feel that for our family it may be closely related to our movement overseas and back at critical times in the children's lives. Moreover, we believe Christianity is a religion primarily understood by adults. Without continuous close and relevant social association, children will drift away as they become teenagers. This is aside from the challenging impact of the increasingly secular society in which we live. We would be most interested to know whether there are others who share our experience.

From Donald Nicolson, Director of Music

The Song of the Sibyl formed an important part of the Christmas liturgy in medieval and Renaissance Spain. Performed on Christmas morning, it was based on the texts of Judgement Day as described by the ancient prophetess. Originally performed in Latin from around the 11th century, it was gradually performed in the vernacular, and appeared in numerous dialects around Spain, and even Southern France. Although removed from the liturgy in the 16th century, it continued to be performed in Mallorca more or less uninterrupted to modern times. In 2010, it was declared a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO.

I have known several versions of this mysterious chant thanks to the magnificent recordings by Jordi Savall and Hesperion XXI. Recently, my love of it has been piqued again while I work on my own version of it for Van Diemen's Band for their Christmas season of concerts in Tasmania later this month. In the meantime, here is Jordi's transportative version of the Sibil Mallorquina, sung by the sublime Monserrat Figueras.

<https://youtu.be/NzfxWQ7YAB4>

Noticeboard

Sunday 19th December A service of Advent carols and readings with Eucharist, 10am.

Christmas Eve (afternoon and evening): we have no Christmas Eve services at Mark the Evangelist, but commend the Christmas Eve services at St Mary's Anglican Church.

Saturday 25th December Christmas Day: Worship with Eucharist, **9.30am**

Normal services will continue, 10am, on Sunday 26th December and throughout January.

Sunday 13th February: Workshop to discuss the future location of the congregation (following worship and for a maximum of three hours including lunch – details to come).



Uniting Church in Australia

The Congregation of Mark the Evangelist - North Melbourne