



Summer 2015

## Given

by Craig Thompson

Despite the fact that it Christmas fast approaches, it is very hard to give a *gift* these days. It is easy, of course, to buy and give something to someone and it is easy enough simply to receive what we might be given. But it is difficult for it truly to be a gift, a giving. In fact, this is probably *because* Christmas fast approaches.

Recall what it feels like at this time of the year to receive an unexpected present. By "unexpected" I mean a present for which you have no present to offer in return. Any sense of embarrassment at not having something to swap for what we have received is the sign that in fact we've not received a *gift* at all, or received it *as* a gift. We are forced into a situation in which we have not earned what we have received by having something of similar value to offer back. This places us in the debt of another person, which is where none of us really wants to be. And so we will make sure we won't be caught without something to exchange with that person next year, just in case she pulls a stunt like that again!

But this is not gift-giving. Giving you something of similar value to what you've given me is what we do at the supermarket checkout and is not called "giving" but "buying". A gift is not a wage or an exchange but something for which no return is necessary or perhaps even possible; a proper gift is sheer grace. If there is a sense in which gifts do place us in some kind of debt to the giver, it is a debt which does not demand to be paid otherwise it would not be a gift.

But even if it doesn't expect something in return, a true gift does effect something: it joins the giver and the recipient and becomes a kind of focal point of their relationship. As such, a gift is both more than just the thing which has been given; it becomes a sign of the relationship, of its character.

The humanity given to us in Jesus is just such a gift. It is not something which we could have given ourselves, and not something to which we can adequately respond. Yet it is exactly what we need our own humanity, got right.

And this gift our perfected humanity in Jesus stands between us and God as the thing which joins us the giftedness which Jesus is becomes a sign of the way in which we and God are bound together. Between God and all humankind lies the child in the manger a sign that we are ourselves, or have ourselves, as sheer gift.

To be what we are gift is to live differently from the dominant way of mere exchange. A gift giver is free. Nothing is lost if the gift is not recognised, because no return was required and the "failure" of the gift does not diminish that it was a gift. And everything can be gained is the gift is gratefully received.

May this Christmas be a time of such free giving and grateful receiving for us all.

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## A Christmas Story

*This week Craig initiated just such a gift. These two emails tell the story*

### Thurs 10pm

Friends,

Many of you will know "Ruth\*" who has been part of our congregation for about 2 years. You will also know that she has been in the process of seeking asylum in Australia. This process has not yet delivered a positive outcome for her and she has now only the option of an appeal to the Minister (Immigration) remaining; if she is not successful here it will result in her deportation.

After consulting with the Church Council, I'm writing to request

1. offers of **financial support** towards her being able to exercise this option.
2. offers of **letters of support** for her application

1. The costs involved are legal fees; we are seeking to raise at least \$2200 (up to \$3300, depending on aspects of the application which are not yet determined). If you are able to contribute financially, please let me know by reply email how much (emails will come only to me).

It will be most helpful to know by Friday 11th (tomorrow) if you are able to assist

2. We are also seeking letters of support for Ruth to accompany her request for a Ministerial intervention on her behalf. If you are able to offer a letter of support, please let me know and I will get back to you about what kind of letter might help; letters would be required by about the middle of next week.

The timing in this matter is very tight, as we have only until December 24 to finalise any appeal or request to the Minister, the bulk of the work having to be done early next week. Please keep Ruth, and all this, in your prayers during this time.

### Fri 8:55pm

Friends,

An update on the request for donations I issued last night:

1. We have raised enough to meet the costs of the legal options, as described in the previous email. We say a very big THANK YOU to all who have been able to contribute in one way or another. With the funds now pledged, the appeal is **CLOSED**. If you haven't contributed financially but intended to, please let me know in case there is anything unexpected which comes up.
2. For those who have offered to write a personal letter of support, some guidelines are available here. Some creative variation on your construction of the letter might help, but the basic requirements should be addressed. If you've any questions about this, please reply to this email or see me Sunday.

Again, thank you...

Craig

(\* The name of the person has been changed for obvious reasons).

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## From the Editor

by Suzanne Yanko

In preparing this newsletter I have been struck by the positive nature of the stories, both past and present, of people in our congregation and beyond. Rod and I (and a number of others) felt that at the heart of our community was someone who deserves to be acknowledged and thanked for the spirit that he has fostered at Mark the Evangelist.

Rob Gallacher has obliged with a piece that surpassed all my hopes. Please take a moment to read it and reflect on it.

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## **Thank you, Craig**

by Rob Gallacher

In 2015 we have lived through interesting times, and for you, Craig, our minister, that has meant many challenges.

Following the huge blow to Mark the Evangelist arising from the forced divestment of property, you have picked up the flagging spirit of the congregation. Together with the Church Council, you have moved us forward into a positive frame of mind, with an action plan that is now well under way.

Yet you have not allowed time-consuming property matters to distract you from careful preparation for the conduct of worship, or from the teaching program you have initiated in the congregation. The way you adapt the liturgy to the season of the church year and to the Scripture readings for the day, is much appreciated. You take pains to teach us new hymns and chants, and you explain the service with your "Litbits".

You have a deep concern that members of the congregation develop a theological awareness that is often overlooked when congregations, anxious about decline, seek solutions that are lightweight and populist in the hope that new people will be attracted. With your sermons and study groups you set our minds, with Mary, upon "the better part".

Pastorally you have maintained a personal interest in each of us, and you have given special attention generously when it has been needed.

It has been a year of regrouping and renewal for Hotham Mission, and you have contributed a freely to the cause, especially integrating the Mission into the web site, working with Gaye, Greg, Beth and the Board on the Three Year Plan, reviewing old ventures and developing new ones.

A personal challenge for you has been the adoption of Coulton's foster sister. We have all been delighted to welcome two-year-old Jasmine into the congregation. With her winning smile, energetic gait and her ease in going to people, she has won our hearts. But this has meant a good deal of adjustment at home. We realise that Annette has made an enormous contribution that at times has been quite costly.

All these pressures have not curtailed your wider involvements. You have been active in the Transform program, the Lutheran/Uniting Church Dialogue, the Presbytery of Yarra Yarra, the Theological Reading Group, a U3A course in Modern Philosophy and very likely more could be added to the list. These broader horizons enrich your ministry to us.

It is of the nature of the ministerial calling that we can always think of more things to put on your plate, and we can all give advice on how things could be done differently to suit our personal whims, but we want you to know that we appreciate you for what you are, an able and dedicated minister of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. We pledge ourselves to work with you as we are able, and to pray for you, your family and the congregation at Mark the Evangelist in 2016.

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## **Prepare the way of the LORD**

by Robert Gribben

‘Prepare the way of the LORD; make his paths straight’ – Luke 3:4b

Susan and I were in Albania for a week in November, not a place many people visit, or wish to. The Communist regime, one of the cruellest of our times, began in 1967, fully determined to stamp out all sign of religion, Christian or Muslim, and did so for more than thirty years until it collapsed, with others, in 1991. Churches and mosques were recycled as museums, garages, theatres, restaurants (not unknown in more peaceful regimes) or simply razed to the ground.

Early in 1992, a missionary Greek bishop in Africa opened a letter from the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople reappointing him, as of its receipt, to Albania. It was a brilliant choice. Anastasios Yannoulatos had become interested in Africa while he was a student, and in fact wrote

his PhD (Athens) in anthropology. He travelled there for his research, and made friends. The Patriarchate in Alexandria (Egypt) which has the title ‘and All Africa’ was putting this ideal into practice, and there were embryonic Orthodox churches in Kenya, Uganda, Ghana and Tanzania. Anastasios had settled into the academic world, and made professor, priest, and then Dean of the Theological Faculty in Athens. At that point, he was made a bishop, and that same evening, he flew out to Nairobi as Patriarchal Exarch for East Africa. He laboured there – and it was a labour – for nearly two decades, building churches, schools, medical centres, a seminary, and ordaining a native African clergy. He was beginning to see rich fruit for his labours, but recognized the rightness of his call elsewhere.



In Albania, there was nothing but death and destruction. Bishops, priests, nuns, teachers, murdered, imprisoned, and tortured in horrendous ways. Bishop Anastasios began by visiting the remains of churches through the cities and countryside, and he celebrated the Divine Liturgy in each ruin. No altar, no iconostasis, no choir – all essentials to a normal Orthodox liturgy. But after a while, old people began to emerge to reconnect with their memory of the faith; young people were intrigued, then involved. Monies were sought from the Orthodox in Greece, North and South America, and Finland. As in Africa, work teams came to do practical restoration; doctors and medical staff offered their time and expertise. This new work slowly but surely came to fruition, through a man who is well named: Anastasios, ‘Resurrection’. The Orthodox (and Catholic, and Evangelical) churches are alive and flourishing in Albania today.

I first met him at the World Council of Churches’ Commission for World Mission and Evangelism conference, *Your Kingdom Come* held in Melbourne in May 1980. I was co-director of an amazing ecumenical liturgy at St Patrick’s Cathedral (assisted by the cathedral’s director, one Father Denis Hart). We were expecting the Coptic Pope Shenouda III as preacher, but he had just been placed under house arrest in the Egyptian desert – and someone suggested the Greek missiologist and bishop from Africa. I reminded him of this in Tirana, on in his 86th birthday, and next day I found two books had been delivered, one, his autobiography of his Africa years, and the other *Mission in Christ’s Way*, his reflections on mission.

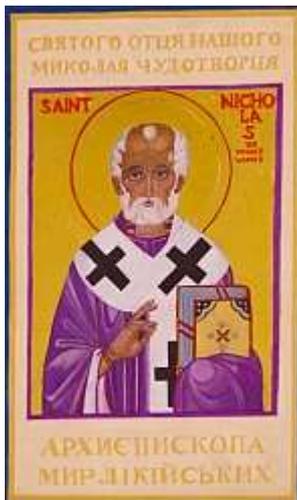
We were in Tirana at the initiative of the Global Christian Forum (on whose international committee I serve). The Forum is just that: a safe place for people of different views to meet. It brought together the leadership of the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Historic Protestant Churches, along with those reluctant and critical ecumenists, the growing Evangelical and Pentecostal ‘new churches’ of the world. We watched new relationships arise where there had only been suspicion and criticism (on all sides), and a new commitment to ‘listening to the voices of the suffering churches’ together. The theme of the consultation was: *Discrimination, Persecution and Martyrdom: Following Christ Together*. You can find out more at our website, [globalchristianforum.org](http://globalchristianforum.org).

The Christmas connection? Well, it’s Advent’s too: the task of the Church is to prepare, not make, the way of the LORD. It is to do everything in its power to point away from itself to the reconciling, healing, forgiving God of Christian faith. It is to be, in its own life, a community governed in all things by the spirit of that holy One, the *Theotokos* (God-bearer), who rejoiced that the mighty would be brought low, and the poor raised to receive the Good News (Lk 1: 46f). It is to act in Christ’s way towards the enemy and to work in everything with friends of the Gospel. The message of Christmas is that she bore the Child in whose human birth all earthly life is blessed, in which we know that matter matters to God, that (as the Orthodox love to say) God became human, in order that we might become ‘of God’.

But I am intrigued by the thought that ‘celebrating the liturgy in the ruins of the Church’ might be the watchword of our times.

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## Saint Nicholas



Saint Nicholas was born in 270 AD and became the Bishop of Myra (now Turkey). As a Monk in his twenties he helped refugees. St Nicholas gave gifts and money anonymously through windows to unfortunate families as stories tell us.

He was recognised as a saint in the 6th Century. Over the centuries St Nicholas has become the model for gift giving around the world. We know him today as Santa Claus or Father Christmas.

“Dear Lord our God, we give thanks to you for the example of St Nicholas the Wonderworker  
To those who were hungry, he gave nourishment  
To those imprisoned he gave hope  
To those who were lost he offered comfort  
And to everyone he taught that truth was all  
Give us strength dear Lord to imitate Nicholas’s redeeming qualities, his courage, love and  
compassion, his hope and kindness, that through him we may serve you in loving our fellow men  
and women.

Help us to live lives of charity and love, that through Nicholas’s example we imitate his good deeds  
to be always mindful of others’ needs and necessities, to give rather than receive, to be loving and  
generous in our love for all humankind. Amen.”

*Iconography, written by Helen C Williams,*

*Adapted Ukrainian Orthodox icon from Byzantine original icon*

*Prayer Emma Taylor*

*Members of the Uniting Church Icon Schools. 2014*

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## Two stories

by Heather Mathew

### A Bouquet' for the Living

Dr Margaret Henderson OBE, distinguished physician, turned 100 on November 13. Some members of the congregation will remember her occasional presence at worship in Curzon Street in the company of the late Gwen Dovey. Margaret was a long-standing member of the Canterbury Fellowship at Trinity College in Parkville, where she lived, however she was a vigorous and effective partner in Gwen's advocacy and support for asylum seekers in the Hotham Mission program. Honouring this, Church Council sent a card to Margaret on her birthday, on behalf of the Congregation, with the following inscription:



*"We offer our congratulations and best wishes on the occasion of your 100th birthday. We honour and give thanks for your Christian witness and the practical support and encouragement you have given to many, including Muhammad and Foozel at Curzon Street.  
May God bless you in your celebrations.*

*The Congregation of Mark the Evangelist, Uniting Church, North Melbourne".*

## Honouring the Past



The North & West Melbourne Senior Citizens Club invited Greg Hill and members of the Congregation to attend the unveiling of a permanent display at the Jean McKendry Paterson Neighbourhood Centre. The display, set up by the City of Melbourne, highlights the work and achievements of Jean with the club over the 40 years since the establishment of the North & West Melbourne Senior Citizens Association in 1975.

Wyn Mackay, President of the Association, invited John Smith to unveil the display, and Rod Mummery spoke on behalf of the Congregation.

Attendees were then invited to visit the Annual Exhibition of arts and crafts produced by the Association, and were welcomed to refreshments.

It seemed a most appropriate and worthwhile display to those attending, for it informs a changing population of visitors and clients of the centre of its origins and the extraordinary person for whom the Centre is named. Due to changed demographics, less than ten elderly citizens attend the Centre these days; but a variety of other groups make active use of the Centre. The Jean that we knew and loved would be pleased to know that the Centre continues to meet the needs of local people

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## Writing about family

by Beverley Wendelken



Perhaps some readers may have noticed that I have recently published a book about my father, Frederick Stansfield Cox. I have now been invited to write briefly concerning what it was like to write about someone with whom I was so close. I had previously written two books. The first, published in 1999, is titled *A Man Dearly Beloved: The Life and Times of Robert Murdoch of Eaglehawk 1864 1927* and is about my maternal grandfather who died well before I was born. When I did arrive on this earth I lived in the house Robert and his wife Sarah built when they were married. Robert had been a very public figure and there was a lot of material available about him.

I was then invited by the Kensington Uniting Church to write a history of the Kensington Methodists. Having been a Kensington Methodist at one time I was quite interested in the project and as a result *Kensington Methodists* was published in 2001.

After having learned so much about my grandfather through research and writing, it occurred to me that my father had also lived a life worth recording and I would be able to write his story from a much more personal perspective. So writing a book was not something new but there was a more personal experience about that as I had known him in a very different way to those I had written about earlier. While some of the features of writing were the same and a good deal of research was still necessary, much of what I wrote was from what I had personally known about my father. I was largely re-living the first half of my own life. I also wrote knowing that many of my readers would have known both of us during the 31 years we shared and felt that in some ways I was having a conversation with others who had known Fred.

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## Christmas History

by David Sutherland



As a small boy I remember my father explaining to us a new charity that had caught his fancy. We would place an empty bowl on the Christmas dinner table and place gifts in it for those less fortunate than ourselves.

Looking at the history of the Christmas Bowl Appeal Act for Peace I expect this was the year the appeal was launched in 1949. It was quite a confronting way to demonstrate to a small boy how fortunate he was even though our country Christmas dinner in those days was much less elaborate than now. It is wonderful to see how this idea has caught on to become a significant charity today. I am also delighted to see that it has become a part of our own congregation's life.

I expect there are others of us who share this memory with me and are also part of Christmas history?

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## Sunday mornings with the children

by Mary Sutherland

Our warmest thanks to the nine members of the congregation who have regularly helped with the Sunday morning children's activities. We always work together in pairs which adds to the variety and stability of the program.

Having such an experienced group to call on is a huge benefit. Each of us gets to know our children in a very informal way as they are growing up, and the children know various "grandparents" in the congregation on easy first name terms.

We are working from Ecumenical material from the UK, particularly created with Church of England, Methodist and Catholic input. This follows the weekly Lectionary and usually has half a dozen ideas for developing the theme with different age groups and styles of learning. More ideas are on their website. Even so, sometimes we need a livelier approach, but someone generally comes up with a new angle, often from personal experience. We always encourage active questions knowing that with a congregation like ours someone can tackle almost any question. And if it can't be answered what a question from a child!

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## Rosalie's big adventure

# Rosalie on the right trek

### CASH RAISED IN EIGHT-DAY ADVENTURE

Julia Irwin

ROSALIE Hudson, 77, said she'll never forget seeing the glowing white peak of Mt Annapurna on her Himalayan trek to raise money for Alzheimers Australia.

"I felt I could have reached up and touched the stars," she said on return from her 115km eight-day trek up some of Nepal's steepest and rockiest terrain.

Working as a nurse educator specialising in dementia care, Ms Hudson was the eldest of the six trekkers, who have so far raised more than \$16,000 in sponsorship.

"Having enough breath to climb at high altitude was very tough but coping with the steep descent was harder – a lot harder than any of us expected," she said.

"The views were just spectacular – especially when we'd climbed to 3900m and I saw the magnificent Mt Annapurna in the full moon."

Ms Hudson credited a rigorous training regimen with the PrYme exercise program



Rosalie Hudson, 77, training with Frances Scarrott-Goold. Below: Ms Hudson in Nepal.

Picture: CARMEL BAZZANO

(designed for those aged over 50) at Northcote Aquatic and Recreation Centre for giving her the stamina for the trek.

Ms Hudson enrolled in twice weekly Zumba and yoga classes and strength training sessions three times per week, with PrYme membership co-ordinator Frances Scarrott-Goold

mapping out an individualised program for her.

"I owe a debt of gratitude to Frances who taught me how to use the trekking poles correctly, gave advice on "walking in" good-quality boots and taking care of my feet," she said. Ms Scarrott-Goold said she was happy to help when Ms Hudson came to her in Septem-

ber and said she was planning to do the Annapurna trek in six weeks.

Ms Hudson said there was no sure way to fend off Alzheimers or dementia but a healthy lifestyle reduced the risks of getting it.

To donate to Ms Hudson's tally go to: [trektoremember2015.everydayhero.com/au/rosalie](http://trektoremember2015.everydayhero.com/au/rosalie)



## A busy schedule

by Donald Nicolson



(Look carefully at this recent picture from the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra!)

(Editor's note: As a music reviewer, I am often surprised and pleased to see Donald on stage, most recently for the performance of the MSO Messiah. So I asked him to summarise his various musical activities this year. As you'll see, we are fortunate indeed to have his services on Sundays at MtE!)

### Latitude 37:

Peninsula summer music Festival, January – Turkish/Ottoman programme

Local Heroes: *Ciacona!* in March, *L'Esprit d'Elegance* in July and *Corradini and the Courtesan* in September

Brisbane baroque, April – a stunning performance of Biber's Rosary Sonatas

Latitude also produced CD#3 with the ABC – *Royal Consorts*

### Anja and Zlatna:

It was relatively quiet, although we did put out our second disc in February, *Oj, Vesela Veselice* Spotlight at the MRC in March

We also did a spot as part of the celebrations for the MSO Chorus in September.

Most recently, the fundraiser for *Medecins sans Frontieres*, in November

In terms of solo stuff – highlights for me this year, would have been the recital we gave in Belgrade in July. I also did a great series of concerts with Wilma Smith as part of the Wilma & Friends series in November, with a premiere by local composer Matt Westwood.

Laura Vaughan and I were also directing the Baroque Ensemble course at Melbourne Uni for the last three semesters. Basically, we get to wave our arms around in front of an orchestra of uni students and them how to play in the style. It's been a fabulous experience, although Unfortunately, due to changes in staff, we've had to be retired from it.

Probably the most important thing for me has of course been the ongoing research/writing for the PhD, which continues indefatigably. It's great fun, but also challenging and sometimes exhausting – Anja has been a wonderful shoulder for me with this.

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### News from Church Council

by Tim O'Connor, Chair

How to make Church Council business interesting to readers of Mark the Word? I'll start by advising that at our December meeting we rewarded ourselves for a year of monthly meetings with passionfruit and chocolate mousse cake. What else remains to tell you will hopefully hold the attention of serious readers!

Far-reaching property considerations in recent months have called for careful reading and discussion. Church Council meetings and two Congregational meetings received progress reports on the work and recommendations of the Project Control Group, which is constituted to prepare recommendations on property use and related issues for the Congregation and wider Church, using the name, Mark the Evangelist Futures Project'. The Congregation is represented by Alan (PCG Co-ordinator), Rod, Maureen and Greg Hill (the Congregation's Administrator). Other members of the PCG represent the Synod, Presbytery and SEMZ Group, the property consultants contracted to undertake research and reports for the Project. The PCG reports to Church Council which then seeks the view of the Congregation, as appropriate for each stage of the Project.

At Congregational meetings on 20 September and 22 November, Alan explained clearly for us the stages of the Project to date and used projected images to outline various property options. Members of the Congregation were able to comment on property options and propose additional ones, which will now be evaluated in detail by the consultants. Church Councillors are grateful to Alan, Rod, Maureen and Greg for their continuing work. Aided by Craig's preaching, we are also thankful that Church Council and Congregational meetings about the Futures Project have been held in an open and harmonious spirit.

Other notable Church Council news can be summarised more briefly. In late November the Curzon Street Children's Centre, which leases the historic Supper Room and adjoining building on the Congregation's greater North Melbourne site, announced its closure after December 2016. Due to the constraints of our long-term property planning, Church Council had previously informed the Children's Centre that no new lease could be offered by the Church, after its current 5-year lease expires at the end of 2015. At the Centre's request we were able to extend the lease to the end of 2016. The Church has accommodated child-care services for the past 30 years, so we regret that a further lease was not possible and that to date the Centre has been unable to find a new location in North Melbourne.

At our December meeting we were pleased to ratify the Three-Year Plan (2016-2018) of our UnitingCare Hotham Mission, which definitively describes its values, goals and services. We noted the strong sense of purpose and energy in the Plan. We also affirmed the value of having Chair of the Mission Board, Gaye and Community Worker, Beth Stewart-Wright address the Congregation from time to time, as well as news items on the Mission in Sunday Notices. When a Special Meeting of the Congregation approved the 2016 Budget of the Congregation of Mark the Evangelist at a Special Meeting on 6 December, we were at the same time approving the budget of UnitingCare Hotham Mission, since the Congregation incorporates the Mission.

We hope you have found this latest Church Council news informative, if not as enlivening as other contributions to Mark the Word! We encourage you to ask any of us for further news and to bring any concerns to our attention.

*Church Councillors: Gaye Champion, Belinda Hopper (Secretary), Wendy Langmore, Gus MacAulay (Treasurer), Heather Mathew, Rod Mummery, Tim O'Connor (Chair), Maureen Postma, Craig Thompson (Minister), Alan Wilkinson and Ann Wilkinson.*

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## Thanks

by Suzanne Yanko

*This newsletter is a testament to our Minister, Council and all those in our congregation who are working hard for us, and for others.*

*Specific thanks to all contributors to this packed newsletter, and to our producer, Rod.*

*To all our readers: best wishes for a happy and blessed Christmas and a safe start to the New Year!*

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## Noticeboard

### Christmas Services:

**Christmas Eve** (we have no service at Mark the Evangelist, but commend the Christmas Eve services at St Mary's Anglican Church the 4pm "Kids' Christmas" and the 11.30pm Christmas Eve Midnight Mass)

**Christmas Day** Worship with Eucharist, 9.30am

**Ash Wednesday** 10 February – Worship with Eucharist, 6pm

**Lenten Studies** *Called to Holiness in Australia*. Wednesday nights, February 17-March 9, 6.30pm at St Mary's Anglican Church, 428 Queensberry St, North Melbourne. Details on website.

