

# Frognal Review



***Christmas 2010  
& New Year 2011***

## **Ye Nations All!**

Ye Nations all, on you I call:  
come hear this declaration,  
And don't refuse this glorious  
news of Jesus and salvation  
To royal Jews came first the news  
of Christ the great Messiah  
As was foretold by prophets old:  
Isaiah, Jeremiah.

To Abraham the promise came,  
and to his seed for ever,  
A light to shine in Isaac's line,  
by Scripture we discover.  
Hail, promised morn! the Saviour's born,  
the glorious Mediator-  
God's blessed Word, made flesh and blood,  
assumed the human nature.

Best wishes to you all for a Happy Christmas  
and a good New Year in 2011

from Jon and Betti Dean

## Minister's Letter

Dear Members and Friends,

The signs of Christmas are all around us, and the children in particular are excited about the coming of Christmas Day. But Christmas was not celebrated by Christian communities until about the year 400. The date of Jesus' birth was not known, and it was not surprising that the Church decided on a date near the winter solstice. For thousands of years people, in all parts of the world, enjoyed mid-winter festivals when homes were decorated with evergreen plants like holly, mistletoe. It was expedient to celebrate the birth of Jesus at a time when people were celebrating anyway.

Everyone enjoys Christmas, whether it because of its religious significance or just because it is a winter festival which might be thought of as 'winterval'; It is a time to send greetings to friends we haven't been in contact with over the year; to watch the children becoming excited about Santa Claus (and the presents they know are coming their way); it is a time to enjoy the nativity stories and to travel to Bethlehem with the shepherds and wise men through the gospel stories and the singing of carols.

There is every reason for us to enjoy the Christmas stories - and to indulge in the sentimentality of the season. But we should keep in mind that the more important part of our Christian faith is what happened during Jesus' life and ministry and in particular his death on the Cross. We can affirm our faith in terms like the following:

We believe in Jesus Christ who came to share our life and to lighten our darkness. Born among the poor, he showed us God's love. Freely accepting death, he destroyed death. Rising again he is the wellspring of life and hope.

Jesus was a spiritually alive and inspired human being. His disciples accepted that they met God through their relationship with him, and so they gave him many titles 'Son of God'; 'Son of Man'; 'Messiah', 'Teacher'; or as Fred Kaan has said in one of his hymns:

'Jesus expressed the human heart of God, born in a stable to carry a tree on his back.'

Jesus was a down-to-earth human being whose fidelity to what he believed about God lights up what 'life more abundant' can mean. If that is true then Jesus challenges us to live in the way that he did, and encourages everyone to emulate.

This is the message of Caryl Micklem's poem 'When Stardust First Exploded'

When stardust first exploded out its blossom from the bud, beyond and in the midst there was, In the beginning God. On quarks and gluons rose His glance - fond Proto - partners in the dance.

When planet earth had formed and cooled and life began its climb God called it good, and watched in hope the long ascent of time until the day when, face to face He met us in divine embrace.

Love – His for us and ours for Him – fulfils humanity, contesting pride and war and lies – Self’s price for being free. In love God still takes flesh today and points, in Christ, The Man, the way.

On behalf of the Ministers and Elders of St Andrew’s I wish you all a very happy Christmas and an enjoyable celebration of the Christmas festival.

*Donald Macarthur, Associate Minister*

### **Thoughts from a Recent Sermon**

by Jonathan Dean

To our Bible Study group on Thursday mornings the minister often brings ideas coming from his great erudition and wide reading. These are stimulating and generally relevant to the passages for the current week and give us much to think about. At the latest meeting and in the sermon for the third Sunday in Advent, Jon began by quoting a prophesy of Isaiah; ‘The crooked shall be made straight and the rough places plain’. But this has been refuted by philosophers such as Isaiah Berlin who talked about ‘the crooked timber of humanity’ and a Chinese thinker who wrote that ‘all of nature and its beauties is founded on crooked lines’. The great optimism in Isaiah was owed to the Prophet’s overwhelming sense, in his inner being, of what seemed so often to be belied by personal experience: of illness, the loss of home and children; of the evils of so much that met their eyes.

The minister also went on to speak of G. K. Chesterton the great Catholic writer of the early twentieth century and A. N. Wilson of our own time who wrote a biography of the Oxford philosopher and novelist Iris Murdoch and moved through stages of belief and disbelief and now a practising Christian.

The prophetic faith was not silent in the face of injustice.  
In fact it held that much social harm great and small  
was caused by not following God's method of  
Training for Living Together



## **Our Family**

**Donald and Pat Macarthur** held one of their happy lunches for members of the congregation and friends in aid of **Commitment for Life**. A splendid meal starting with delicious soup, made by Donald himself and Irene Huang, continued with chilli con carne; apple puddings were provided by Anne Thom and ice cream was an alternative or addition. The ground floor of the Macarthur's lovely house was beautifully set out creating a sense of well-being. As well as raising money for a good cause, these occasions cement friendships and establish a sense of community. Our thanks go to the Macarthur family and Irene for all their hard work and hospitality.

Another happy St Andrew's celebration was the Christening of Dominique Honor Appleton, granddaughter of Jeni Sandison. The little girl, surrounded by friends and family, thoroughly enjoyed the ceremony and it was lovely to see so many children in Church - mostly friends and relations - who found St Andrew's a welcoming place.

On the third Sunday of Advent, St Andrew's children, under the able direction of Christy Sawyer gave a liitle play which was all about Angels to start the service; Christy managed to include children as young as two as well as teenagers - the oldest of whom, Harry Heming, read beautifully one of the lessons. Christy read and spoke the links.

Early this year (19th December), the **St Andrew's Christmas lunch** followed the service opened by the children's play. This was a most enjoyable feast, and feast indeed it was.

The first course was a lovely cool fruit salad followed by delicious turkey with all the trimmings and vegetables. Afterwards came a traditional Christmas pudding served with cream. The meal must have been a great treat for those living alone.

The tables were beautifully set out and decorated and everything went smoothly thanks to the co-ordinated efforts of the cooks and the helpers in the kitchen.

Special thanks go to John and Sara Meadows, Elwyn and Doreen Morgans, Dai and Susan Noble (who also decorated the Church) and Anne and Brian Noble who cooked and served and saw that everyone was happy, which indeed they were.



**Tony Jasper**, a good friend of St Andrew's, is now an associate member of our congregation. He is quite at home here as he uses the church for performances and rehearsals of his plays, about well-known Christian figures written for his Jasperian Theatre Company. We welcome him among us and will appreciate his presence even more as he has now moved from West Hampstead to his family home near Penzance. On the third Sunday of Advent he spoke a beautiful prayer as part of the service and was able to join us for the Christmas lunch.

Before he left London in November he held a book launch at St Andrew's with a supper for all who wanted to partake. The book is **Jesus centre stage** a powerful overview of the ways in which Jesus has been portrayed in drama from medieval cycles and mystery plays to radio and television drama, with interesting discussions about how the audience at home is so very different from the theatre goer who goes out to enjoy live drama, usually with companions and friends.

The co-author of this book is Professor Kenneth Pickering who is regarded as Britain's leading director of medieval drama, following major productions in Canterbury and Birmingham Cathedrals and the great Abbeys of Tewkesbury and Malvern. The volume is easy to read and full of interesting information.



## Henry Gorecki 1933-2010

Following the death of the great Polish composer in November a remarkable programme on Henry Gorecki was shown on BBC Four. It was a performance of his 3rd Symphony - the Symphony of Sorrowful Songs. All the while tragic scenes formed a background to the music and these scenes were heart-rending.

Beginning with a mother lamenting the death of her son, it continued showing the horrors of the gas chambers of Auschwitz, and finally, perhaps most poignantly of all, the starving peoples of sub-Saharan Africa. To see these skeletal figures of people from nomadic tribes, always able to find food for themselves and their animals, as they moved from grazing to grazing, in this dire situation, is tragic beyond imagination.

The grief in the songs was movingly expressed by a woman's solo voice and the orchestra shown from time to time drew a true feeling of lament from their instruments.

I felt we must do something practical for these starving Africans, hard as it is to alleviate their grief - their children dying at their feet - their elders collapsing on the sun-baked earth. The Angel on our front cover came from a 'Save the Children' Christmas card and it seemed that in lieu of a reproduction fee we should make a small charge for the magazine (£1 suggested) and pass on the proceeds to 'Save the Children', with a request that it be used in Africa.

*Editor*

## **Hampstead Christian Study Centre**

In the autumn term the Hampstead Christian Study centre ran a course on different aspects of the Bible disconnected from, but in a way introductory to, the textual description and criticism that is bound to be at the forefront of both religious and secular consideration in the coming year.

The course started with a textual study of the Old Testament by Rabbi Rachel Montague. Other topics included a talk on manuscript writing of texts by a female scribe trained in Israel. She brought her instruments and pointed out that quills must only be taken from birds that were kosher as food. She showed some of her own beautiful manuscript work. Far from being a dull practitioner she was a youngish, lively Canadian who was close to the point and most instructive.

Then we had a discussion between a Rabbi and the Revd Stephen Tucker showing how arguments were built up in Jewish schools where the students were always taught to question.

A completely different approach was taken by Professor Michael Kauffman who gave an illustrated talk on medieval manuscript illustration of the Bible in Britain - Narrative and Symbolism. Finally our minister, Jon Dean, gave a fascinating talk on Alexander Cruden 1699-1770, the author of Cruden's Concordance to the Bible which indexes every word in the Bible and is still in use today. He can be thought of as a living computer.

**A garland of Christmas readings given in Church  
by Elders and Members on Sunday 19th  
December**

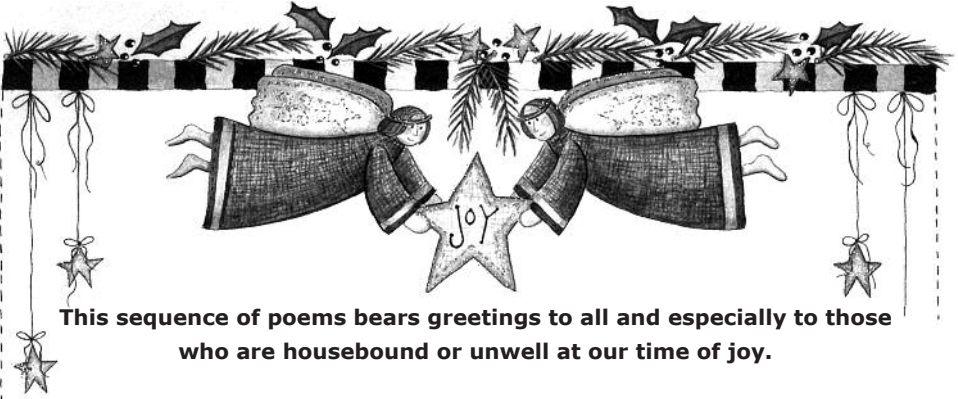
This is the truth sent from above  
The Truth of God, the God of love,  
Therefore don't turn me from your door,  
But hearken all both rich and poor...

And at that season of the year  
Our blest Redeemer did appear:  
He here did live, and here did preach,  
And many thousands did he teach.

Thus he in Love to us behaved,  
To show us how must be saved;  
And if you want to know the way,  
Be pleased to hear what he did say.

*From a West Country Folk Carol*





This sequence of poems bears greetings to all and especially to those who are housebound or unwell at our time of joy.

### **From On the Morning of Christ's Nativity**

This is the month and this the happy morn  
Wherein the Son of Heav'n's eternal King  
Of wedded maid and Virgin mother born,  
Our great redemption from above did bring;  
For so the holy angels once did sing,  
That he our deadly forfeit should release,  
And with His Father work us a perpetual peace.

That glorious form, that light unsufferable,  
And that far beaming blaze of majesty,  
Wherewith he went at Heav'n's high council table  
To sit the midst of Trinal Unity,  
He laid aside; and here with us to be,  
Forsook the courts of everlasting day,  
And chose with us a darksome house of mortal clay.

See how from far upon the eastern road  
The star-led wizards haste with odours sweet:  
O run, prevent them with thy humble ode,  
And lay it lowly at his blessed feet;  
Have thou the honour first thy lord to greet,  
And join thy voice unto the Angel Choir  
From out his sacred altar touched with hallowed fire.

*John Milton*

## Street Lights

The little town leapt a little, tonight,  
As the Christmas lights came on.  
Everyday streets became more important  
And even the darkest pathways glistened.  
Stars and snowflakes  
Angels and reindeer  
Flashed and flickered a holy-white whisper,  
Making our town,  
Our ordinary brick and tarmac town,  
Sparkle like a frosted castle  
In a far-off frozen land.

*Carol Rumble*



## Robin

In the stable where the Christ-Child lay  
A small brown bird pecked in the hay.  
The stable's fire was almost dead  
And seeing this the small bird spread  
Its wings out by the last faint spark'  
Then fluttering like the meadow-lark,  
It fanned it once more into flame.  
Good Joseph built the fire again,  
Mary, smiling, blessed the bird,  
Neither she nor Joseph heard  
The bird's faint cries, and neither guessed  
At the burnt feathers on its breast.  
But when in God's good time new feathers came,  
The robin's breast was red as any flame.

*Eric Finney*

## The True Meaning of Christmas

Jesus Christ was born this day  
So many years before  
He came a servant to the lost  
Though he was Lord of Lords.

We celebrate this joyous time  
Reflecting on his birth  
Not born in a mansion, but a stable  
As if he had no worth.

He came so he could identify  
With the human heart of man,  
And gave his life as sacrifice  
Offering us a better plan.

A plan that reconciles us back  
To our loving father God  
Bringing hope and redemption from  
Sin's ruling iron rod.

For this is the only reason that we  
Should celebrate this day  
To become focused on anything else  
Would take the meaning away.

So let's arise with joy in our hearts  
And share it with everyone  
The meaning of Christmas will always be  
The birth of Jesus - God's son.



*Christian poem by M. E. Lowndes*

## Now every child that dwells on earth

Now every child that dwells on earth  
Stand up, stand up and sing  
The passing night has given birth  
Unto the children's king.  
Sing sweet as the lute,  
Sing clear as the horn,  
Sing joy of the Children  
Come Christmas the morn:  
Little Jesus Christ  
Our brother is born.

Now every star that dwells in sky,  
Look down with shining eyes:  
The night has dropped in passing by  
A star from Paradise.

Now all the angels of the Lord  
Rise up on Christmas Even:  
The passing night will hear the word  
That is the voice of Heaven.

*Eleanor Farjeon*



## **Journey of the Magi**

A cold coming we had of it,  
Just the worst time of the year  
For a journey; and such a long journey;  
The ways deep and the weather sharp,  
The very dead of winter.'  
And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,  
Lying down in the melting snow.  
There were times we regretted  
The summer palaces on the slopes, the terraces,  
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.  
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling  
And running away, wanting their liquor and women,  
And the night fires going out, and the lack of shelters,  
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly  
And the villages dirty and charging high prices:  
A hard time we had of it.  
At the end we preferred to travel all night,  
Sleeping in snatches  
With the voices singing in our ears, saying  
That this was all folly.....

...This: were we led all that way for  
Birth or Death? There was a birth, certainly,  
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and  
death,  
But had thought they were different; this birth was  
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.  
We returned to our places, these kingdoms,  
But no longer at ease here in the old dispensation,  
With an alien people clutching their gods.

*The full text of this famous poem by T. S. Eliot can be found in many collections of his work and in anthologies.*

## From The Wind in the Willows

It was a pretty sight and a seasonable one, that met their eyes when they flung the door open. In the fore-court, lit by the dim rays of a horn lantern, some eight or ten little field-mice stood in a semi-circle, red worsted comforters round their throats, their fore-paws thrust deep into their pockets, their feet jigging for warmth. With bright beady eyes they glanced shyly at each other, sniggering a little, sniffing and applying coat-sleeves a good deal. As the door opened one of the elder ones that carried the lantern was just saying, ' Now then, one two three!' and forthwith their shrill little voices uprose on the air, singing one of the old-time carols that their forefathers composed in fields that were fallow and held by frost, or when snow-bound in chimney corners, and handed down to be sung in the miry street to lamp-lit windows at Yule-time. [this was the carol they sang]

Villagers all, this frosty tide  
Let your doors swing open wide,  
Though wind may follow and snow beside,  
Yet draw us in by your fire to bide;  
Joy shall be yours in the morning.

Here we stand in the cold and the sleet,  
Blowing fingers and stamping feet,  
Come from far away you to greet-  
You by the fire and we in the street-  
Bidding you joy in the morning!



For ere one half of the night was gone,  
Sudden a star has led us on,  
Raining bliss and benison-  
Bliss tomorrow and more anon,  
Joy for every morning!

Goodman Joseph toiled through the snow  
Saw the star o'er a stable low;  
Mary she might not further go-  
Welcome thatch and litter below!  
Joy was hers in the morning!

And then they heard the angels tell  
'Who were the first to cry Nowell?  
Animals all as it befell ,  
In the stable where they did dwell!  
Joy shall be theirs in the morning!'

The voices ceased, the singers bashful but smiling,  
exchanged sidelong glances, and silence succeeded-  
but for a moment only. Then from above and far  
away, down the tunnel they had so lately travelled  
was born to their ears in a faint musical hum the  
sound of distant bells ringing a joyful and clangorous  
peal.

*by Kenneth Grahame*



## **Protestants in Bergamo**

Italy is one of the most strongly Roman Catholic countries in western Europe. Bergamo, at the foot of the Alps in northern Lombardy, is known to Italians as 'the second Vatican' because of its particularly strong attachment to the Church and its propensity for producing Popes over the centuries. The old city contains a magnificent cathedral and baptistery and several notable smaller churches.

However, Bergamo also has a Protestant congregation with a history that pre-dates the Reformation. The Waldensian-Presbyterian church is a neat building on the main road leading to the old city. The Waldensians are believed to have originated with a French merchant named Waldo in the late 12th century. In its early years the Waldensian movement had features that many people then found outrageous but which are now long established features of Protestant worship (although the term Protestant only arose much later). Among these were women preachers, a refusal to suppress supposed heretics, and use of the New Testament in the vernacular (Provençal in Waldo's case).

The Waldensians experienced many disputes and divisions in their early years but came together in 1218 in the Conference of Bergamo. Over the next 750 years they suffered intermittent persecution and during the 14th and 15th centuries only a few followers persisted in the mountains of northern Italy. In due course they allied themselves with the leaders of the Reformation, and became identified as Protestants. In more recent times, many Waldensians joined the Italian Resistance during the Second World War.

We attended morning worship at the Waldensian church in Bergamo one Sunday in February 2010. The interior of the church building was similar to many URC's, with simple

decoration and plain wooden pews. The service was well attended, the congregation consisting of a mixture of local people, migrant workers (mostly from English speaking parts of Africa) and a few visitors such as ourselves. The service followed a familiar pattern of prayer, readings, hymns and a sermon.

The minister (who must have been the only woman preaching in Bergamo's many churches that morning) led the prayers in Italian, followed by English. The readings were alternately in Italian and English, and the sermon was in Italian, with a brief commentary in English.

As for the hymns, we were invited to sing in either English or Italian according to our preference (books were available in each language). This resulted in a vigorous competition, as the two languages fought to make themselves heard. Perhaps not surprisingly in the land of opera, and the home town of Donizetti, Italian won.

After the service, we visited the church bookshop, which carried a varied stock of Christian writings and volumes on the history of the Waldensians.

Interestingly, Italy's "second Vatican" has been at the heart of a Christian movement that has operated for over 800 years and which promoted Reformed ideas and practices well before the Reformation. The Waldensian church in Bergamo serves local members whose families have worshipped in that tradition for generations, perhaps for many centuries. It also positively welcomes people from other parts of the world who are in the city only temporarily, whether working or on holiday, and who are seeking a particular form of Christian worship.

Our own Jonathan Dean was minister of the Waldensian Church in Turin from 1982-1985.

*Andrew Glennie*

## **Brent Opera Autumn Gala**

How fortunate we were to have Brent Opera's Autumn Gala performed at St Andrew's. The standard of singing of both soloists and chorus seems to improve every year and everyone appeared to know exactly what to do at all times - What an achievement.

As a totally biased member of the church, I enjoyed Dai's enthusiastic Gypsy in *Il Trovatore* and Doreen's committed and sensitive Barcarolle duet with Christine Fahy from *Tales of Hoffmann*.

I thought the whole programme was cleverly constructed with a good balance of the more serious pieces and the better-known, fun pieces, such as *Yeomen of the Guard*, and this in turn showed - off the singers' own particular strengths.

However my two personal favourites were firstly, the more unusual choice of Britten's *Embroidery Aria*, sung most movingly and lyrically by Sara. In fact her performance succeeded in shifting my normally ambivalent feelings about Britten's compositions. Secondly the *Così fan Tutte* trio placed near the end of the concert and sung by Julie Gray, Mary Jane de Haras and Ian Wilson Pope. These three sang so beautifully together that it left me uplifted for the journey home.

Thus the whole concert was a delight, and I'm sure this was largely thanks to the talent and fine musicianship of the Musical Director, conductor and pianist, Anthony McCarthy.

So well done everyone involved and many thanks for a most enjoyable evening - from a grateful tea-lady.

*Jenifer Sandison*

## Books for winter reading

Most of us have favourite books that we have enjoyed in the past and there are others waiting to be enjoyed. At this time of year and reminded by the passage from *Wind in the Willows* above, I turn again to Hardy's wonderful description of village carolling at Christmas in *Under the Greenwood Tree*. This tells of the way in which the Church choir was a group of players, using country forerunners of our sophisticated string, wind and percussion instruments. The novel is a lament for the passing of these choirs when a new vicar insists on installing an organ. The book opens up a way of life long gone, but it is presented truthfully through the fictional characters.

Hardy was later than Mrs Gaskell and she too appreciates country life but is also a close observer of the effect of industrialisation in the northern manufacturing cities, in one of which, Manchester, she lived as the wife of a Unitarian minister. Mary Shakeshaft gave an excellent talk on Mrs Gaskell at the Hampstead Christian Study Centre which sent me back to her work with the intention of reading the marvellous biography by Jenny Uglow (another author I commend)

Kay Pariss, editor of 'Reform' recently interviewed Marilynne Robinson, an American author whose *Gilead* I had just read.. and I think that this book looking backward and forward through the eyes of a Congregational minister in middle America is rewarding in its human insights; the author brings to life middle America from the days of the Civil War to the present.

In this the year of the centenary of his death I recommend that you turn to Tolstoy. – perhaps the greatest of all European novelists. I am currently re-reading *The Idiot*. Idiocy is the term given to the Prince Myshkin, a pure and lovely character who has been afflicted with epilepsy and with qualities that could be described as Christ-like. Dostoevsky's understanding of mankind and his ability to handle scenes involving many people and points of view is masterly. Do not stumble over this book – it is worth all the attention you can give it. *IH*

## **Our Great 1611 Bible in English**

People have varying views about this splendid version of the Bible so carefully translated by the scholars appointed by King James I of Great Britain. Many are critical of this King who united the kingdoms of Scotland and England and brought to London an entourage of educated Scots and courtiers.

With close connections to Continental Europe through his mother and grandmother he had been indoctrinated with views of the Divine Right of Kings which were to prove the downfall of his son Charles I, who lost not only his throne but his head as we all know.

Yet King James managed to steer the ship of State through dangerous waters for long enough to achieve this wonderful book which one may be bold enough to say is a work of God-given beauty and cadence beside which almost every other English translation falls flat. Simpler language often helps towards an understanding of these sacred texts, but where they are to be read aloud in Churches the great 1611 Bible has no peers.

It depends heavily on William Tyndale's earlier translation and many of Tyndale's phrases are even now part of our daily language because they were taken into the 1611 version. A good book recounting the making of this version is Adam Nicholson's *The Power and the Glory* a thrilling piece of historical narrative which I would have included among the recommendations above, but that it seemed to fall into a different category.



*The Flight into Egypt*  
*The Flight into Egypt by a follower of Giotto from Assisi*

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*Front Cover: Angel by an early Italian artist*