





The Board and editorial staff of TUI MOTU wish all of our readers and friends a happy, peace-filled Christmas. May 2013 bring songs of hope welling up all over our world.

We Aotearoans love celebrating the summer Christmas of fiery sun-baking heat at the beach or the lakes, dowsing ourselves with obligatory protective sun cream; of the barbie, and the delicious smell of the fish, chops, sausages and steak bbq-ed to perfection; of the many stunning colours: searing red pohutukawa guarding our coasts, cabbage tree in full white flower, and the profusion of roses, lilies and other flowers whose aromas linger in the evening warmth. All of these bring out the best in our hearts. They remind us that wherever you are there is a special flavour and a uniqueness of culture which breathes the fullness of life we owe to the Christ child.

When I was a lad, our family had a holiday trip around the South Island. I remember we visited a small parish church in Nelson, where there was a

magnificent crib set — St. Francis of Assisi would have been proud to see the way the Christ child had jumped down to earth. On the head of the donkey was a two shilling piece, and on that of the Christ child, one shilling. Dad laughed for days at the bet that had been placed on the donkey, when it was the child that had won! It was an eloquent commentary on the nature of the Incarnation: salvation comes to us through a poor child.

It's a blessing too to be reminded of the Christmas city of Bethlehem by two very different writers. Each in his own way underlines the great lengths that faith-filled people are prepared to go to pass on the heart of the Christian message: to ensure that the dignity of the Christ child is upheld in our ways of thinking and in the ways we work to give to following generations the vision of life and love

which came with this God-baby. Both Bernard Sabella and Peter Bray highlight how vulnerable we are in doing this, yet how important that challenge remains. It is the kernel of the Year of Faith. And without doubt our hearts go out to the peoples of Gaza and Israel, yet again threatened by unbridled power and cruel domination.

There's much to ponder in this edition, with its distinctive Aotearoan Christmas flavor: Joy Cowley's loving rendition of the Christmas sotry will warm your hearts, as will Mike Riddell on the gift of our Holy days. And sing loudly with Colin Gibson. His new carol will enhance our celebrations.

Whether you face sun or snow in this season, enjoy its positive message — and a very happy Christmas to you from this Kiwi place down under! **KT**

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Front Cover illustration: Donald Moorhead

discover heaven in the world

Jenny Dawson

Preparations for Christmas pageants are being made in little churches and in big cathedrals, and probably also in Ranana on the Wanganui River. Volunteer teacher and Compassion Sister Margaret Mary has left Jerusalem but I hope that someone else is encouraging the children in that Ranana schoolroom to tell again in drama the story of the birth of Jesus. I hope too that the audience will again be made up of the assorted parents and friends who make up those small communities. Because of the film-making ability of Miriam Smith and Christopher Prior many of us joined in that audience — and in parties and fruit picking — as we watched the documentary film *How Far is Heaven*. Intriguingly there is no question mark in the title, which comes from a question asked by 13-year-old DJ, then answering himself in tones of wonder “Past the world, past the earth, right up there, keep going, keep going...”

Somehow, and it is very flimsy, there is a holding together in the world of the film a complex set of dualities: ageing (perhaps ageless?) women devoted to service, prayer, and jam-making who carry in their hearts but never quite make sense of

the young ones caught up in a world of alcohol, gang life and violence. They are bound together in community.

The fragile accord of this tiny village sang for me, through the months since I saw the film, of the Christmas theme of incarnation. The main characters in *How Far is Heaven* moved hauntingly between roles of insider and outsider, between belonging and remoteness, between hope and precarious future. Through the sisters’ continuous presence at Jerusalem since Suzanne Aubert went there in 1892, they and the spire of the small church offer pointers to God. Suzanne Aubert told her sisters, “Never forget, a Maori village was the cradle of our Institute.”

Another even more troubled village will be remembered this Christmas: the Middle-Eastern village that we claim as the cradle of our faith. In both villages is the seed of incarnation, of some flimsy awareness that in Jesus Christ all of life has been touched by the love of God.

The Christmas story, with homeless young parents making a birthing suite in a manure-smelling stable, drives home the point that God is concerned not only with the spiritual. God has a body. God knows what it

is like to be poor, anxious, a refugee, excluded. Each year Christmas calls us again to participate in the work of redeeming people from guilt and hopelessness, as well as creating healthy communities and affordable housing for the poor, all in the same breath. Because Jesus himself, while recognised as spirit, also has a body, the gift of Christmas is a passion for justice for real people here and now. How far is heaven?

In *Ethics*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer argued that because of the coming of Jesus it is no longer possible for us to “think in terms of two spheres,” the divine and the worldly, the holy and the profane, the Christian and the un-Christian, but only the single reality of the world-reconciled-to-God-in-Christ. Like the film title, the incarnation does not have a question mark. Rather it is an invitation: to discover heaven in the world, in the earth, right down here, for all people. As DJ said, “Keep going, keep going.” May this Christmas bring new hope to all people in God’s world. ■

Reverend Jenny Dawson is an Anglican priest who is the Bishop’s Chaplain for the Anglican Diocese of Waiapu in the Hawkes Bay.



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Tui Motu – InterIslands is an independent, Catholic, monthly magazine. It invites its readers to question, challenge and contribute to its discussion of spiritual and social issues in the light of gospel values, and in the interests of a more just and peaceful society. Inter-church and inter-faith dialogue is welcomed.

The name *Tui Motu* was given by Pa Henare Tate. It literally means “stitching the islands together...”, bringing the different races and peoples and faiths together to create one Pacific people of God. Divergence of opinion is expected and will normally be published, although that does not necessarily imply editorial commitment to the viewpoint expressed.

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the grace of survival

I always say that *Tui Motu* keeps me sane and able to stay within the bounds of the church, especially when I read articles such as the ones in the October issue by Cardinal Martini, Sister Susan Smith and Jo Ayers and Pat Snedden. As one who watched Vatican II with hope and excitement, I too find that much of what is happening today is sadly out of touch with the modern world.

As a woman who hoped to be able to serve my church in ministry (I even gained a diploma in theology from Otago University in preparation) I have been turned away. I have watched all my children except one abandon the Catholic church as either irrelevant or rejecting of their circumstances.

I have had to accept a 'new' translation of a liturgy I had grown to love in favour of something more suited to the pre-Vatican II church. And I have accepted ministry from a number of young priests who have been trained in a very conservative way of thinking. The articles mentioned above remind me that I am not alone. I feel that I am in the church by default. There doesn't seem to be anywhere else that I would fit now. I just live in hope that some day mother church will step into the 21st century, will accept women as full members of the church, including in ministry, and will begin to minister to those who 'are in need of a physician'. Until then I will continue to survive by grace and with the help of the likes of *Tui Motu*.

Peg Cummins, *Tauranga*

an historical embarrassment

Here's a simple thought I had in passing. Perhaps the current issue of gay marriage is simply that, our current historical issue. Our reticence towards its acceptance is marked similarly throughout history on various touchy subjects. All in all it is simply a small group of people (of a certain era) not wanting 'those others' to have the

rights they have had. Perhaps in the end we will look back on this current issue as an historical embarrassment, as we do with the right for women to vote, and blacks to be treated as equal.

Paul Armstrong, *Dunedin*

slaves and dictators

Well done *Tui Motu*, you have done it again. 'Every post a winning post'. I would like to comment on Pat Snedden's article. He says, "My own children (all five of them) have left the church that seems out of step with their lives."

I have eight children and none of them have left the church, which is 'the people of God', that is the laity. They have left the 'institution', which is a different thing. All my children are very close to Jesus in their daily lives, including my lesbian daughter and homosexual son. While I preach the gospel, all my children put into practice what I preach.

Today's gospel of Mark 10:35-45 tells us that we must act not only as servants, but as slaves! I have no worries about where the church is going. Our holy mother Spirit has everything under control. Until the hierarchy starts acting like slaves instead of dictators, nothing will change.

Paddy McCann, *Waikanae*

state-owned-enterprises

While privatization of SOE's helps to reduce debts and possibly increase efficiency into the bargain and our debts have risen to equal \$160,000 per family of four, the buyers of these assets would be foreign enterprises, causing further loss to our nation of our sovereignty as well as income.

During several decades, our irresponsibly negligent governments have allowed the situation to worsen. As a nation, we now need to be employed and work not six, but seven, days a week. Meanwhile family life suffers.

For decades I urged government to impose sufficient taxes on luxuries and other unessentials to get their

letters to the editor

We welcome comment, discussion, argument, debate. But please keep letters under 200 words. The editor reserves the right to abridge, while not changing the meaning. We do not publish anonymous letters otherwise than in exceptional circumstances. Response articles (up to a page) are welcome — but please, by negotiation.

own house in order and provide incentives for frugality, together with legislation to curb easy borrowing. The increase in tax-take would both help to reduce debt and provide funds for better and more extensive social services.

Gerard van den Bemd, *Mangere Bridge*

sun shining and cool winds

Cardinal Martini (*TM*, Sept) asks, 'What can you do for the Church?' At parish level, while some are quietly ignoring new responses, they and others are working to reach out, show love and give practical support to those who feel alienated, whether by society in general, or by the church. They are, with the encouragement of their pastors, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and visiting the sick. They do so quietly, without fanfare. Some of them speak of Rome as 'irrelevant'. Some priests try to reach out to those the Church deems unable to receive the sacraments, but have to take great care how they do it. At the moment it seems that Roman priorities, such as the new liturgy, are often different from those seen by the average parishioner, who is more likely to be concerned about the loss of a future generation. Also, Roman methods of implementation often leave much to be desired. The sun is shining in many parishes, but is cooled sometimes by the chill winds blowing from Rome.

Pat Reid, *Auckland* (abridged)

reforms or a giant leap backwards?

The advent of God as a child at Christmas heightens our focus on children and family. It can also be a time of stress between partners and bring unfortunate results for children.

David More

The breakup of a relationship when children are involved can be one of the most traumatic events anyone can experience. The more disharmony in the breakup, the more the trauma. In spite of this, many parents do agree over care arrangements for their children. Others can't. For them there is the Family Court. It must follow that the parents who apply to the Family Court are those who are unable to reach their own agreement, without assistance.

The reasons why a couple separate are myriad. These reasons, particularly when they involve issues such as control or violence, are often the very reasons why parents need the assistance of the Family Court to determine the care arrangements for their children. Up until now parents have been able to consult a lawyer and legal aid is available for those who cannot afford to pay their own legal fees.

More importantly, the Court appoints a lawyer for the children. This ensures that the children's views are made known to the parents and the Court, without the children being caught up in their parents' conflict. Children love both their parents and it is essential for their welfare that they are protected from parental discord. The appointment of a lawyer for the children helps ensure that parents don't ask their children to choose whom they wish to live with.

The Government proposes this will change. Parents who apply to the Court for orders in respect of the day-to-day care of their children will not be permitted to engage a lawyer.

A lawyer will not be appointed to represent their children except in the more serious cases, whatever that may mean. Parents will represent themselves in an environment which is totally foreign to them. For most it will be intimidating and overwhelming. The issues which have hitherto been the barrier to their being able to agree on their children's welfare have not suddenly evaporated. It is nonsense to suggest that a woman, who has left a relationship because of the controlling influence of her spouse/partner, will suddenly be able to foot it equally with him, in proceedings involving their children, with both as unrepresented litigants.

At present when an application is made to the Family Court, both parents are referred to counselling. Six counselling sessions are provided at no cost. If agreement is reached at counselling, the court makes a consent order. Otherwise, the court process continues. Counselling has not proved to be successful in the majority of cases, and will be abolished if the proposed changes to the Family Court are implemented. In its place will be an out of court Family Disputes Resolution Service, which parents will be required to undertake at a shared cost of \$897.00. It remains to be seen whether this will be any more effective than counselling and some parents will find the cost difficult to meet.

It is important that parents who cannot agree on the care of their children do get legal advice. According to recently retired Principal Family Court Judge Peter Boshier, research shows that litigants in person are unfocussed, cannot address the

issues and take up too much of the court's time. This is to be expected when they are still carrying the scars of the breakup of their relationship. The benefit of legal advice is not restricted to the court proceedings, and often guides parents through the counselling process.

With parents representing themselves and no lawyer for the children appointed, it is inevitable that children will become directly involved in adult issues. Parents will ask their children to take sides. It is less likely that children's voices will be heard, and New Zealand runs the risk of breaching its obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly article 12.

The reality is that parents who can afford to instruct a lawyer privately will do so for advice on what to do and how to approach the court system. These parents will be at a distinct advantage. Legal aid will not be available for parents who cannot afford to pay privately. In the majority of cases these will be mothers. It will be a double whammy for them if they have recently come out of a violent or controlling relationship.

The Minister of Justice describes the proposed changes as a reform of the Family Court. A reform is a change for the better. The proposed changes are hardly that. The government is committed to reducing the expenditure on legal aid and this is all about saving money.

David More is a barrister, living and working in Dunedin.

KIWI CHRISTMAS

A children's Christmas story by Joy Cowley



Christmas can be our story.
You only have to look at the blue sky
and the waves splashing light,
to know that Christmas belongs here
with the long days of summer
and the pohutukawa in bloom.

So let's backtrack to autumn
when our own story begins,
with Mary at her sewing machine
and a fantail darting in the door,
only it isn't really a fantail.
It's the angel Gabriel in disguise.

Mary gets such a surprise,
she nearly falls off her chair.
She's always known that birds
can be special messengers,
but she's never yet seen a fantail
with a bright light around it.

She thinks she should be afraid,
but when the bird starts talking,
she has the strange feeling
that she's waited all her life
for this to happen.

"You will have a baby," Gabriel says.

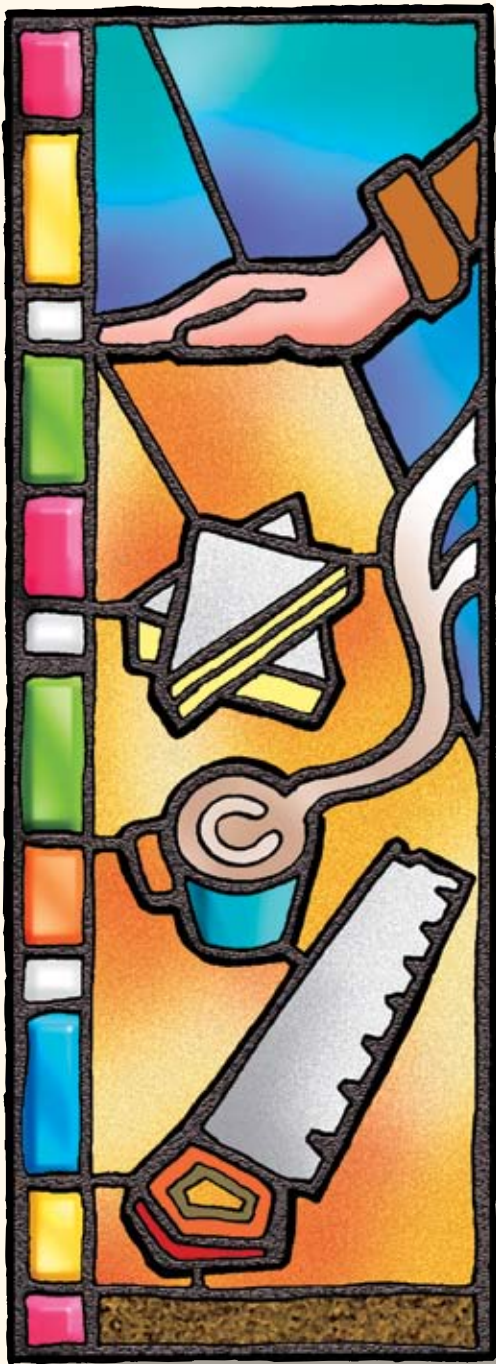
"A what?" says Mary.

The fantail flits across the room.
"You'll give birth to a boy child
and you will call him Jesus."

"You have to be joking!" Mary says.
You must know that babies are made
by two people, a mother and a father."

"God will be the father," says Gabriel.

Mary thinks that this is ridiculous
but now the room is filled with light
and some of that light is inside her.
It seems to find its home in her heart.
"Well, yes, okay," she says. "Whatever."



But there is a complication here. Joseph, a man who makes furniture, is really keen to marry Mary, but when he sees she's pregnant, he's worried to say the least. He's about to call it quits, when he has a strange dream.

It's a fantail in a ring of light,
telling him everything is fine.
The child belongs to God.

Well, Joseph and Mary get married
and you can imagine the next few weeks.
He's in the workshop making a rimu table
and she's bringing him a cup of tea
with a cheese and pickle sandwich.

In the evenings he rubs her back
and puts his hand over her belly
to feel the son of God kicking.
Already they are filled with love
for this miraculous baby.

The day comes when Joseph
has to drive across the country
for some business in the city.
He knows he can't leave Mary,
and yet he's worried about her
sitting for hours in an old truck
on a rough and dusty road.
"Don't worry!" she says.
"I'll be absolutely fine."

But that changes long before
they reach the main highway.
Without too much warning,
the baby starts to come,
Mary is doubled over,
groaning and begging Joseph
to stop the truck and get help.

Now, in the old story there was an inn,
but here it's just acres of farmland
with sheep, and an iron woolshed
the only building in sight.
Joseph almost carries his wife

through the paddock gates
and up the rickety steps.

It's just your normal old shed,
shearing machines, bales of wool,
and a smoko room to one side.
Joseph spreads fleece on the floor
and puts his jacket over it.
He thinks there is a farmhouse
a mile or two down the road,
but Mary is in such a state
he can't leave her alone.
He doesn't know what to do.

Then, simply,
like a pea from a pod,
Jesus comes into the world.

It just so happens that the farmer
sees an old ute parked on the road,
and lights on in her woolshed
She races across the paddocks
on her quad bike, to investigate.
When she opens the shed door,
she stands like a stunned mullet.

The couple are laughing and crying
and holding a baby so new
that the cord is still attached.
But the baby's eyes are wide open
and when he turns his head
towards the farmer, she sees
that his eyes are full of light.

The evening becomes a festival of light.
The Southern Cross hangs low,
glittering over the woolshed,
and the space between stars and earth
is filled with angels – not birds this time,
but choir-angels with flowers in their hair



and voices that sweeten the night.
No one has heard such singing before.
Dogs lift their ears to listen
and people smile in their sleep.

The shepherds on the farm
come to see what it's all about.
They too, stop dead in their tracks,
mouths open in wonder, when they see

the newborn child in Joseph' arms.
"Come closer," Mary invites them.
"Put your finger in his little hand.
See how he holds on to you!"

The next day a newspaper has a story
about the aurora australis, lights caused
by unusual atmospheric conditions.
Another paper says there was a comet,
and another suggests space craft
from some far off galaxy.
The shepherds smile at each other.
"Yeah, right," they say.

Mary and Joseph are back home with Jesus
when the wise folk arrive from overseas.
"We've come to see the king," they say,
and it's fairly clear what they think
of the furniture maker's cottage.
Mary brews them a pot of tea,
butters scones hot from the oven,
and the three gradually relax.
They've brought expensive presents.
Mary doesn't know what a baby will do
with gold, frankincense and myrrh.
but she is sure these people mean well.

The visitors tell Mary and Joseph
that the child will be a great king.
"One day he will rule the world!"

Mary cuddles the baby and smiles.
"He won't rule the world," she says.
"Not the way you think.
He is the king of hearts."

Well, I reckon, that's our story,
set in summery December,
the time of natural celebration,
warmth and new growth.



As for the Christ child's gift to us,
it can be seen at any time of the year.

It's the gift of sacred light
in the eyes of every child.

Note: *Kiwi Christmas* will be published by
Random House in 2013, a children's picture book
with illustrations by Bruce Potter.

reflections on midnight mass

Mike Riddell

In womb-like darkness a match is struck. A wick is lit. Pure single light illumines the shadows.

The Christ candle shines once more as we celebrate another Christmas. There have been many before, and for most there will be more to come. The great wheel of our lives moves on another notch. Our seasonal faith flares a little, gutters in the winds of uncertainty, and holds steady.

A few words about light shining in the darkness drift through the imagination. Alongside us at this late Mass are children long parted from the church. Our thoughts are scattered. The Christmas dinner; the gift still to be wrapped; the loved ones gone.

Women stash their handbags anxiously as the faithful shuffle forward. Has the light overcome the darkness? Somewhere in the city a young woman vomits in the gutter; a homeless man settles down in an alley way; a wife reels under the impact of a fist.

A baby nestled in straw. The wafted pungency of incense. Mumbled responses. The sweet sherry breath of the stranger beside you. Gloria. A mobile phone rings. An infertile woman is feeling empty. Mary remains eternally beatific.

What is Christmas really about? Churches erect billboards urging us to put the Christ back in Xmas. But they're overshadowed by nagging reminders of how many shopping days remain. Each year Christian dignitaries valiantly seek to provide a fresh slant on 'the reason for the season'.

But I remain confused and distracted. Mixed messages have

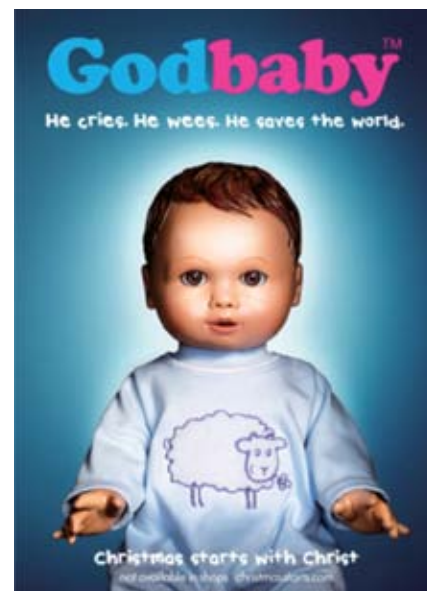
scrambled my intuitions. I blame my European ancestors. They bundled up their traditions along with their gorse plants, and brought them half way across the world. It was intended to provide comfort in a strange land. Instead it brought only strangeness.

Light shining in the dark is perfect for mid-winter. Amid gathering gloom and creeping cold, the light of a candle and the warmth of a fire seem welcome causes for hope and celebration. Throw in a rib-sticking feast and the gathering of the clan, and you have the ingredients for a memorable marking of the incarnation.

Here in Aotearoa–New Zealand, Christmas coincides roughly with the summer solstice. Evenings unfold in languid twilight; pohutukawas bristle with crimson; the delicate fragrance of sizzling sausages sneaks over the fence from the neighbour's barbecue. The natural world opens like a blowsy rose to invite us to its lazy nectar.

No wonder we wait until midnight to find a rough approximation of close darkness in which to light the Christ candle. In this new land, the population staggers through December not in anticipation of the feast of the incarnation, but in hope of packing the lilo in the car and heading off on holiday. Heathen and hedonist, or just pragmatic?

This is, after all, the celebration of the incarnation. God taking human form. The eternal becoming present. Transcendence finding flesh. God with us, God among us. God in our world rather than us in paradise. In the evocative words of the Christmas hit song, "What if



God was one of us?" What indeed?

Theologians have talked about the incarnation as "the scandal of specificity". If through the entry of Jesus into the world, God has been born of a woman, then history is bifurcated and the story of humanity changed forever. The mingling of Godhead and humanity is a miracle not to be undone — what God has joined, let no one put asunder.

One of the consequences we celebrate, not only at Christmas but in every sacrament, is that both human life and the world that sustains it are suffused with God. We have no need to 'shuffle off this mortal coil' in order to be united with our maker or even enlightened. Salvation is not in the beyond but here in our midst.

This is a fact not readily appreciated. For too many centuries and in too many lands, the church has made us uneasy in our environment. We fear 'the world' and seek to create a safe colony in its midst — erecting palisades of piety to protect us from the vulgarity of the barbarian hordes. Worst of all, we fear our own bodies, suspecting

them of mortal treachery.

If the birth of a saviour in a smelly animal stall in Palestine is what we claim it to be, then surely we can accept our world and our own humanity as brimming with the incarnate presence of God. Still marred and yearning, certainly. But as full of promise as that shimmering foetal presence in the womb of creation.

And so, and so. To mark the Incarnation in the Antipodes means to acknowledge the divine presence in our unique corner of life — not in spite of it. If summer be the season, let it be in that vibrant shimmering light that we give thanks for the coming of Jesus.

Christ is to be found not just in holly and snow, plum pudding and mince pies, partridges and pear trees. He is present with us in toetoe and hot sand, ham salad and pavlova, tui and totara. Our cultural rituals have been shaped by geography and climate, but our acceptance of them as valid bearers of divine presence is lagging.

The church has never 'fitted' here. It has come as an exotic rather than a native. Like the pine tree it has shallow roots and cannot withstand the wind. Is it too much to hope for a church that models itself on the pohutukawa, tenaciously holding to the barest of coastal margins and resplendent in its outrageous flowering?

It is not only the natural world and seasons that escape our version of Christmas, but the fabric of common life in this setting. Do we need any reminders that culture here has moved on from that in the lands we came from? No one in Aotearoa stands tall without having ancestors who once forged their lives elsewhere.

But Māori certainly, and the rest of us gradually, are *tangata whenua* — people of the land. Our very being and ways of doing things are infused with living here rather than

elsewhere; with being this kind of cultural mix rather than any other; with having our sort of laconic and self-deprecating humour rather than that of a different people.

Among shearing gangs and mussel farmers; with district nurses and darts players; beside paper-shufflers and pram-pushers — we are becoming the people of God. That man with the beerpot riding over his togs; that kuia with the moko; that girl on a boogie-board at the beach — these are the living embodiment of the humanity God lives in.

I don't hope for a new and pure church. I'm not a utopian. What I look for is a redeemed world — one in which people of faith find and uncover the presence of God in the ordinary stuff of life. I don't wish for Jesus to make an appearance on Mt Taranaki. I'm hopeful he might be glimpsed in somebody's mirror.

I look for signs that we've begun to accept ourselves and our place in the world. I'm ever hopeful that we might not feel the need to be like someone else to be worthy, or the need to be better than we are in order to be acceptable to God. That much is already given in the incarnation.

Midnight Mass is a weird ceremony in a New Zealand summer. But it still has much to commend it. For one thing, people gather to the name of Christ for their only visit of the year. That man with the sherry breath deserves an enthusiastic passing of the peace. Who knows why he comes, other than some rough intuition that the baby Jesus offers something found nowhere else?

Soon we will be with friends and family if we're lucky. We will eat and drink and declare a ceasefire on our familial feuds for part of a day. Then we will trickle into easy times — a sun-filled sabbath in which there's space to think of where our days are taking us. Holy days, they were called in earlier times.

May we not despise the season we inhabit, nor the land we occupy, nor the humanity we possess. That lonely Christ candle has lit us all, and evermore we travel in blessed light. ■

Mike Riddell is a theologian, writer and filmmaker who lives in Cambridge. He is currently researching a film on the pioneer plastic surgeon, Archibald McIndoe.

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holy santa and aunt leonie

A Palestinian Christian, whose lifelong work has been for reconciliation and justice between Israel and Palestine, brings joy and energy to his desire for 'Peace to the World' and among those with whom he lives.

Bernard Sabella

I recall Christmas in the early fifties of the last century when my family was a refugee from the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948. We were all living in one room; but crowded as it was with some ten members of the extended family, we were managing to live in community so to speak without electricity and other essentials that we cannot do without nowadays.

santa's visit

Most impressive in those years was Santa's visit on the eve of Christmas. We were allowed to stay up till midnight to wish our parents, aunts and other members of the family community a Merry Christmas. But our anticipation was always focused on Christmas morning when we would wake up and find the colourfully wrapped candies at the base of our bed. With the candies, we would find a personal gift, usually a sweater or pajama; or a toy and some precious small change which made us feel like big spenders. Especially so since our family's precarious finances, coming out of a war, denied us access to such small change throughout the year.

aunt leonie

As children we earnestly believed in the existence of Santa Claus. I was a firm believer in his existence and I remember telling my younger siblings how it was indeed Santa who placed the colourful candy wrappings, the gifts and the small change on our beds. Later on in my childhood I discovered that Santa was no other than Aunt Leonie, who took extra care at preparing the wrappings and offered the small change from her own limited purse. Christmas for Aunt Leonie was a show of love and compassion that emphasized the family, the togetherness and the joy of celebrating the birth of the Divine Babe.

our potential as human beings

The environment of Christmas then made us feel that we were entitled to being recognized as individuals, as persons in our own right and reinforced in us the feeling of belonging to the family and to the larger community. It inspired us to delve into ourselves and to recognize our potential. It was an invitation to be open to the world, even if that world was no bigger than the old city of Jerusalem with its 20,000 or so inhabitants of Muslim and Christian Palestinians.

My father, God bless his soul, never missed the midnight mass in Bethlehem. He would leave for the Church of the Nativity after our family's Christmas Eve dinner at around 7:30 in the evening. One year, he insisted on my accompanying him. I was awestruck by the multitude of pilgrims and their different languages as they gathered awaiting midnight mass. For my father, the visit to Bethlehem was one of adoration to the newly born Divine Babe and I still remember him genuflecting by the nativity grotto and later on reciting his rosary at the Saint Catherine's parish church where the midnight mass was set to start.

the gift of parental teaching

As I reflect on my childhood experience of Christmas in the 1950s, I am struck by how much my parents' generation taught us about ourselves and about how our world should be, by their way of celebrating and experiencing Christmas. This was a generation that was traumatized by the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and by the fact that they were refugees with challenges of life and its difficult circumstances that would make one easily lose hope and perhaps faith. But they never lost either hope or faith and they kept insisting that life should go on and that Christmas, in spite of

our material poverty and our refugee status, should be celebrated with joy.

Perhaps most reflective of this spirit of my parents and their generation was the Christmas tree that adorned the same corner of the family room year after year. It was always my mother who worked hard to set up the tree and guide us on how to decorate it. That was fun and we were always so proud of our Christmas tree and the nativity set and paraphernalia that were placed at the base of the tree.

the human spirit is stronger...

We have learned as children that Christmas is a season of joy. Later on, the childish joy associated with Christmas, its carols and Santa's visit, developed into a joy of faith and hope. Irrespective of how difficult life can be, even for refugees who have just experienced



a devastating war, Christmas was a reminder that the human spirit is far stronger than the vicissitudes of life. As we celebrate Christmas in 2012, with the world continuing to experience conflict and economic difficulties, among other woes, and as our country continues to suffer occupation and the unfulfilled aspirations of freedom with a Palestinian state of our own, we should be reminded of the joy and faith of my parents' generation as they struggled to reshape their lives and their world. Christmas was a driving power in their struggle then as it should be to all of us as we celebrate yet another Christmas this year. The message of Christmas 'Peace to the World' cannot but start with peace to the family and to oneself irrespective of the hurdles and anguish caused by continuing conflict and its many woeful adverse manifestations.

Merry Christmas and a happy New Year. ■

Dr Bernard Sabella is the executive secretary of the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees at the Middle East Council of Churches in Jerusalem.

letter from bethlehem

*The vice-chancellor of Bethlehem University,
Brother Peter Bray, writes for Christmas*

Greetings from Bethlehem! Our 2012–13 academic year is well under way. The students are pleased to be back together. Many staff and students still get harassed in getting to the campus. Those from East Jerusalem who have to come through the Wall are particularly vulnerable to delays and abuse. We cannot change that. What we can do is ensure that when they are on campus they feel safe, cared for, respected and able to approach study with greater focus and peace of mind. A Dinka chief in the midst of a destroyed village in Southern Sudan said: "Education gives us the freedom to think for ourselves. You cannot give anyone a greater gift or a greater freedom than that." This is the University's role in the midst of the continuing oppression and occupation.

Good news: we've purchased the last suitable piece of land close to us. This will set the University up for 20 years, and will show the local people that the University

believes in the value of what it is doing for the Palestinian people and for their future as a nation. We are unashamedly a Catholic University. Muslims feel comfortable in coming here. Students and staff here know that around the world there are people standing in solidarity with them — you know about the occupation and the oppression, about the restrictions and the political, economic and military control under which our people live and work. It is even more supportive if they are aware that you are also raising the awareness of others in your local communities. This becomes real when faculty, staff and students engage with visitors on campus and deepen their understanding. I am conscious of Archbishop Desmond Tutu's comment: "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor."

Thanks for your prayer support. It is crucial to our mission. Thanks for the many New Zealanders who have visited us here at the University and are spreading the word about us, and thank you for your financial support.

As we approach Christmas again I am very aware of the Good News that came to us with the child born here in Bethlehem. You will be remembered in prayer as we celebrate Christmas in this holy place. ■

Editor's note:

Donations for the work of the University sent to **Caritas Aotearoa NZ PO Box 12193 Thorndon Wellington 8144**, and clearly marked 'Bethlehem University', will be forwarded to Brother Peter. Tax receipts for such donations will be provided.



[Photos of Bethlehem University: Peter Bray]

faith and a wild sea

The Christ child presents us with a huge challenge. In the midst of all our Christmas buying, selling and consuming, do we really believe that this baby is God?

Peter Murnane



It might seem strange to start a Christmas Letter by talking about Palm Sunday, but what happened then best explains what I understand about faith. On that day we were returning home to Gizo Island in the Western Solomons, after celebrating Mass on the island of Kolombangara. Setting out for home on normal days we could see Gizo on the horizon 22km away, but on that day the horizon was an ominous white blank.

journey homeward

We were in a seven-metre dinghy, powered by outboard motor. On the outward journey the rough sea had thoroughly wet us, and was now growing rougher. I felt grateful for our driver's skill, swerving among the ever-changing waves, neither taking them head-on nor letting one come over the side to swamp us. Only occasionally would we speed over a crest

and land in the trough beyond with a jarring clang of our aluminium hull.

We kept the coast of Kolombangara to our left, staying out in deep water away from the reef and its wild surf, but soon that coastline curved away and faded into mist. Letting go of its security, we continued our bouncing way towards the cloud that hid the horizon. Then we had to enter that cloud and were immediately enfolded in rain so heavy that we could see no more than a few metres in any direction. Countless drops peppered the surface with little craters which instantly disappeared and were as suddenly renewed.

Our boat bucked like a rearing horse. I held on with my right hand, and with my left made a veranda from the hood of my jacket, to shield my face from the stinging rain, but every minute or so I had to drop my arm to empty a half-litre of water from my sleeve. A dark joke against

myself gave little comfort: worst case of water on the elbow . . . ever!

a metaphor emerges

In the white-out, I wondered how we could avoid being pushed completely off course. Our driver never used a compass, but steered by landmarks and wave patterns. He stood at the tiller, bracing himself with a paddle wedged behind the rear bench, his baseball cap only partly protecting his face from the rain. If it overcame him, would our little boat be swamped, and we left kicking on the wild surface above 500 metres of water?

I peered forward, hoping to see the land that we knew was there, somewhere. After what seemed hours I thought I could see a section of white, hardly distinct from the rest. There was something solid in all that cloud. Then I was certain: as the rain thinned, the coast appeared: we were not far off our expected course.

our situation today

It is difficult to believe that Christ is God, because like every other baby he was born into a world of cruelty. Our affluence and wasteful consuming are a façade, behind which the larger part of the human race is kept in poverty and semi-slavery. A powerful few shape society for their own advantage, using wars as their preferred instrument. In the last 50 years Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos; most countries in Central and South America; Libya, Palestine, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, East Timor, West Papua and not least Iraq and Afghanistan have been deliberately savaged by violence condoned or even assisted by 'The West'. People in their millions, each born as a

fragile babe like Jesus, were bombed; had their forests poisoned, their villages burned; their persons violated and traumatised or were forced into exile as homeless refugees.

The leaders of the nations and corporations who do this 'reshaping' first use the media to deceive us into fearing the 'enemies' they create: 'communists', 'terrorists' (Moslem, Palestinian or otherwise), then arrange wars to destroy them so as to 'maintain our interests', not the least of which is profit from selling weapons to all sides.

what do we believe?

Most of the time we turn our faces away, not willing to admit these terrible sufferings or that they are deliberately caused and that we ourselves indirectly support them by sharing the profits and by remaining silent. Do we really believe that God was born into this? Or that God is infinitely good, but allows this? Why does God not do more to help us in the mess our world is in?

These ancient questions still trouble people as they have always done, but now they have reached a new intensity. They push many thoughtful persons — especially the young — to walk away, disappointed and frustrated, from our churches and often unconvincing liturgies.

Today's seekers are healthily sceptical of 'believers' — whether in mainstream religions or on the lunatic fringe — who claim certainty and try to make us accept their own convictions which are often blindfolds to save them from looking at the world's pain. Are these dogmatists any different from the advertisers and hucksters who commercialise everything, even the season of Christ's birthday?

the gift of experience

When we try to explore the Transcendent — 'what is God?' — reasoning can take us only so far, for what we are seeking is, by definition, beyond the human mind. We reach a threshold, a shore, but the only reliable 'boat' we have to navigate the sea

of doubt, is our own experience. After all, it is experience that reliably tells us when we need air, water, food. By experience we find what will satisfy us, and experience tells when we have had enough, although we sometimes over-ride it, deceiving ourselves to keep consuming beyond those limits.

**St John was
describing his own
lived experience
when he gave us
the profound phrase
"God is Love".**

the transcendent in ordinary

The experience of being loved can lead us towards healing even after trauma. What brings us nearest to the Transcendent are our ordinary experiences of love, joy, peace and even various kinds of resurrection. At the death of loved ones, for instance, many people experience convincing signs that 'the departed' has only gone beyond human sight. Many other people describe the experience of having been touched by The Mystery when healed, or in ecstasy, or in a Near Death Experience. The people who wrote the Scriptures were recording such experiences: Luke's and Matthew's stories of Jesus' infancy; the stories of those who experienced Christ after he had passed through death. St John was describing his own lived experience when he gave us the profound phrase "God is Love".

god is love

When we experience the love that shines like the sun from the face of every friend or lover, are we seeing hints that there must be a 'stupendous Lover' from whom flows all the beauty of the created universe? If so, must not such a Love also be supreme Intelligence, fully aware of us? What deep affection God must have for all people! How could people who have experienced this, continue to hurt one another?

faith in love?

To admit love into our lives can be as frightening as a tropical storm at sea, but every one of us is capable of it. We can steer our boat towards the further shore, rather than stand, lamenting the storm and looking fearfully out to sea.

When we accept that the Transcendent Mystery is real, we enter profound peace. Could there be any greater joy than to know that we are loved without any limits? Then at any time, like the mystic William Blake, we can see heaven in a wild flower; hold infinity in the palm of our hand, and eternity in a half-hour. We can silently wait on The Mystery in meditation or talk to God by more direct prayer. But as the mystics also emphasise, we will make much more progress by loving than by reasoning or talking, for love unites us in a way that mind cannot.

I am not normally fearful, and on Palm Sunday my death was not likely, but in the heart of the rain-squall I did begin to fear that we would not get through. I have had a previous brush with death. And I know that by statistical odds I will die and enter more closely into The Mystery within seven or eight thousand days. This deepens my trust. The boat that is our 'true self' cannot sink! If it seems to, Love is always there to support us, deeper than any depth below us.

the power of love

If there is such a Love, might it contain an answer wider than all the apparent contradictions in the material world: greed against weakness; violence against peace? Just as human beings can heal one another by forgiving, might not Love, which is everyone's origin and final destination, be great enough to embrace all in its infinite depths, where 'darkness and light are one'? ■

Father Peter Murnane OP is novice master for the Dominican Province of the Assumption in the Solomon Islands.

When angels rove the restless skies

Words and music © Colin Gibson (2012)

ANGLESPIEL ♩=96

When an - gels
When wise and
When tears of

rove the rest - less skies, and all cre - a - tion sees with
fool - ish seek the Child, the Son through whom all worlds are
grief are wiped a - way, when peace and just - ice rise to

Mar-ry's eyes, when shep-herds run in wild sur- prise, it is the time, the bless - ed
re - con - ciled, when gen - tle beast lies down with wild,
light the day, when love at last finds out the way,

time when all things hu - man and di - vine make Christ - mas.

The Blessed Time



Tui Motu is pleased and proud to present to readers *When Angels Rove the Restless Skies*, a new Christmas carol composed specially for you by Colin Gibson. Colin's contribution to church music within Aotearoa-New Zealand began over 40 years ago and continues to flourish.

When angels rove the restless skies,
And all creation sees with Mary's eyes,
When shepherds run in wild surprise
 It is the time, the blessed time
 When all things human and divine
 Make Christmas

When wise and foolish seek the Child.
The Son, through whom all worlds are reconciled
When gentle beast lies down with wild
 It is the time, the blessed time
 When all things human and divine
 Make Christmas

When tears of grief are wiped away,
When peace and justice rise to light the day,
When love at last finds out the way,
 It is the time, the blessed time
 When all things human and divine
 Make Christmas

— Colin Gibson

treasured beyond measure

Too often at Christmas, the real magic is missed. There is nothing infantile about the infant; the innocence of the child is the power of the Father filling the hearts and souls of his beloved and broken people with hope for the eternal light of his love and affection.

Daniel O'Leary

Back in the 1950s, during December days, at around 6 p.m., a small army of boys and girls were collected from the neighbouring villages of Knocknagree, Gneeveguilla and Barraduff, and taken to Rathmore Creamery, for the killing and plucking of the Christmas turkeys and geese. The staff did the killing; we did the plucking.

It was pure torture. Plucking resistant pin feathers from a tough and bony old bird was hardly an inspiring Advent ritual. It was ninepence for a cock, sixpence for a hen. The hens were easy. I wasted my whole first night trying to pluck a cock. Again and again I was refused my money — either there were some impossible feathers still attached, or the skin was bruised or bleeding, or the plucking checker did not like me.

This was my first introduction to paid work. Looking back now, I remember how upset I was at that hard world of earning, meriting and competing. There was little generosity in that smelly shed of flying fleas and feathers. You had to cajole and bargain for every last penny at the payout. Even in those young years, I wanted another kind of world — a more forgiving one, a more loving one, where all the pin feathers do not have to be removed. With a child's clarity, I longed for things to be different. I discovered later that they already were. But nobody told us.

One day, if we are lucky, the impact of Christmas stuns us. Something remarkable begins to dawn on us — the recognition that, despite its ugliness and evil, this wounded world is alive with love. We are treasured beyond measure by a mercy that does not depend on our worthiness — that carries no inspection for perfection.

Every year, we have Advent to remember and delight in this transforming story, this radical revelation that the divine Mystery is now flesh of our flesh, as intimate as our senses. The mystic within us knows that the same holds true of the world itself, that we must cherish it, because now we know it to be the precious body of God.

Incarnation is about the way we see things, the way we get hints of the holy, hidden nature of everything, especially of the experiences of our lives. Think, for

instance, of the most complete, loving moment you can remember. Think of all that has ever moved you profoundly, whether this be the silence of the darkness, the forgiveness of a friend, or the wind in the winter trees. All of that is unearned, undeserved. And it is all free. We know this because of the baby.

There will, of course, be days when we doubt this. There is too much confusion around us, too much pain inside us. We lose our longing for the light. On Sunday we prayed for the removal of “the darkness that blinds us to the vision that fills the mind...” Midnight Mass reveals, to those who have learned to see, that these beautiful prayers are already answered — every day.

Reflect, for instance, on the utter surprise of feeling the invincible Spirit move in you, of sensing there is nothing you cannot be, or do. Think of the most liberating moments in your life — when, for instance, at the end of your worst night of loss, you still got up, drew back the curtains, and, without knowing why, your stalled heart began to beat with hope again.

Or think of the most courageous moment that still makes your eyes shine. Think of the time when you reached way beyond yourself, when you stretched for what was out of reach, when someone or something carried you to a place you had only dreamed of, when you felt at one with everything, and sensed that your forgiving look was a small sacrament of universal peace.

Remember the sublime music that moved you to tears, the dance that made you throw back your head and laugh out loud, the painting that touched your hidden passion, the possibility or the person that stole your heart. That is when you were experiencing the excitement we call God, revealed first in the small lover on straw who smiled at the star above him, and cried at the cross he glimpsed beneath it.

Too often, at Christmas, we perennially miss the real magic — that in his subsequent death and Resurrection, the ‘baby Jesus’ is, in fact, revealed to be the Cosmic Christ who flattens the hills of injustice and fills the valleys with hope, the heart, soul and saviour of God's beloved and broken people, the mighty “firstborn of all Creation”, the pulsing being

of all that lives. There is nothing infantile about the infant. Christmas is already Easter.

We look at the baby and sight trembles into insight, seeing is transformed by recognition. Advent grace is for attuning the senses of the soul to the rhythm of God's heart in every heartbeat. The poets know this. Gerard Manley Hopkins reminds us of "the face behind the face", Kathleen Raine of "the mountain behind the mountain", Seamus Heaney of "the horizon behind the horizon" and St Paul of "the energy behind all energies". That's the revealing language of the traditional "Catholic imagination".

"The day of my spiritual awakening", wrote Rhineland mystic Mechtild of Magdeburg, "was the day I saw — and knew I saw — all things in God and God in all things." Incarnation is about recognising divine beauty — usually in deep disguise. Can you think of a time when you saw into the heart of a gesture, a passing event, any sensation — really and truly saw into it, through the lens of Christmas?

In "The Snow Geese", poet Mary Oliver tells of her sacramental glimpse into the mystery of the ordinary:

*One fall day I heard
above me, and above the sting of the
wind, a sound
I did not know, and my look shot
upward; it was

a flock of snow geese, winging it
faster than the ones we usually see,
and, being the colour of snow, catching
the sun

so they were, in part at least, golden ...*

I have never seen them again.

*Maybe I will, someday, somewhere.
Maybe I won't.
It doesn't matter.
What matters
is that, when I saw them,
I saw them as through the veil, secretly, joyfully,
clearly. ■*

*Fr Daniel's website is www.djoleary.com
Father Daniel O'Leary is a priest of the
Diocese of Leeds, England.*

*This article is reprinted by kind permission
of The London Tablet.*

Blue jays and one green apple

Donoughmore Cross, Ireland

The autumn is heavy with blue jays in the bare trees.
You'd swear the tree cupboards were empty
but then there's the thud of a green apple. It's tiny.
It curls up at one end like an Arabian slipper.
There's slime on it and a dark wet leaf and a long black slug.
But pick it up anyway and pop it in the sink.
It will come up all shiny. Peel off the ringlets
of impeccable skin and there are the white crystals
tinged with green that make up the fleshy nursery.
What a long time it's taken to get here, two hundred years at least.
Well done, tree; well done, jays. We like the way
you chase the crows away before they give us a headache.

— Bernadette Hall

For Love of Mary

Advent roses fill our gardens
preparing us to celebrate
Your birth
Mary's love In full bloom
no need for snow or mistletoe
in Aotearoa

Pungas throw out their fronds
announcing Your arrival
Rengarenga lily
drapes her cloth like peace
prepare our hearts
to birth the Star of Wonder

Red Pohutakawa white Manuka
flower this land of abundance
fruitfulness pours out her joy
carrying the seed Emanuel
Trinity of conception perceives her love
Summer Christmas
Aotearoa

— Bridie Southall



looking towards christmas with isaiah

*'The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib;
but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.'
(Isaiah 1:3)*

Damian Wynn-Williams

At Christmas we celebrate the birth of God's Incarnate Word. The Scripture readings of our Advent and Christmas liturgies invite us to respond to this self-disclosure by God ever more profoundly and personally. Of the readings selected from the Old Testament special place is given to those from the Book of Isaiah (26 out of 41). How might we read them today?

the fifth gospel

The Book of Isaiah is frequently cited or alluded to in the New Testament, some 16 times in Matthew's Gospel alone. For the early Christians it provided a sort of mental grid with which they could interpret both their experience of Jesus of Nazareth and their own identity as the new 'Israel'. St Jerome even described the Book of Isaiah as the Fifth Gospel.

According to the title of the book Isaiah lived in the later part of the 8th century BCE. However, a careful reading of the text implies later historical settings as well, notably the period of Babylonian Exile in the 6th century and also the so-called Second Temple period when Judah was but a tiny part of the vast Persian empire (5th–4th centuries). Evidently the book as we now have it was formed over many hundreds of years, with the message of the 8th century Isaiah constituting a nucleus that was subsequently elaborated and applied to new situations. In time the words of other anonymous prophetic voices



were joined to the older material. In the process older sayings or images took on new shades of meaning in the light of these later additions, though it is often impossible to distinguish the stages of redaction or editing with absolute certainty.

'rereading' redaction, editing?

That this process of 're-reading' Isaiah continued even after the book assumed its final form sometime in the 4th–3rd centuries BCE is evident from the scrolls and the many fragments found at Qumran. For example the sectarians at Qumran took the phrase 'in the wilderness' in Isa 40:3 to refer to their place of self-chosen exile by the Dead Sea. In its original context, however, the exhortation: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,' referred to the journey back to Jerusalem by the exiles in

Babylon centuries earlier. This same text was given yet another interpretation by early Christian readers who saw in it a reference to John the Baptist. In each of the Gospels the phrase 'in the wilderness' is taken to refer to 'the voice' of John the Baptist rather than to 'the way'.

The question inevitably arises: how is the meaning in the text to be determined? Is this to be restricted to what the author intended? Should one presume that there is only one meaning? Or does the experience of the reader contribute in some way? Unquestionably historical criticism plays an important and fundamental role in our understanding of a text, providing parameters for interpretation. It serves to prevent the reader from imitating Humpty Dumpty who said to Alice that words could mean whatever he chose them to mean (*Through the Looking Glass*, chap 6)!

'open-endedness'

But while words do define and have specific meanings, they can at the same time possess a certain 'open-endedness'. Words and images in a text can have a potentiality which the original author may not have realized. We might recall how through the centuries great actors and producers have 'discovered' in Shakespeare's plays new shades of meaning in the light of their contemporary experience.

We read the Scriptures, not simply as historical documents, but as 'the word of God'. In this regard there is

a tantalizing connection between the mystery of God's self-disclosure in the Incarnate Word of God and the mystery of revelation in the limitations of human language. According to Karl Rahner, "In every word, the gracious incarnation of God's own abiding Word and so of God himself can take place... If one is to grow ever more profoundly Christian, one must never cease to practise listening for this incarnational possibility in the human word." (*Theological Investigations*, 4: 362)

a godly conversation

By paying heed to the various speakers in Advent/Christmas readings we can listen to them as a sort of conversation between God and ourselves. It should be noted that prophecy is not primarily about predicting the future. The prophets were concerned with what was happening in their present world. They 'told forth' rather than 'fore told.' In this conversation we do not expect to receive information otherwise unknown to us but rather we are attentive to God's invitation to trust and to love.

There are indeed several texts which speak of a future birth (or perhaps enthronement), 7:14; 9:6f; 11:1ff. For example, when Isaiah urged Ahaz to put his trust in the LORD, Ahaz is promised a sign: 'a young woman' would bear a son (7:14). But if this sign was to be meaningful to the king, Isaiah must have been referring to an event in the immediate future, perhaps to the birth of Ahaz's son Hezekiah. What is significant is that even when the individual or individuals alluded to in these oracles failed to live up to expectations, the hopes expressed therein continued on a trajectory of their own. In the Hebrew text of 7:14 the woman said to be (or about to be) with child is referred to simply as the *almah* (a woman of marriageable age). However, in the Greek version (dating from around the mid-2nd century BCE) this term was rendered as *parthenos* (a virgin). When

Matthew handed on the tradition that he had received about Jesus' conception, he was able to associate the promised child mentioned by Isaiah with Jesus, Mary's son, for whom the title 'Emmanuel' (God-with-us) was most appropriate. What underlies this sort of 're-reading' is the conviction that God's word remains alive and active.

sequential reading

It is helpful to read the Isaiah texts in the sequence in which they appear in the Lectionary, taking note of the various clusters of images and ideas that recur. When viewed in the light of the Gospel, these may take on new connotations. For example the various references to Zion/Jerusalem/the Temple 'in the days to come' might remind us of Jesus' self-description as the temple to be raised in three days (Jn 2:19). The images in Isaiah describing the 'shalom' promised by God (harmony/ banquet/defeat of Death/healing of the lame etc) are seen in the Gospels as signs of the Kingdom inaugurated by Jesus. Each of the many different references to God such as Lord (Yahweh), the Holy One, creator, our Father, shepherd, redeemer can be the basis of personal prayer. When we hear mention of 'the way', we might recall how the Gospels speak of Jesus' disciples following him 'on the way' or that Jesus himself is 'the way'.

oracle of light

One cluster of terms and images in the Advent/Christmas readings from Isaiah is particularly suggestive, namely those associated with light. In Isa 9:1ff. (read at midnight Mass), the prophet announces that, "The people that walked in darkness has seen a great light, on those who live in a land of deep shadow, a light has shone." The oracle reflects both the suffering and despair caused by the Assyrian devastation in northern Israel and the enthusiastic hopes engendered by the birth or accession of a new king in Judah. Among

scholars there is no agreement about his identity or when this oracle was composed. In any case these hopes came to nothing. But the prophet's words endured. Centuries later they were seen by Matthew (4:15f) to express the significance of Jesus' appearance in Galilee at the beginning of his ministry in Galilee. He is 'a light to enlighten the nations' (Lk 2:32), 'the light of the world' (Jn 8:12).

looking to christmas

One further example of this sort of 'imaginative' re-reading of Isaiah deserves mention as we look towards Christmas. In Isa 1:3 Israel is accused of rebelling against God; even animals are more intelligent! Now the Greek version of this verse uses the same word for 'manger' as occurs in Luke's account of Jesus' birth (Lk 2:7, 12). It also renders the Hebrew term for 'master' as 'lord (kyrios),' the title regularly applied to Jesus. For later Christian readers with the nativity story in mind Isaiah's words took on an extra nuance, allowing piety to introduce an ox and an ass into depictions of the Christmas crib scene. 'The ass recognised the manger of his Lord!' With such hindsight Isaiah could be said to have been looking towards Christmas. ■

Father Damian Wynn-Williams is a priest of the Diocese of Dunedin, and a scripture scholar.

If you really love reading your Tui Motu,

you might like to remember us in your will.

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no room at the inn?

The number of homeless people is growing within New Zealand.

The writer asks us to reflect on the place of the inadequately sheltered and homeless.

What can we do to remove this scandal?

Susan Smith

Christmas is often about homes, or lack of them. Two thousand years ago at the first Christmas, Luke tells us that “Mary gave birth to her firstborn son, and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger [this could be either a feeding trough or a cattle stall], because there was no room for them at the inn” (Lk 2:7). No home for a young couple and their child was the problem here. Matthew’s infancy narrative omits this detail and instead we learn that “Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea” (Matt 2:1). Most contemporary Lukan scholarship believes that Luke is not primarily concerned with writing an accurate historical account of the birth of Jesus. Instead he is interested in conveying an important theological truth in narrative form, namely that the birth of Jesus, the Son of God in a stable, not in the guest-house, anticipates the life of one who has nowhere to lay his head (see Luke 9:58).

nz context

In contemporary New Zealand, Christmas is about homes too, or in some instances, lack of them. On the plus side, families reunite over Christmas in homes, and often enough children who have left home for work or study or marriage return to spend Christmas with their parents. Or people temporarily go to other homes at the beach, to DOC parks and camping grounds, or take off in their mobile homes in order to relax and enjoy life. On the debit side, there are those who like Joseph and Mary have nowhere to go and

are dependent on the charity of others. There is no room for them at the inn.

numbers of homeless growing

There are growing numbers of homeless people in New Zealand. Research indicates that those particularly susceptible to lack of adequate long-term and affordable accommodation include single men often not long out of prison whose bail conditions require they live apart from their families, or conversely have few family members who could or would host them. Others struggling to find suitable and affordable accommodation include families who have had to seek assistance because they have been deprived of their former housing through their inability to pay the rent required.

Poor quality housing means poor education, health and social outcomes.

reasons why

Often such a situation has occurred because the income-generating partner has been made redundant or has been hospitalised and there is insufficient income to pay the rent or to keep up mortgage repayments. There are also people with mental health issues, solo mothers often the victims of domestic abuse, and those with alcohol and drug issues who have been marginalised by their

families and by government agencies. Homelessness, like poverty in general in New Zealand, is increasingly an inter-generational reality and unsurprisingly one housing trust reported that almost 25 percent of their clients had been in care as children.

In addition to these people there are still hundreds living in rented or mortgaged sub-standard accommodation in Christchurch, victims of government policies that think building a covered sports stadium is more important than providing suitable accommodation for earthquake victims.

place of housing trusts

Different housing trusts throughout New Zealand, such as the Monte Cecilia Housing Trust in Auckland or the Tai Tokerau Emergency Housing Charitable Trust in Whangarei, undertake to work with the homeless. Today the work these two trusts and other trusts do is becoming increasingly important as the government seems less than interested in responding to the situation of the homeless or the growing group of potentially homeless people.

The recent publicity surrounding the government and state housing could mean we think that Housing New Zealand is at the forefront of those concerned about inadequate housing, but we need to remember that state housing comprises only 5 percent of the homes in New Zealand. Furthermore, the present government is reducing its responsibility for providing for those who lack adequate accommodation. Sadly local councils are also stepping back



from providing housing for the homeless in their communities.

new non-solutions

Increasingly the homeless are found in caravan parks paying inflated prices for caravan dwellings, in garages, sleep-outs, or living with other families in cramped, damp and unhygienic conditions. Caravans and hut accommodation may be nice for a couple of weeks over the Christmas holidays but as a long term solution for homeless people such accommodation presents many problems. These problems include lack of privacy, lack of belonging, lack of emotional and physical security, and lack of stability — all of which impact negatively on adults and their children, particularly the latter as they transition from school to school, from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. Poor quality housing means poor education, health and social outcomes.

‘social housing’

The Minister of Housing, Phil Heatley, is currently advocating as the desirable government housing policy “social housing”, which means the government provides some finance for non-government housing providers. This he believes is a better option for the government than being actively involved in providing homes for the less affluent and homeless in our towns and cities. It is yet another indication of the government’s ideological commitment to privatisation. It is ironic to recall that the minister’s

announcement occurred just ten days prior to John Key’s departure for Hollywood to wine and dine with celebrities and to assure them that New Zealand would continue its tax concessions and rebates to Hollywood’s film moguls. It is also ironic to remember that John Key, who grew up in a state house, is one of our former welfare state’s great success stories. Welfare states can and should work for the less fortunate.

our concern?

So should Christians be concerned about those who like Joseph and Mary, a young marginalised couple, have nowhere to live? As disciples of Jesus, we understand that one of the corporal works of mercy is to shelter the homeless (see Isa 58:7). Throughout Luke’s gospel we find the author directing our attention to a saviour who came to bring good news to the poor. Unlike Matthew’s story of the birth of Jesus, Luke has no reference to the three wise and presumably wealthy men who come with their expensive gifts to worship the child. In Luke’s gospel the first visitors are the shepherds. This is Luke’s way of demonstrating to his community that Jesus has come above all for the poor and the outcasts. Shepherds at this time were a marginalised peasant people, often nomadic, who paid little attention to societal norms.

united nations’ declaration

But not only does the bible mandate such work. Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human

Rights states that “everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.” Article 25 is speaking about people who present at housing trusts up and down the country.

no room at the inn?

The birthplace at Bethlehem invites us to recognize the scandal of Christmas, the scandal of God coming into human history as a helpless baby to parents who were either unwed or only recently married and who had nowhere to stay. Today we have the scandal of the inadequately sheltered and the homeless more and more obviously apparent in our society. Christmas is a time that invites us to reflect on the happiness a rich and fulfilling home life can mean for us. It is also a time to reflect on those who are not so blessed and who, like Joseph and Mary, find there is no room at the inn. ■

Mission Sister Susan Smith, who lives near Whangarei, is a member of the Tai Tokerau Emergency Housing Charitable Trust Board, Whangarei.

how faith has formed me

In the last of this three part series, Bishop Peter reflects on what Church refocusing might yet be done in the light of Vatican II, and the Church's need to be transformed from within. He signs off, "Don't count me out yet!"

Peter Cullinane

There are other needed reforms that will emerge more easily in the wake of this fundamental refocusing, and that can't happen ahead of it. There are also some 'issues' that probably won't even arise when the Church's landscape has changed.

Those same charisms of religious life and ordained ministries that contributed so much to the Church's life through the institutions that have since closed will also find new vigour in a renewed Church. There will always be those who are a cutting edge. But a wider range of charisms will have been released and given scope. Wider participation — in the Church's apostolates, in decision-making, and in the celebration of liturgy, for example — generates its own energies and synergies. This is why, in the early days of the Diocese of Palmerston North, we replaced the Diocesan Pastoral Council with five Deanery Pastoral Councils — widening the scope for people's participation and formation, and my involvement with them.

Given my commitment to the Council, how do I cope with moves that seem to go back on its reforms? Some of them have been saddening, destructive, and blatantly contrary to Catholic ecclesiology. Well, in the end they can only be like flotsam caught in an eddy on the surface of a river. They even manage to go against the current for a few seconds (or years) as the eddy circles. But they are going nowhere really. The reforms of the Council are the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit. They are like the deep water of the river, which cannot be stopped. In other words, I keep my focus on the big picture. I remember, too, that many of the problems that followed

the Council derived from the inadequate formation — scriptural, catechetical and liturgical — Catholics received before the Council.

The renewing Church also needs to get out of its own way, i.e. not loom larger than the mission that is its very reason for being, which as Pope Paul VI described it, is:

"to bring the good news to all aspects of humanity, and through its influence transform it from within, making humanity itself into something new." (Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n.18).

And he immediately added: "But there can be no new humanity if there are not first of all new persons." It is our relationship with Christ that transforms ourselves — and all our other relationships. This is how the Gospel is able to permeate and transform society at every level.

inside knowledge

There are some things that can only be known from inside the experience. Love itself is like that. It can only be known from inside the experience of loving. It cannot be known by looking on from the outside. So too, our ability to accept the Church's teachings emanates from inside our relationship with Christ. In chapter 6 of John's gospel those who didn't yet know the person of Jesus were the ones who couldn't accept his teaching. Those who already knew him knew that he was true, and therefore so was his teaching — even if they didn't understand it either.

And because I belong to a journeying, pilgrim people, I have no problem with the fact that sometimes the Church knows what it knows before it can properly explain. I would expect

this to be the case, because the deeper meanings of our faith come on to our horizons only as we journey.

discerning salvation history in one's own life

On the journey into reality it can be easier to recognise God's presence if we have learnt to recognise God's style. Looking back to the people and the places of earlier stages of one's journey is more than an exercise in geography or genealogy. It is a journey into mystery. God's presence in human history and in our own lives turns ordinary history into salvation history — the extraordinary side of the ordinary. The raw material is the same for both, but within history a purpose is unfolding that cannot be thwarted by history's twists and turns. That is why we often find that the very times when we were most assailed by doubt or despair turned out to be break-throughs to new hope.

I recommend to you the practice of diarying your own experiences of dying and rising, of valleys and hill-tops. I have always found it nurturing to go back and touch again those moments when I have been most alive to God's presence. It seems to be through remembering, that the graces are renewed — and the tears and the healings too. And it is easier, looking back, to discern any pattern in the story of God's dealings with us, especially when God seems not to be hearing at all:

*You have never abandoned me
even when you seemed most absent,
for you entered my life more fully at those times
when aloud and in silent tears I prayed to
the One who had the power*



Bishop Peter Cullinane

*to make things different – but didn't,
because you wanted me to choose your will
instead
and be more at one with you.*

*When you allowed me to experience failure
and confusion*

*it was in order to unmask the falseness
of self-sufficiency and self-justification
and make me place all my hope and trust
in you.*

*Through the valley of darkness, therefore,
you have led me more surely
and enabled me, even out of the depths
to thank you with joy.*

*I would bless the cross that took me there,
but you already have. (Page 53)*

signing off

I recently signed off as bishop of the diocese. At such a time it comes naturally to think of one's failures and of lost opportunities. But of these I will say what Kierkegaard said of sin — its opposite is not virtue but grace.

It has been an extraordinary privilege to serve Christ and his people in this ministry. However, if there is reason for wonder at what I became, this is all the more because of where I came from. I have always felt humbled by the mystery of how one who grew up in the paddocks of Oringi became a bishop of the Church and first bishop of the Diocese of Palmerston North.

In a letter expressing thanks for my 32 years as bishop, the Cardinal

Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples reminded me that my apostolate will become mainly one of prayer and sacrifice. It was a helpful reminder of how each of us can continue in the service of Christ until our last breath.

Dying is not something that should merely happen to us. It is something we co-operate in. It is too important not to be included in the living of one's life. And so, I practise my part by beginning each day with that act of adoration we all know as the Glory Be...

All this is strangely familiar. It brings to mind a holy picture given me in my childhood featuring Jesus in the garden and the prayer he prayed when confronted by his death: "not mine but your will be done". I have been told that was the prayer my father also prayed when he was dying, leaving a young wife and four children, one of them only one week old. What makes me tick goes back a long way.

There is an understandable expectation that a bishop will be buried in the Cathedral city of his diocese. However, I have chosen to be buried with my parents in Dannevirke. It was my parents who mediated to me the gift of life and with it God's purpose for my life. For all of us, God's purpose unfolds within the humble, ordinary circumstances of our lives, beginning where our lives began. And so, having carried out my calling, I am returning, as it were, to my *whenua*. And the Gospel reading I have chosen

for my funeral is a one-liner in which Jesus says: when you have done all that was commanded you, you are to say we have only done what it was our duty to do (cf Luke 17:10).

May the last word on my life be 'thank you'

for all that has been and all that will be.

And when my life belongs to the distant past

and all our names have been forgotten,

may it be that I – together with those I loved and those who loved me –

was entrusted by the community called Christian

to the One called Christ.

Grant me the grace to look forward to His coming again,

as she surely did who prays for us

'now and at the hour of our death' (page 57)

But before we come to that, there's the matter of retirement and what it means. A friend of mine was the Bishop of Galloway, Scotland, before his retirement. At the end of a delightful little book reflecting on his ministry he says:

Retired bishops in the past were 'transferred' to 'titular sees *in partibus infidelium*' i.e. dioceses that no longer existed. Now that somewhat coy fiction has been abandoned and 'a bishop whose resignation from office has been accepted acquires the title "emeritus" of his diocese.' (Canon 402 #1)

The word sounds fitting and worthy, perhaps something like 'meritorious'. So I looked up my Latin dictionary: 'emeritus – one who has served his time, a veteran, unfit for service, worn out.'

To which I say, don't count me out yet! ■

*Bishop Peter Cullinane was the first
bishop of the Diocese of Palmerston
North. He retired in 2011.*

The full text of Bishop Peter's complete paper under the title "This I believe" is available at: <http://www.pn.catholic.org.nz/?sid=2088>

the hospitality of god

Lk 1:39-44 (4th Sunday of Advent); Luke 2:1-20 (Christmas Day)

'Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.'

Kath Rushton

We are in Advent. Christmas draws near. I pause before the bowed figure of Mary in Jan Wilson's wall hanging above. Luke tells us "Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart" — the words of the angels and the shepherds and those of the child Jesus in the temple (2:19, 51) find a home in Mary's heart.

I read the Australian scholar, Brendan Byrne. 'Hospitality' — guests, meals, making the stranger feel at home, enlarging our home so others will be at home with us — threads through Luke's gospel. Significant events and exchanges take place within the context of the offering or non-offering of hospitality. Further, Jesus' whole life and ministry are a 'visitation' of God to Israel and 'all the world.' Those who receive Jesus are drawn into the hospitality of God. I return to Jan's wall hanging drawn into the hospitality of God to treasure and ponder in my heart.

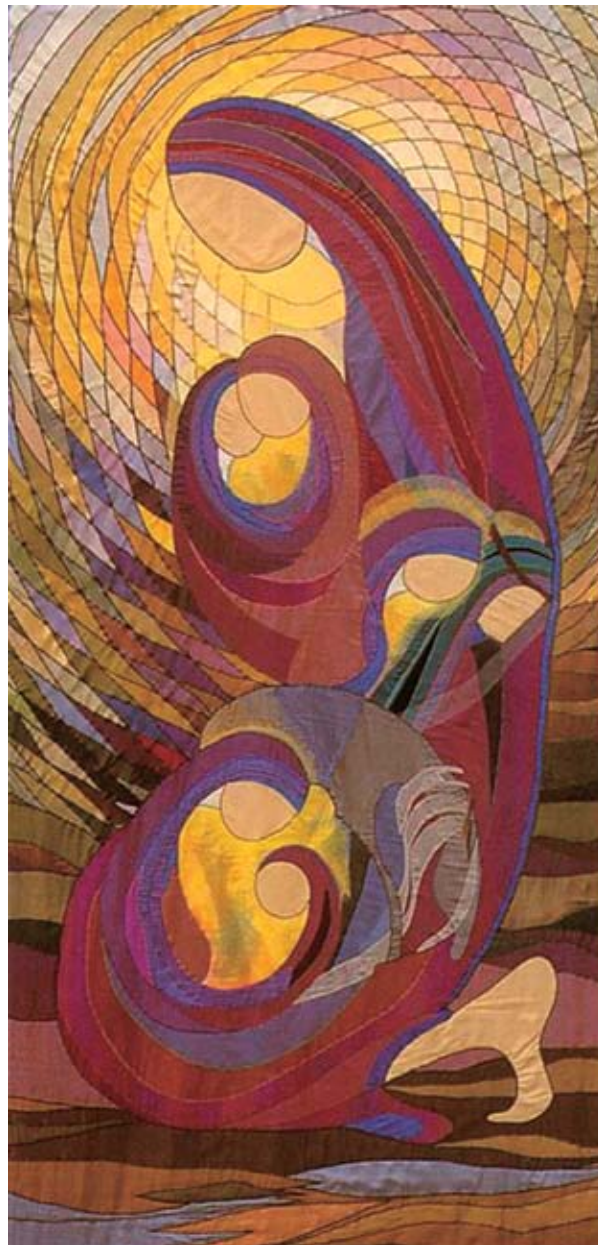
cosmic hospitality

The spiralling background and the encompassing bowed figure speak to me of two moments and two phases of the one process of God's self-giving and self-expression — evolution/creation and incarnation. The God who creates becomes one of us. The revelation of God is through the divine, the cosmos and humanity. God is glimpsed only briefly through the opening of a veil which closes again. I glimpse the Divine Presence through some experience and then the Presence fades into darkness only to be unveiled again when often in unexpected places and times I encounter the Presence again.

For nearly 14 billion years, the complexities of the cosmos have evolved giving hospitality to unfolding life. The Book of Creation is a 'visitation' of God. Evolution reaches a crescendo in the incarnation evoked in Mary whom 'the power of the Most High' overshadowed at the annunciation in Nazareth, an obscure Galilean town.

visitation

My gaze drops to the two cousins embracing. This scene not only brings Elizabeth and Mary together in a rare biblical scene of a conversation between two women but is the first instance of a pattern Luke



This Annunciation patchwork hangs in Holy Name Church, Dunedin. It was:

"Designed and made by Mrs Jan Wilson and completed in 1980..."

In describing the wall hanging, one would view the Annunciation; then move on to the visit to Elizabeth; Mary and her baby, Jesus; then the flight into Egypt."

often shows of two individuals who have had a religious experience that they do not quite understand. They share their individual experience which becomes community experience. Through their sharing, full meaning is found.

Mary enters Elizabeth's house. As Gabriel had 'greeted' her, she 'greeted' Elizabeth. At this, the infant John by 'leaping' in his mother's womb (1:41) witnesses to the Saviour anticipating his later role (3:3-6, 15-18) which we hear proclaimed on the third Sunday of Advent. When with a loud cry Elizabeth blesses Mary and 'the fruit of your womb,' she utters the first 'blessed' of many found in Luke.

Mary is the first of many to give hospitality to Jesus and who, then, themselves are drawn into the hospitality of God. Mary will find hospitality with Elizabeth. In the hospitality these two women give each other, their faith overflows as they grow in knowledge and celebration. We see the beginning of the community of faith that will share the coming of Jesus.

birth of jesus

My gaze moves to Mary and her child. I ponder the context of his birth (2:1-5). The Spirit is at work in both the Jewish and Gentile events of the day. The stories of Zechariah, Elizabeth and Mary are laced with the Old Testament. The Gentile world, too, cooperates. Caesar Augustus' decree that 'all the world should be registered' serves Luke's theological purposes. Jesus has come for 'all the world'. Joseph returns to his ancestral Bethlehem so Jesus is born in David's city. While the Gentile world during the Pax Romana regarded Augustus as the prince of peace, Jesus comes as the true Prince of Peace.

Only two verses tell of the actual birth of Jesus (2:6-7). Yet this sparse account reminds us of what lies ahead. Mary "wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger" (2:7, 12). This mirrors the One who wrapped in cloth will be placed in the tomb (23:53). The parents of Jesus find no hospitality in the city of David. He is born on the margins. Thus begins a pattern that that will recur in Jesus' life and ministry.

annunciation to the Shepherds

The shepherds were among the poorest because not owning land or sheep they worked for hire. They were on the margins. There God's glory shone to herald incarnation breaking into evolution. In an episode cast as an annunciation scene, an angel declares: "to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord" (2:11). 'This day' suggests the present inbreaking

of God (4:21; 5:26; 13:32-33; 19:5; 23:43). They respond with fear. They are reassured. The birth is announced. The role and status of the child is given. A sign is given which they are commissioned to go and find.

If I find God is absent, maybe, I have strayed from the margins. I miss the present inbreaking of annunciation. I need to be there to recognise God's advent (coming) and in my daily life to give birth to God by incarnating Jesus. The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins sees us as the 'place' where Jesus comes to be:

New Nazareths in us ...

New Bethlems, and he born

There, evening, noon, morn –

Bethlem or Nazareth

[We] here may draw like breath

More Christ...

To ponder this Advent and Christmas like Mary so we may 'draw like breath' more Christ. ■

Kathleen Rushton is a Sister of Mercy working in adult education in the Diocese of Christchurch.



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best books of 2012

Kate Doherty offers her choice of four of the best reads for 2012

There are times when I envy the eccentric father of the famed Mitford sisters. According to one of his daughters, reading wasn't on his agenda because he claimed to have read one book when young — *White Fang* by Jack London — and enjoyed it so much that he didn't ever want to read another. When faced with a pile of new finds and old treasures, each one waving its pages and whispering "read me FIRST" I think that if I had stuck with *The Wind in the Willows* life would be a lot simpler. Not as interesting, but simpler.

a possible life

Sebastian Faulks has provided his readers with a problem in his latest work — find the link. *A Possible Life* (Hutchinson) is described on the title page as "a novel in five parts" but the problem is: when do five short stories set in time from the early 1820's to the future later in this century and in places as diverse as a Nazi concentration camp and the post-crash Italy of the future, and with no obvious link of theme or characters, become a novel?

In an interview published in *The Irish Times* the author said that this book was about individuality and "whether there is such a thing as a self or a soul — whether we are entities in ourselves or part of some larger consciousness..." He suggests that it may help to think of this novel as a five-movement symphony, or an album with five different tracks.

However one looks at it, there is some wonderful writing in *A Possible Life*. In the first story, A Different Man, we are in familiar Faulks territory — the brutality and horror of

war. Previous novels — *Birdsong* and *Charlotte Gray* — have demonstrated this author's mastery in evoking the atmosphere of life as lived with death all around. This latest war story takes place largely in a Nazi concentration camp where a mild English schoolmaster finds himself caught up in the grim work of the camp. It is a truly shocking narrative — as the title suggests, one man went to war and quite a different one came back.

The other four stories are less harrowing but equally engaging — none more so than the story of the down-trodden peasant woman in mid 19th century France. But the question remains — do five short stories with no links constitute a novel? Sebastian Faulks claims to aim to provoke and challenge his readers. In his latest work he has certainly succeeded.

the dream of the celt

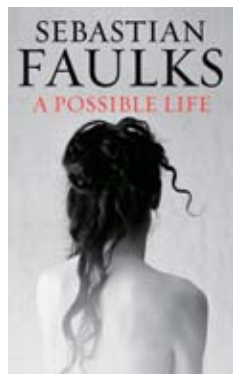
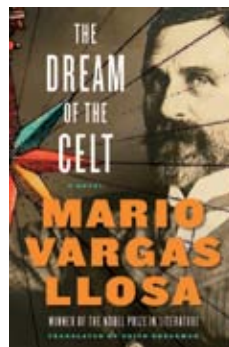
Heading *The Dream of the Celt* by Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa (Faber and Faber) is an epigraph from the writing of the Uruguayan author José Enrique Rodó: "Each of us is, successively, not one but many. And these successive personalities that emerge from the other tend to present the strangest, most astonishing contrasts among themselves." These words are the key to the novel which tells the story of Roger Casement, still a controversial figure in the story of Irish nationalism.

The story begins and ends with Roger Casement in London's Pentonville Prison, awaiting execution, with flashbacks to the years when he was a British consul in the Congo and in Peru. His observations

and subsequent reports on the abuses of human rights in these territories made him much lauded in Britain and he was knighted in 1911. At the same time he grew to despise colonialism and to turn against the British, who epitomised all he loathed. The description of an expedition in the 1880s with the explorer Henry Morton Stanley (famed for his "Dr Livingstone, I presume") leaves a very nasty taste.

The result of seeing paternalistic colonialism at its worst was that Roger Casement espoused the cause of Irish nationalism, even going to Germany in the early months of World War I to seek the help of the Kaiser in obtaining arms for the Irish to use against the English. When he returned to Ireland he was arrested and returned to England, stripped of his title, tried and found to be a traitor, imprisoned and hanged. His fall from grace was compounded by the release of the so-called 'Black Diaries' enumerating his homosexual activities. The author considers that if they were indeed the writings of Casement they were more likely to be imaginings rather than factual accounts, but they blemished his name forever.

This is not an easy novel to read. At times it reads more like a biography or a history, and the didactic tone can be overwhelming, but as an account of the complexities of a life it is worthy of perseverance. The Epilogue gives a factual account of the years after Roger Casement's death when he was largely forgotten and the requests of his family that his body be repatriated for Christian burial in Ireland were ignored. In 1965 the British government finally



gave permission for his remains to be returned to Ireland. The tribute over his coffin at Dublin's Glasnevin Cemetery was given by Eamon de Valera, first president of Ireland, and the last surviving leader of the 1916 Easter Rising.

Joseph Anton

Even more complicated and controversial is Salman Rushdie, whose fascinating memoir *Joseph Anton* (Jonathan Cape) tells of the years from February 1998 after a *fatwa* — a sentence of death — was issued against him by Iran's spiritual leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, following the publication of his fourth novel, *The Satanic Verses*.

The title comes from the name he used in his decade of hiding and living with police protection, Joseph for Joseph Conrad, Anton for Anton Chekov. It was not his idea to change his name, but as it identified him as a man all Muslims had been told had to be executed, his protection team insisted on it. He was told he should not have an Asian name, so as well as giving up his identity he gave up his race, to become 'an invisible man'. He writes of himself "he was an effigy, an absence, something less than human." Banned from some airlines and hotels, unable to move freely in public, constantly edgy, the protection surrounding him made him feel as though he were in jail.

It is interesting that Salman Rushdie has in a way chosen to distance himself from his narrative by referring to himself always in the third person: 'I' never appears, 'he' is the one who feels and thinks and speaks and writes. The memoir, introduced by the *fatwa*, weaves in Rushdie's childhood in India, his intense feelings of being an outsider when his parents sent him to be educated in England, his four failed marriages, his inability to forget or forgive perceived slights and

criticisms. It is a rare insight into an extraordinary life.

Now — a leap backwards. I first read Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* 50 years ago. The last few pages were, literally, stunning. Since then I have always felt that the novel had the most perfect ending, unbearably bleak.

A Farewell to Arms

In an interview with *The Paris Review* in 1958 Hemingway said that he had written the end of *A Farewell to Arms* 39 times before he was satisfied. The problem, he explained, was 'getting the words right.' Until recently the published ending with the perfect sentences was the only one most of us knew. Then this year the novel was reissued by Scribner (now a division of Simon and Schuster), the

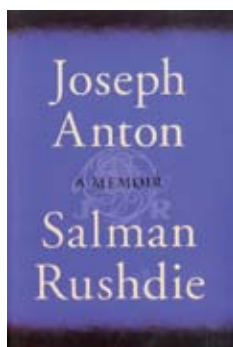
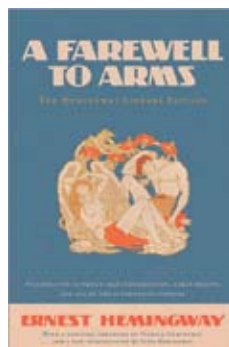
house which published it originally in 1929 with an appendix of not 39 endings, but 47!

The original manuscript, with all its versions of the ending, plus 14 passages of early drafts of sections which were either re-worked or cut out entirely, and a list of

44 possible titles, is preserved in the Ernest Hemingway Collection

in the John F Kennedy Presidential Library in Boston. The author's only surviving son, Patrick, now 84, has provided the foreword, and his grandson, Sean, son of Patrick's brother, Gregory, the introduction, with insights into his role as editor of this beautifully produced volume.

The creative process which results in a published work is mysterious, and, in these days of computers, largely hidden. Authors can re-write constantly, add and subtract words, re-arrange the order of the narrative, and at the end of it there is not a trace of what was changed or discarded or what might have been. The end of *A Farewell to Arms* is presented as though there could have been no other. The publication of all the other possible endings shows the almost palpable anguish Hemingway went through in his commitment to 'getting the word right'. Debating whether or not he did, whether he should have gone with the hopelessness of the 'nada' (nothing) ending, or the philosophical 'religious' ending or the ending suggested by Scott Fitzgerald, or the ending in which the baby lives, could keep lovers of Hemingway occupied for hours. ■



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Crosscurrents

Jim Elliston

about the synod

The reason for the October Synod was to examine how the Church is responding to the call to follow Him whose birth we now celebrate. The Church has no other purpose. The 'New Evangelization' (NE) is directed at three groups: those who do not know God or Christ, those who are growing in faith in the Church, and those who have distanced themselves from the Church (Proposition 7). Roughly 260 bishops (with two from NZ), many lay people, including about 40 women, as well as a number of prominent members from other Christian religions participated. Benedict departed from tradition and authorised publication of the Synod's 58 'propositions' (recommendations). Details can be found on the Vatican website under 'Synod of Bishops'.

My impressions from a quick scan of the formal addresses are that many were run-of-the-mill and a few seemed out of touch. But I think the main thrust is summed up in the following excerpts.

the problem

Prof. Yong Suk Francis Xavier OH, General Secretary of the Catholic Lay Apostolate Council of Korea: "The Korean Church is known as a dynamic one ... but nearly 60% of newly baptized Korean Catholics drift away from the Church within 3 years. It is like filling a bottomless vessel. It is very clear why the NE requires 'being evangelized' before evangelizing."

Sister Mary Lou Wirtz, President of the International Union of Superiors General: "Today there are people of our Catholic faith and tradition who are hurting. Some have already left our institutional church because they cannot find a place to belong; others remain within the church but are struggling and searching for something that nourishes their

soul. Families and individuals long to dialogue about their concerns in an atmosphere where they can share without judgment what is burdening their hearts. Pope John XXIII said that the church was to become more pastoral and merciful. Yet today some, who when they turn to the church in the midst of their pain, are alienated by judgmental attitudes or issues of power and control. This only pushes them further away. Can we allow ourselves to enter into the pain of our people?"

Archbishop Salvatore Fisichella, President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of NE: "Perhaps our communities ... appear tired, repetitive of obsolete formulas that do not communicate the joy of encountering Christ, uncertain of the path to follow. We are wrapped up in ourselves ... having so greatly bureaucratized the life of faith and the sacraments."

aspects of the Solution

Filipino Archbishop Villegas: "The Gospel cannot thrive in pride...The task of NE must begin with a deep sense of awe and reverence for humanity and her culture. Evangelization has been hurt and continues to be impeded by the arrogance of its messengers. The hierarchy must shun arrogance, hypocrisy and bigotry. We must punish the errant among us [the hierarchy] instead of covering up our own mistakes. We are humans among our human flock... This humility will make us more credible new evangelizers. Our mission is to propose humbly not to impose proudly. Secondly, the NE must be done by new saints and we must be those saints... Our experience in the third world tells me that the Gospel can be preached to empty stomachs but only if the stomach of the preacher is as empty as his parishioners'...The NE needs a new humility; a renewal in holiness

and a new face of charity for it to be credible and fruitful."

Filipino Cardinal Tagle: "The Church is called to follow Jesus' respect for every human person. He defended the dignity of all people, in particular those neglected and despised by the world. Loving his enemies, he affirmed their dignity. The Church must discover the power of silence. Confronted with the sorrows, doubts and uncertainties of people she cannot pretend to give easy solutions. In Jesus, silence becomes the way of attentive listening, compassion and prayer. It is the way to truth."

The seemingly indifferent and aimless societies of our time are earnestly looking for God. The Church's humility, respectfulness and silence might reveal more clearly the face of God in Jesus. The world takes delight in a simple witness to Jesus — meek and humble of heart."

Ms Rita María Petrirena Hernández, Director of Pastoral Affairs Commission, Cuba: "For many years the Cuban Church has, through her pastoral plans, underlined her vocation to be a praying Church that is missionary with its roots in the people. Thus it developed openness, encouraged dialogue and participation, forgiveness and service."

thoughts for christmas

Archbishop Oscar Romero: I have learned "the beautiful but harsh truth that our Christian faith does not separate us from the world, but it immerses us in it."

Archbishop Rowan Williams at the recent Synod: "To be converted to the faith does not mean simply acquiring a new set of beliefs, but becoming a new person, a person in communion with God and others through Jesus Christ." ■

where do we see god?

Peter Norris

Sometimes it is hard to 'be religious.' I have been thinking about this column for some time but good ideas often come to nothing. I was thinking about getting good ideas, but then not following through.

A few months ago I was sponsor at a confirmation in another diocese. I was humbled by the lovely young woman who asked me to be with her. It was the first time I had been on 'the other side' for a ceremony such as this. The celebrant was wonderful, the kids were great, and the ceremony was good. I was surprised at the crowd control request to be there an hour beforehand. The celebrant just laughed that it would be the longest I had been in church for any ceremony for a while. He was right but I noticed that most of the natives did not obey the rules.

I also thought about writing about some of the problems students have with stress. I worry about it but do not think writing here will make it any better. Most people are not aware of what some students go through if they are trying to

achieve. We try to make certain the students can work, have a little fun, and also stay as sane as possible. We are shaped by our environment but there is a lot of discussion on what makes a good environment. Some people want more parental involvement but others, and sometimes I am with them, see parental over-involvement as a problem.

Most recently I was talking to a young mum whose son is being picked on at school. Since the school was not doing anything I suggested writing to ERO about it. This is very hierarchical advice. While she may do this she thought that beating the offending child up may be better both for her son and the offender. While she was probably right, the legal implications are more fraught. She thought that since she was the same size as the offender, it would be OK.

Where is religion in all this. For confirmation, just because it was in a church does not mean it was full of religion but when I saw the life of God reflected in my little friend I could not doubt that God was present. When I

look at the students suffering from various stress problems I am always impressed with the number of kind friends who are always affirming and certainly show the love of God. When I see the lovely young man who is being bullied at school and I see the care exhibited by his mother and I see the great friends he has I feel more sorry for the offender who probably has not got that love expressed to him.

Religion is a loose term but it really embraces all life. My current task is to see God and God's love wherever. When preparing a homily a few weeks ago I was struck by a passage that said God is present everywhere but we can see God more easily in a church than in a pub. Our task is to see him in the harder places and that is why we pray. God is present in a confirmation ceremony, in our stressed students, and even in a school classroom where bullying is the norm. ■

Father Peter Norris is the Master of St Margaret's College, University of Otago.

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a Mother's Journal

by Kaaren Mathias

A voice calling, clear the way through the wilderness for the Lord!

Make a straight highway through the wasteland for our God

Every valley shall be filled in

Every mountain and hill made low

The crooked roads, made straight

The rough roads, made smooth

And all people will see God's salvation!

— Luke 3:4,5

A year ago, my friend Janet Legro preached on these paradoxical words spoken by John the Baptist, and they've been marinating ever since. In our corner of North India the idea of the leveling of mountains and hills seems preposterous, and promising that pot-holed winding roads will be made into wide straight highways unfathomable. I have, in fact, felt quite troubled with this passage, at the idea of mountains, that I love so much, being flattened. But Janet opened wide a window on these words, as we huddled under shawls and jumpers in the gloomy, staid St Paul's church in Mussoorie last December. She suggested that this is a message about the liberating power brought by the arrival of Jesus. That it is a passage about the ample gift of the Gospel.

Last week Jeph and I went cycling,

riding a 120 km circuit right down into the valley 1200 metres vertically below us, and back up the other side. Joyous in the autumn sun, we traversed high above the valley, past red chillie flags drying on patios, and large, green pumpkins squatting on slate roofs. The magic of it though was the new, smooth tarmac. We could cycle nearly twice as fast as on the old, pot-holed track. The downhill were a swooping, wing-tilted, wind-blurred flight.

The traditional theologies of Old and New Testaments, and Judgment day, heaven or hell, are all somewhat blurry to me. I can't quite imagine God cunningly designing a contorted and treacherous trail, the only way for seekers to find the elusive Holy One. Neither can I imagine God sprawled largely on a beach chair, shouting through a loud-speaker, 'Here I am! Come and find me!' to all us lost thronging souls. We do have to get up on our feet, and start walking toward God. We do need to turn our faces toward the Light.

John the Baptist was heralding

the shift from the Old Testament's narrow and almost impossible route to God, exclusively accessible to 'the chosen' people, to a new model. Somehow Jesus would be part of this new route. It was to become a path to God that is a generous and wide trail, smooth and straight, that everyone can walk on.


God invites me on the journey, and does some track work to make it easy to find my way, and keep going. God clears away obstacles, takes out tight corners and even smooths the biggest descents and ascents. It's like finally levelling and cementing the long farm driveway that for years was rutted and bumpy, with a car-belly-catching middle ridge. Now even auto-rickshaw drivers feel OK to drive up to the front door.

Advent's welcome is so clear: "and all people will see God's salvation".


O Come, O Come Emmanuel. ■

Kaaren Mathias lives and works in community health and development in North India with her husband Jeph and four children.






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