

CHRISTIAN FOCUS

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Winter 2011



It is a time to hear again the familiar story of the birth of Jesus Christ. A time when we long for peace on earth and goodwill among all people.

But Christmas is more than simply the celebration of the birth of a baby. The story takes us beyond the glitter and the tinsel and the lights to something much deeper.

SUNDAY CHURCH SERVICES in ABINGDON

**RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF
FRIENDS, Abbey Centre
Audlett Drive, 10.15 am**

**ST HELEN'S PARISH
CHURCH, West St
Helen Street (Church of
England), 10.30 am
and 5.30 pm**

**ST EDMUND'S
CATHOLIC CHURCH,
Radley Road, 8 am, 9.30 am,
11.30 am and 7 pm**

**THE SALVATION ARMY,
West St Helen's Street, 10 am
(also 4 pm 2nd Sunday in the
month)**

**CHRIST CHURCH,
Northcourt Road (Church of
England), 9.30 am, 11.15 am
and 6.30 pm**

**CHRIST CHURCH ON
LONG FURLONG,
Long Furlong Primary
School, Boulter Drive
Church of England 10.00 am**

**PEACHCROFT CHRISTIAN
CENTRE, Lindsay Drive 10 am**



Trinity Church

**ST MICHAEL AND ALL
ANGELS, Park Road (Church
of England), 9.30 am**

**ABINGDON BAPTIST
CHURCH, Ock Street,
10.30 am and 6.30 pm**

**ALL SAINTS METHODIST
CHURCH, Appleford Drive,
10.30 am and 6.30 pm**

**TRINITY CHURCH,
Conduit Road (Methodist
and United Reformed),
10.30 am and 6.30 pm**

**ABINGDON COMMUNITY
CHURCH, Thameside
School, Cotman Close,
Abingdon, 10.30 am**

**ST NICOLAS CHURCH
Market Place (Church of
England), 11 am**

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In a recent national survey, 64% of the 500 parents questioned said their child did not attend daily acts of collective worship at school.

Anxious about inclusivity in an increasingly secular and multi-racial society, many schools are opting to talk about social and humanist themes. The result is generations of children who know of Jesus only as the baby in the stable. This article is about one practical way in which we can help schools address this issue.

OPEN THE BOOK began in Bedford in 1999, when a group of Christians started presenting Bible stories in school assemblies. They were so well received that they were asked to return - again and again. Soon the word reached other schools and other areas, and Open the Book began to grow from a local initiative into a much bigger national enterprise.

Since Open the Book became a national organisation in 2007 it has continued to grow at an encouraging rate. 5,408 volunteers are now going into 1,065 schools.

OPEN THE BOOK offers primary school children an opportunity to hear the major stories of the Bible in an interactive and enjoyable way during assembly times. Teams of volunteer storytellers from local churches use drama, mime, props, costume to present Bible stories in ways that are lively, engaging, informative ... and great fun for everyone involved!

At 10-15 minutes long, each story can be incorporated into a wider school assembly, or stand alone. Volunteers use stories taken from *The Lion Storyteller Bible*, written by Bob Hartman, alongside resources from Open the Book's website.

The assembly "topping and tailing" is strictly scripted, to help introduce faith issues to young minds, and volunteers are expected to agree to a "Code of Conduct" which reminds them of their responsibilities as educators. Open The Book fulfils both OFSTED and SIAS (Church School Inspection) requirements for Collective Worship, and has been successfully used in a multi-faith context - it is a mark of Open The Book's popularity that most schools go on, to participate on a weekly basis.

*Christian Focus
wishes all readers a
Happy Christmas
and a
Peaceful New Year*



The History of Christmas Carols

CAROLS were first sung in Europe thousands of years ago, but these were not Christmas Carols. They were pagan songs, sung at the Winter Solstice celebrations as people danced round stone circles. The Winter Solstice is the shortest day of the year, usually taking place around the 22nd December. The word Carol actually means dance or a song of praise and joy! Carols used to be written and sung during all four seasons, but only the tradition of singing them at Christmas has really survived!

Not Understood

Early Christians took over the pagan solstice celebrations for Christmas and gave people Christian songs to sing instead of pagan ones. In AD 129, a Roman bishop said that a song called 'Angel's Hymn' should be sung at a Christmas service in Rome. Another famous early Christmas hymn was written, in about 760AD, by Comas of Jerusalem for the Greek Orthodox Church. Soon after this many composers all over Europe started to write carols. However, not many people liked them as the normal people couldn't understand.

By the time of the Middle Ages (the 1200s), most people had lost interest in celebrating Christmas altogether.

This was changed by St. Francis of Assisi when, in 1223, he started his Nativity Plays in Italy. The people in the plays sang songs or 'canticles' that told the story during the plays. Sometimes, the choruses of these new carols were in Latin; but normally they were they were all written and sung in Latin, a language that the people watching the play could understand and join in! The new carols spread to France, Spain, Germany and other European countries.

The earliest carol, like this, was written in 1410. Sadly only a very small fragment of it still exists. The carol was about Mary and Jesus meeting different people in Bethlehem. Most Carols are untrue stories, very loosely based on this time and the Elizabethan period Christmas story, about the holy family and were seen as entertaining rather than religious songs.

They were usually sung in homes rather than in churches! Traveling singers or Minstrels started singing these carols and the words were changed for the local people wherever they were travelling. One carol that changed like this is 'I Saw Three Ships'.

When Oliver Cromwell and the Puritans came to power in England in 1647, the celebration of Christmas and singing carols was stopped.

However, the carols survived as people still sang them in secret. Carols remained mainly unsung until Victorian times, when two men called William Sandys and Davis Gilbert collected lots of old Christmas music from villages in England.

Before carol singing in public became popular, there were sometimes official carol singers called 'Waits'. These were bands of people led by important local leaders (such as council leaders) who had the only power in the towns and villages to take money from the public (If others did this, they were sometimes charged as beggars!). They were called 'Waits' because they only sang on Christmas Eve (This was sometimes known as 'watchnight' or 'waitnight' because of the shepherds were watching their sheep when the angels appeared to them.), when the Christmas celebrations began.

Also, at this time, many orchestras and choirs were being set up in the cities of England and people wanted Christmas songs to sing, so carols once again became popular. Many new carols, such as 'Good King Wenceslas', were also written. New carol services were created and became popular, as did the custom of singing carols in the streets. Both of these customs are still popular today! One of the most popular types of Carol service is Carols by Candlelight. At this service, the church is only lit by candlelight and it feels very Christmassy! Carols by Candlelight services are held in countries all over the world.

Perhaps the most famous carol service, is the service of Nine Lessons and Carols from King's College in Cambridge, UK. This service takes place on Christmas Eve and is broadcast live on BBC Radio (and all over the world). In my house, we listen to it and it means Christmas has really started!!

The Service was first performed in 1918 as a way of the college celebrating the end of the First World War. It is always started with a single choirboy singing a solo of the first verse of the Carol 'Once in Royal David's City'. A service of Nine Lessons and Carols, has nine bible readings (or lessons!) that tell the Christmas story with one or two carols between each lesson. Sometimes you get carol services which are a combination of nine lessons and carols and carols by candlelight! So you have nine lessons and carols by candlelight!

Answers to Bible Cake

Four and a half cups of Kings IV, 22 (fine flour)
 Half pound of Judges V, 25 (butter)
 Two cups of Jeremiah VI, 20 (sugar)
 Two cups of Nahum III, 12 (figs)
 Two cups of Samuel XXX, 12 (raisins)
 Two cups of Numbers XVI, 8 (almonds)
 Two teaspoons of Amos IV, 5 (leaven, baking powder permissible)
 To taste, II Chronicles IX, 9 (spice)
 Six of Jeremiah XVII, 11 (eggs)
 One and a half cups of Judges IV, 19 (milk)
 A pinch of Leviticus II, 13 (salt)
 Proverbs XXXIII, 14 (beat)
 Substitute the fruit of, Numbers XXXIII, 9 (dates) for the Nahum ingredient

'Feed My Sheep'

Oxford's Community Soup Kitchen

MRS ICOLYN SMITH, a diminutive lady from Jamaica, was walking along the Cowley Road in Oxford 21 years ago when she saw a man foraging in one of the rubbish bins. She was upset to see this and suddenly she was surrounded by light and the words 'Feed my sheep' came in to her mind. That was start of the Oxford Soup Kitchen. Mrs Smith wanted to do something for people like this man and decided to open a Soup Kitchen. Wednesday seemed a good day and a church in Manzil Way, now an Asian Cultural Centre, seemed a suitable location. She contacted the administrator and requested Wednesday morning.

No way! Wednesday was not available as a women's group met then. That afternoon she had a phone call to say the group no longer required the room! She applied to the City Council but did not receive support from them until two years later.



Mrs Smith who, in 1998, received an MBE from Prince Charles. This octogenarian is one of life's special people.

And so she went on seeking help in various ways - God was helping her. The first day she opened there were nine people, the next week 100 - and she fed them!

On a Wednesday morning Mrs Smith is in the kitchen by 7.30 am having started the meat cooking the night before at home. A team of volunteers from the Jesus Army church in Oxford, peel all the potatoes for the day and deliver them to the centre ready to be par-boiled. There are always two choices e.g. chicken and pork, or shepherds pie and beef, or meat balls and chicken.

The accompaniments vary as a lot depends on what the Food Bank deliver. They collect the food near its sell-by date, from various supermarkets and we never know what goodies they will bring. There may be bread, cakes rolls, or raspberries, bananas and apples, or mushrooms, tomatoes, beans, or only a few of each or only one or two items. Whatever, Gary, Mrs Smith's son, a trained chef, turns it into a gourmet dish.

Helpers come from various sources and give their time as they can, depending on other commitments. Mrs Smith doesn't always know who is coming but there are always enough to cope with the needs.

The soup is served at 12.00 but before that, 'Mrs Smith's people' start to arrive and can make themselves a mug of tea or coffee and have a biscuit while waiting. At 12.30 the main meal is brought up including the fantastic roast potatoes.

There is no charge for the meal but there is a jar for contributions, which vary from week to week. In order to finance the venture Mrs Smith does fund raising all year. At the Cowley Road Carnival and at the Florence Park Open Day she has a stall dispensing food.

Money comes also from donations and collections and from various sources. Any clothes given are put out for the taking and at Christmas each person gets a 'goodie' bag of food and clothes.

An average of about 45 people come to the centre each week, primarily men but always some women. Many of them call Mrs Smith, Sister Smith. She is a saviour to them. She is always supportive, positive, encouraging and ready to listen. She has seen recovery from drugs, from depression and from other problems. She has clients who have been coming for years and some who only come once. They know they are always welcomed and not judged.

Christian Focus thanks all who sent articles for the Winter publication but due to pressure of space some items, including articles received after the deadline have, unavoidably, been held over until the Spring edition.



What do you want for Christmas? *Think Big!*

BISHOP Stephen Cottrell has a wonderful story in his little book, *Do Nothing: Christmas is Coming: an Advent Calendar with a Difference* (2008, p. 14), about a government minister being interviewed for a feature on what public figures wanted for Christmas:

Not wanting to appear too grasping, he said that he rather liked those bottles of stem ginger that you see in the shops around this time of year. And so the article ran: 'We asked leading figures what they wanted for Christmas. The Archbishop of Canterbury said he wanted an end to the violence in Iraq. The Dalai Lama said he wanted peace in the Middle East. The Pope said he wanted an end to poverty. The Minister for Trade and Industry said he wanted a jar of stem ginger'.

What do YOU want for Christmas? World peace or a jar of stem ginger?

Before we laugh at the hapless minister for Trade and Industry, from a Christian point of view, actually, the modesty of his desires is praiseworthy. Part of discipleship in Advent *is* getting back to basics. In Advent we hear prophets like Jeremiah, Isaiah, Malachi and John the Baptist condemn prevailing social values and conspicuous consumption, and exhort us to cast off alien seductions and return to a simple, clean life before God.

The modesty of preferring a jar of stem ginger to a new Ferrari seems especially appropriate this Advent, when public discourse is dominated by the turmoil in international financial markets, the travails of indebted Euro-zone members, and mass protests in many major world cities against the financial status quo.

Whatever we may think of the methods and goals of those who have set themselves up to ‘Occupy LSX’ (Occupy the London Stock Exchange) and ‘Occupy Wall Street’, their witness represents a wake-up call for all of us.

Every day the news parades increasingly gruesome spectres of the break-up of the Euro, financial meltdown, ‘double-dip’ recession, loss of savings and pensions, and mass unemployment - worst-case scenarios that mirror the apocalyptic images in our Advent readings and hymns. Advent encourages us, in the midst of all this worldly uncertainty, to prepare for Christ’s coming by focusing on what is truly needful, and downsizing our appetites and desires is indeed one response.

But Advent also encourages us to ‘think big’. John the Baptist features in many of our scripture lessons in Advent, and, like those occupying world financial centres, John always encourages us to think BIG - he engages the big themes of redemption, justice, mercy and judgement, of radical personal transformation and radical social transformation. The motto of missionary William Carey, which we read in the Autumn issue of *Christian Focus*, also encourages us to think big - *Expect Great Things from God, attempt Great Things for God*.

Expect Great Things from God – how big are your hopes and expectations this Advent and Christmas? What do you *really* want for Christmas, if you could have anything you wanted? It’s probably not easy to fit under the tree. It could be good health, for yourself or someone you love. It could be more time and joy, less anxiety and stress, or losing a stone - or finding a job, a true friend, reconciliation, forgiveness, a deeper prayer life. What in your life seems completely intractable, hopeless of solution, in need of the kind of radical transformation preached by John the Baptist? That’s where to begin with our Christmas wish lists this year.

But how do we begin, *where* do we begin? Defeatist thoughts are sure to crowd in - she’ll never forgive me, I’ll never shake this weight, I’m too ashamed to admit what I did, my brother would hang up if I rang him now, I don’t know where to start, it’s hopeless - but Advent is the season for leaps of faith, the season to banish defeatism! John the Baptist can help us in this.

John, our guide in Advent, never took no for an answer. He encourages us to THINK BIG: these festering things in our lives, NOW is the time to wake up, wash ourselves clean, and make a change, so we can greet the Lord unashamed when he comes, as the Apostle Paul prays for the Philippians.

But John also teaches us that doing big things often starts by paying careful attention to the small things – the words we say, the bananas we buy, the five minutes each morning we give to prayer, the small acts of kindness we perform, our decisions for acting in a selfless rather than selfish way. Bringing about the world’s redemption by preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as John did, is pretty BIG – but he did it one baptism and one sinner at a time.

THINK BIG – but start small. What BIG, IMPOSSIBLE THING does your heart yearn for this Christmas? What small thing can you do to bring it closer? We may not be called to pitch our tent in front of St Paul’s—but God is asking each one of us this Advent to wake up, look at our lives, and ask our Lord what we can do to make ourselves ready for his Coming.

Almighty God, as your kingdom dawns, turn us from the darkness of sin to the light of holiness, that we may be ready to meet you in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

Revd Dr Jane Baun, Abingdon Team Ministry

DEADLINE FOR COPY FOR THE NEXT EDITION OF CHRISTIAN FOCUS IS FEBRUARY 1, 2011.

Copy or photographs should be sent to the editor, Ron Moss,

5 The Lodge, Bayworth Lane, Boars Hill, Oxford OX1 5DF.

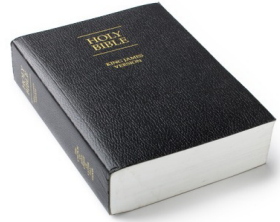
Telephone 01865 321537. E-mail address: ronmoss7@hotmail.com.

Copy should be sent by e-mail, as a Word document, on a CD, or printed.

Bible Alive!

21 – 24 September 2011

'Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path' - Psalm 119:105



How Long Did It Take?

Approximately 79 hours reading through the day and night. We started with the book of Genesis at 10 am on Wednesday 21 September and finished the book of Revelation just before 5pm on Saturday 24 September. We read the New International Version of the Bible.

Who Took Part?

Revd John Moore, the founding curate of the church 50 years ago, launched the reading. He was followed by teams made up of individuals, friends, families, life groups, youth and children from across all the Christ Church congregations and the wider church in Abingdon. We were joined by Nicola Blackwood MP, Andrew Proud, Bishop of Reading, Mike Badcock, the Mayor of Abingdon, BBC Radio Oxford and visitors from the local community. We estimate that over 350 people read and more than 50 helped to host the event. Our youngest reader was four years old and our youngest visitor six weeks!

What Did People Say?

'I did not realise how powerful reading the bible like this would be – there is an incredible power and energy. I could have read all night ... and listened all day.'

'A wonderful family experience we will cherish for a long time.'

'When I read it was like being 'in the zone' - the words just seemed to leap out.'

'Really excellent – so much effort had gone into the displays and set-up and it created a wonderful peaceful atmosphere.'

'A true place to find God.'

'... for the word of God is alive and active!' - Hebrews 4:12

Ruth Savage (Christ Church)

Questioning

Faith A layman's view of faith and evidence

Faith has been described as many things:

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see - Hebrews 11:1

Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase - Martin Luther King, Jr ^[1]

But, in recent times, there has been a perception taking hold that faith is independent of evidence. Professor Richard Dawkins goes as far to say:

"Faith means blind trust, in the absence of evidence, even in the teeth of evidence." ^[2]

This perception seems to be stemming from the popularised view of the "new atheists" (though this term is pretty old and recycled now) that faith is solely a religious word. Physicist Paul Davies (who's not a Christian) doesn't think so:

"Even the most atheistic scientist accepts as an act of faith that the universe is not absurd, that there is a rational basis to physical existence manifested as a law-like order in nature that is at least in part comprehensible to us. So science can proceed only if the scientist adopts an essentially theological world view." ^[3]

It's not just elements of faith that science and Christianity have in common. Many scientists have found the impression of design so over-whelming that they believe in a designer though some stop short of the God of the Bible. This was the case for Anthony Flew who, whilst he didn't become a Christian, certainly gave up his Atheism. ^[4]

Eminent cosmologist Fred Hoyle has concluded:

I do not believe that any scientist who examined the evidence would fail to draw the inference that the laws of nuclear physics have been deliberately designed with regard to the consequences they produce inside stars. If this is so, then my apparent random quirks have become part of a deep-laid scheme. If not, then we are back again at a monstrous sequence of accidents. ^[5] *Unlike science though, the Christian faith is dealing with a person not a theory but the principle of basing conclusions on evidence is the same. In this case it's a two part faith: 1) Jesus existed and rose from the dead and 2) he is trust worthy enough to put our faith in him and follow him.*

Despite the shrieking of the new atheists, Jesus' existence is accepted by virtually every ancient historian. Professor Graeme Clarke of the Australian National University has gone on record as saying: *“Frankly, I know of no ancient historian or biblical historian who would have a twinge of doubt about the existence of a Jesus Christ – the documentary evidence is simply overwhelming.”*^[6]

His resurrection is a bit of a different matter. Whilst many historians have concluded that he did rise from the dead, many will only go as far to say: “Something happened but I really don't know what.” Either way, the resurrection is something that is taken seriously by all historians studying the period. The evidence for his resurrection falls into five main categories:

- Jesus was crucified
- The disciples sincerely believed they'd seen the risen Jesus
- The conversion of Paul
- The conversion of James
- The empty tomb

All these are attestable by historical evidence both inside and outside the Bible and are accepted by virtually every historian and scholar, even sceptical ones. ^[7]

So we can support the claims Jesus existed and rose from the dead with evidence, but what about that he is trustworthy enough to follow him? Personal experience is not historical evidence or

re-producible in a laboratory but doesn't mean it's worthless or indeed, not evidence. I don't know anyone who trusts someone without having experience of that person. Can a husband prove his wife's love for him? No, but he's willing to bet his life on it, because he knows his wife and on the strength of that experience/evidence can rationally conclude that she loves him and you'd believe him.

Beyond faith

A few Christians have said, too: "it can't be based on evidence otherwise it would be knowledge" Faith does go beyond the evidence but it can provide a base from which you can build on. Or as W. H. Griffith-Thomas put it:

"Faith commences with the conviction of the mind based on adequate evidence".^[8]

During my journey to Christ, the easy bit was the evidence on his existence and resurrection but I had to be happy in my own mind that these two statements were true. Without evidence of these, it's nothing more than blind faith, believing it because I want it to be true and I want nothing to do with that kind of faith. The hardest bit was believing that he was trustworthy. My past experiences of Christ had not been good but I am a different person to the one I was ten years ago.

In many ways, evidence is more vital for the Christian otherwise how do you determine the difference between God and the devil? The Christian faith is not a leap in the dark. It is rational and supported by evidence of many kinds. Evidence will only get you so far though, eventually you have to take a risk, take that first step as Martin Luther King Jr alluded to and keep taking them, working your way up the staircase.

As Jesus himself says:

For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened – Matthew 7:8

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MINI SERMON

There is something wondrous about Christmas. Not so wondrous for those of us who have pushed past the halfway mark of life. Yet, it is wondrous for kids, and somehow we can remember the wonder. That's probably why we go to so much trouble to make the event special for the children in our families. We overspend on food and presents, usually by a factor of three at least. Still, all the suggestions that we should

limit the presents to one main one and limit the food to what can be comfortably eat in an hour, are set aside in the search for a childhood memory - the wonder of it all.

The wonder is easily brought to mind. It can be an image, smell or sound. For me it is a sound, a sound I grew up with. As a child growing up, I always listened for the Salvation Army band that would play early on Christmas morning. Every Christmas the band moved around the district playing Christmas carols. It started as a distant sound wafting on the wind, and then ended up crisp and clear as the band assembled at the park near our home. This then was the sound of Christmas for me. In the midst of the frantic opening of presents there in the background was the sounds of a brass band playing Christmas carols.

As I remember the wonder of it all I think how devoted those blokes must have been to get out on a Christmas morning to play carols. While others were either at home sharing the wonder, or at church celebrating the wonder, there were these kind men blowing away for kids like me. Maybe that was their church, and when you think about it, what a great way to do church. There they were standing under the trees at the park on a Christmas morning celebrating the birth of Jesus. If all we ever did at Christmas was sing Christmas carols we would certainly not be the less for it. Most of the carols are powerful gospel proclamations. They do get a bit overdone and so their impact is easily lost. Yet, the message is there for us to take hold of if we are in any way searching for God.

"Of his love and mercy mild, This the Christmas Story: And, O that Mary's gentle Child, Might lead us up to glory!" Such wonder

COMING SOON! *to a Church near you*

January 20th to 25th **Week of Prayer for Christian Unity**

Lunch Time Prayers in St. Nicolas Church

January 20th Annual CiA Quiz

January 22nd United Service for Christian Unity

6.30pm in Trinity Church Preacher, Dr Anthony Mahoney from the Centre for Christian Studies in London. His special interest is Global Christian Studies, especially in the Middle East

February 26th Pulpit Exchange

February/March 2012 Lent Lectures in All Saints Church at 8pm

Canon David Winter on 'Facing the Darkness and Finding the Light'

For more details of all these events please see your own church Newsletters

A date for your diary:

Experience Easter, the series of interactive workshops for primary-school children, will return to Abingdon in 2012.

Scenes will be set on Wed 21st March, with schools visiting on Th 22nd & Fri 23rd.

Trinity will also be open for family visits on the Saturday morning and for groups, by arrangement, both evenings.

Further details from Trinity Learning, Tel:520282 or at TrinityLearning@gmail.com

Put the date in your diary, book a visit for your group, and look out for volunteer requests in January!

News of Old Friends

Colin & Carol Pattenden. Send greetings from wet and windy Yorkshire. They are feeling more settled now in their new surroundings at Westwood and are setting up new courses.

Steve & Anne Godfrey write from the New Life Baptist Church in Guildford where Steve has organised the refurbishment of the Queen Elizabeth Park Community Centre for which the NLBC has taken over responsibility. He was Inducted as Minister there on 29th October.



First World or Third World - What do you think?

MY motives for visiting South Africa in August 2011 on a “Traidcraft Meet the People Tour” to South Africa were mixed. I have wanted to visit the country for a long time to see how it has changed, and carried with me the lifetime baggage of the boycott of SA goods, the “Free Mandela” marches, the euphoria of seeing him freed, and the elections where all could vote. If I am honest, the fair trade element was secondary, but an opportunity to be more than just a tourist.

This was the first project we saw, and we learned that floods at harvest time had prevented access to their ripening grapes and not only had they lost all this year’s grapes, but many farmers had lost their vines as well. We asked how they spent their Fairtrade Premium and were told that this year it had all gone to restock the vines for the farmers who had lost everything.

Weinrand, who guided us round the project said simply: “Without Traidcraft I don’t know what we would have done.” Later in the day we visited the local school, which in the middle of winter had no heating, outdoor toilets and had a leaking roof. This is a mixed race community, many of whom suffered forced relocation during the years of apartheid. It is a remote part of the country and definitely not yet in the first world.

The other Traidcraft project we visited couldn't have been more different. In the Stellenbosch wine growing area near Capetown, is the Koopmanskloof vineyard which supplies them with their white wine. This firm is no longer owned by one white vintner, but by a family trust, and 44% of the shareholders are (black) workers on the estate. Asked the same question about the use of the Fairtrade Premium, the answer was on solar panels for our workers' houses and not only have we received free electricity, but we have received money in addition from the electricity company from the sale of the surplus power. Somehow we hadn't expected this degree of sophistication, but then what is Fairtrade about if not aiming at equality with the first world? This is what Traidcraft is calling in its current campaign: "From Fair to Flourishing" or indeed "Life in all its fullness".

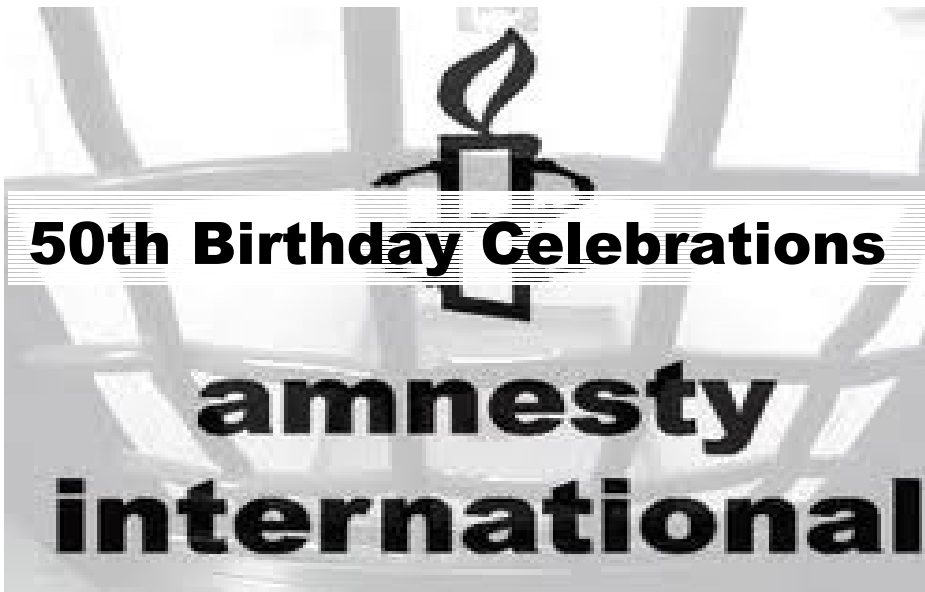
While we were there we also visited three other fair-trade projects: another vineyard, producing the Fairhill wine sold in the Co-op, a seed co-operative and one producing Redbush tea.



We saw two aids projects, made a township visit and had a number of tourist visits, including Table Mountain, the Cape of Good Hope, Sung Evensong in St George's cathedral, Robben Island and, for many of us, a highlight, the spring flowers in Namaqaland. We even managed to see giraffe, zebra and ostrich as well as a number of lesser known local fauna and flora.

It was also wonderful to see consigned to a museum signs saying "seats for whites only", and to meet the above couple, who could not openly have been enjoying the view together thirty years ago.

Ruth Sillitoe



'Yet if these feelings of disgust all over the world could be united into common action, something effective could be done.' - Peter Benenson

'It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.' - Chinese proverb.

In May 1961 a British lawyer and Roman Catholic, Peter Benenson was outraged by a news report on two Portuguese students imprisoned simply for raising their glasses in a toast to freedom. Benenson wrote an article called *The Forgotten Prisoners* which was first published in *The Observer* on 28th May (Trinity Sunday) 1961 and reproduced around the world.

In it Benenson highlighted cases like that of the Portuguese students, coining the phrase 'prisoner of conscience'. He called for like-minded people to unite in an 'appeal for amnesty' on their behalf - and readers responded to that call by writing hundreds of letters.

Global Movement

In 1962, the organisation which grew from that appeal was officially named Amnesty International. And since then, what began as a small band of volunteers based in London has grown to a global movement of 3 million supporters, members and activists with 18 national sections and 850 groups in over 27 countries.

Over the past 50 years individuals and local groups have written letters, signed petitions, demonstrated outside courtrooms and embassies, launched media campaigns and lobbied officials directly. Amnesty's remit has broadened to include, for example, work on refugees and human rights education but its central objective - to protect people when their rights are denied, and end discrimination, persecution and harassment - has remained constant.

For fifty years, Amnesty International has shone a light on human rights abuses that previously went unseen and unpunished and it will continue to do so.

Abingdon has its own small but determined local group which is keen to welcome new members. We meet at 8pm on the 2nd Tuesday of each month at the King's Head and Bell, 10 East St Helen's, Abingdon OX14 5EA (except in August).

You can follow Abingdon's Amnesty group on Twitter @abingdonamnesty, on Facebook Amnesty International Abingdon, and through our website: www.amnesty.org.uk/abingdon.

On Saturday 12th November we will be running a Greeting's Card Campaign stall in the Market Square. This is an annual event at which we ask people to send a card with a friendly greeting or message of solidarity to someone who is in danger or unjustly imprisoned.



HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED what in the world do leaping lords, French hens, swimming swans, and especially the partridge, that won't come out of the pear tree, have to do with Christmas?

From 1558 until 1829, Roman Catholics in England were not permitted to practise their faith openly.

Someone during that era wrote this carol as a catechism song for young Catholics. It has two levels of meaning; the surface meaning plus a hidden meaning known only to members of their church. Each element in the carol has a code word for a religious reality, which the children could remember.

The partridge in a pear tree was Jesus Christ,
Two turtledoves were the Old and New Testaments,
Three French hens stood for faith, hope and love.
The four calling birds were the four gospels of Matthew, Mark,
Luke & John.

The five golden rings recalled the Torah or Law, the first five books of the Old Testament.

The six geese a-laying stood for the six days of creation.

Seven swans a-swimming represented the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit; Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety and Fear of the Lord. The eight maids a-milking were the eight beatitudes. (Blessed are the poor in spirit etc. Matt 5:3-10) Nine ladies dancing were the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit; Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self Control. The ten lords a-leaping were the Ten Commandments. The eleven pipers piping stood for the eleven faithful disciples. The twelve drummers drumming symbolized the twelve points of belief in The Apostles Creed.

BIBLE CAKE

(as given by Amy Stewart Fraser in *In Memory Long*, 1977, p.70)

You might like to try this old recipe for the Book of Common Prayer date of Bible Sunday – the second Sunday in Advent (4 December this year). Authorized Version of the Bible, of course!



Ingredients

Four and a half cups of I Kings IV, 22	To taste, II Chronicles IX, 9
Half pound of Judges V, 25	Six of Jeremiah XVII, 11
Two cups of Jeremiah VI, 20	One and a half cupfuls of Judges IV, 19
Two cups of Nahum III, 12	A pinch of Leviticus II, 13
Two cups of I Samuel XXX, 12	
Two cups of Numbers XVII, 8	
Two teaspoonfuls of Amos IV, 5	

Directions:

Proverbs XXIII, 14
Bake for one and a half to two hours.

Comments

Make this as you would any fruit cake. I would be inclined to substitute the fruit of Numbers XXXIII, 9 for the Nahum ingredient.

Hilary Clare

CiA Bereavement Support Group

'A friendship group focused on grieving'



Aware that there are many people in the Abingdon community, struggling with bereavement, and that our churches have a patchy ministry to the bereaved*, the CiA Bereavement Support Group was established. This is the third year of running the course. It is a listening/befriending group, intended for anyone having problems coping with bereavement, however long ago the loss of the loved one might have been.

Although it is run by church members of the CiA, it is not aimed specifically at Christians. In fact, many of those invited to come to the CiA Bereavement Services by the funeral directors may have had the funeral for their loved ones at the Crematorium without a church service.

By promoting the Support Group at the CiA Bereavement Service, we hope to minister to the grieving, whatever their 'faith status' with practical suggestions with how to cope; as well as being a quiet witness to the Gospel of Christ, at a time when people are often enquiring and receptive.

We do not offer counseling, but we do offer a safe environment, to enable those who come to talk of their loss, to be heard and to offer comfort and support.

We also have a wider range of information available concerning particular circumstances of loss, and can suggest other agencies for specific needs, if this may be helpful.

Those involved with the group are all trained 'Listeners', with some members of Cruse, and the others with proven pastoral experience.

Our first meeting will be held on 17th November at 7.30 at Abingdon Baptist Church, 35 Ock Street, followed by another on 8th December.

At these meetings we will be dealing with strategies that may be useful in dealing with Christmas and the New Year for the bereaved. There will be two further meetings on 5th January and 19th January; all at the same venue and time.

It is a daunting prospect for the bereaved to come to meetings on their own, so if you have a friend who is battling with grief, please suggest they come, and then please bring them.

Tim Hewes, St. Helen's Church

If you would like to know more please contact:
Rev Tim Hewes, St. Helen's Church, Tel: 01865 735646
Jane Lane, Christchurch
Hazel Partridge, Abingdon Baptist Church

* 'Patchy', according to a survey of churches' pastoral care for the bereaved, carried out in 2008/9 by Colin Pattenden

Church in Abingdon Annual Celebration



This year's celebration was hosted by Christ Church, Abingdon, on 16th October. Keith Dunnett, the Associate Vicar, led the service which focused on 'community' looking at the work of the Town Chaplains and the Street Pastors. There was a full congregation from churches across the town, and a real sense of celebration.

Richard Bittlestone introduced the work of the Town Chaplains and the type of work they do. This was illustrated by a 'role play' and Q & A sessions between two chaplains, while Diane Livesley used the story of Jesus meeting the woman at the well (John 4 v4-26) to illustrate and reflect on the type of conversations and

needs that are met when the chaplains visit the businesses in the town. Four chaplains were then commissioned and two re-commissioned.

David Hancock (and baby!) gave a report on the Street Pastors scheme, saying that they have been well received by all sectors of Abingdon's Friday night community and two pastors gave their experiences and some stories to illustrate the work that happens during their 'shifts'.

The Street Pastors are supported by a group of Prayer Pastors who pray throughout the shift and also help in practical ways at the 'base'. Sue Robbins reflected on the call to 're-build the ancient ruins' from the passage Isaiah 61 v1-4 and how this has resounded for many who feel drawn to this ministry.

Three pastors were then commissioned. Andrea Saunders and Anne Myers gave an overview of the Friday Prayers for Abingdon Scheme which has just been re-launched as a CiA project and which they spoke of encouragingly as bringing many blessings. A prayer card has been produced for people to use in their own homes and these are available through CiA reps.

Keith illustrated the definition of 'mission' by describing a circle of people. The instinct is to face inwards, but this is not mission. They then turned so the circle looked outwards. However, Keith noted that true mission is with one half of the body rooted in God and the other reaching-out. This is the aim of these valuable community and of many of the other CiA projects.

After the service the congregation enjoyed tea and cake while perusing the many displays showcasing the projects supported by the CiA.

Altogether a very a happy event when congregations from the churches in Abingdon join to gather in praise, worship, celebration and thankfulness to God for all the blessings He bestows on our town through the churches praying and working together.

Anne Marie Lanham
Christ Church, Abingdon

Meeting the People of Peru

'An Unforgettable Experience'

Our Traidcraft Meet the People of Peru visit in August allowed us to visit the tourist attractions in Lima, Cusco, the Sacred Valley of the Incas, Machu Pichu and Lake Titicaca, as well as spending time with some of Traidcraft's partners. We felt that these local experiences gave us a much clearer view of the lives of



some of the poorest people, often in the high, cold, literally breathtakingly beautiful mountains. This made us very aware of how soft and easy our Western lives are, but also how our partners live together in harmonious communities where people work together using the available resources.

We saw both sides of part of the Minka project which has been a Traidcraft partner for over 20 years. Minka means “working together” in Quechua, the language in the Andes. It aims to promote sustainable development, strengthen cultural identity, preserve and improve the environment in which indigenous rural communities live practising traditional crafts and it works with 5,000 groups who live in scattered areas in the mountains. Each group has a President who is contacted by Skype and she passes on the information to her members. Presidents will occasionally be brought to the head office in Lima for further training. Minka has action plans which cover such areas as Product Development, Quality and Logistics, Education, Health (especially for women's groups), and democratic organisation. In the head office we learnt about quality control, packing, shipping and training. There we met Constantina who is the President of one of the groups who spoke to us about their work, translated by our wonderful guide, Efrain, while she constantly knitted alpaca wool.

This was on our first day and our first experience of the Peruvian enjoyment of their traditional music to which we danced in many places, starting with Constantina and the Minka staff who would let nobody sit alone. On our last day we again met (and danced with) Constantina and some of her fellow Presidents at their rendezvous in Juliaca, in the Altiplano, where they showed us how they cleaned and spun the Alpaca ready for knitting. There, as wherever we went, we were shown wonderful hospitality, with delicious Peruvian meals, followed by a show of some of their products which we bought.

Later Thomas, Victoria and Delphine showed us how they rub the skins from the coffee beans, grind them by hand, (not easy, I tried), and roast them over an open fire in the shack. This is not how the “Machu Pichu” coffee in our shops is normally processed. In Lima we were shown around Cocola’s modern processing plant where tons of coffee beans are ground, quality controlled, blended and shipped.

Our hardest night was spent at Cuyo Grande with a Community producing handicrafts for Minka. These people seemed to spend most of the time working outside, weaving, spinning and making ceramic objects. We found it extremely cold, despite our thermals and were amazed that the Andean people are mostly bare legged, wearing sandals made from old tyres.

After watching their spinning, weaving, and extraction of plant oil to make ointment, we had a go at making ceramic Ocarinas or water whistles as featured in the Traidcraft Catalogue. They fed us well on quinoa, vegetables and potatoes with Coca tea which we hoped was helping us adjust to the altitude. Finally we were dressed in some of their local costumes to dance with them round a camp fire before retiring to our separate dormitories. We slept in as many clothes as we could put on as it was very cold and we saw no heating or even chimneys anywhere.

In Cusco we visited a ceramics works where books from Sunderland University’s ceramics department which Traidcraft had sent with us were very gratefully received.

Here we watched how the pots were thrown and decorated for Alpa (Quechua word for earth), another Traidcraft partner.

Our lunch was a traditional Pachamanca meal, potatoes, corn, beans and some chicken which is buried underground with very hot stones on top for several hours. In Lima we visited the Alpa headquarters with a show room of wonderful artefacts which so far Traidcraft does not stock. We also visited a family silver workshop where the owner is passing on his skills to apprentices and we all bought some lovely jewellery which is sold to Traidcraft via Alpa..

The Tourist visits were spectacular. We had a luxurious ten hour train ride from Cusco to Puno on Lake Titicaca when we were wined and dined in great comfort with wonderful views of the Atiplano and the distant mountains. We were entertained by fashion shows and Peruvian musicians and dancers who, as usual insisted that we dance with them.

To be in Machu Pichu surrounded by enormous Andean peaks was awe inspiring. We saw many other Inca sites and learnt a lot about their history and what is still practised by their Andean descendants. We also learnt of the Spanish conquest and saw some of their colonial buildings. One church in Cusco had been built on the vandalised buildings of the Inca Sun Temple. When an earthquake destroyed the church the Inca walls remained standing.

We were told that the Inca descendants worship their ancestors, the mountain spirits and the earth as well as being practising Catholics. In a local house we saw the various altars including Christian and were amazed by the numerous guinea pigs running underfoot. Guinea Pig is a great Peruvian delicacy and we were relieved not to be offered it anywhere. We did eat Alpaca which was fine. In Cusco Cathedral there is a painting of the Last Supper where the meal is guinea pig and Judas has the features of the Conquistador, Francisco Pizarro.

All in all an unforgettable experience.

Sylvia and Martin Wilson All Saints



The People's Bible Comes to Abingdon

PEOPLE in Abingdon have been 'making their mark in history' by contributing to The People's Bible, a unique, hand-written digital edition of the Bible.

The People's Bible is an initiative of the Bible Society to mark the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible, and gave people the chance to write out part of the Bible by hand, two verses at a time, to produce a complete handwritten edition on paper and online.

It has been touring the country from Edinburgh in June to Westminster Abbey in November, where part of the paper version will be presented to the Queen at a service in to mark the anniversary.

At the end of October the People's Bible came to Abingdon town centre for a day. The stall was set up by the market place, with members of local churches on hand to help people to join in. It attracted a lot of interest right from the start, with the first person wanting to take part even before the computers were switched on.

People were asked to enter their details, including email address, and then the next two verses in sequence appeared on the screen. The verses allocated on the day were between Psalm 25 and Psalm 50 from the Good News Bible (the Kings James version had already been completed earlier in the tour).

Using a special digital pen, they copied out the two verses on paper. People could also add a comment or thought of their own. As they wrote the pen recorded an image of their handwriting which was immediately uploaded to the People's Bible website. Each participant received an email with a link to the website so they could see their verses, in their own handwriting, making up part of the People's Bible.

Throughout the day there was a constant stream of people keen to take part, with hardly a moment when the stall was quiet. By the end of the day 88 people has taken part, and 176 verses from the Psalms had been added to the People's Bible. It was a very successful day, and it was good to see the Bible being written and talked about on the street.

You can see the Bible at www.thepeoplesbible.org.

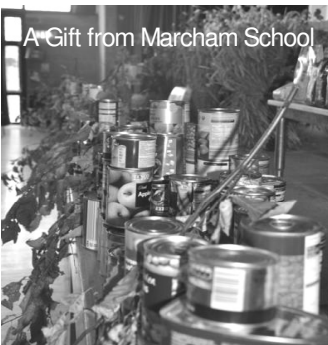
Geoff Pratt, a member of Abingdon Baptist Church



Abingdon Foodbank – Harvest Thanks



Earlier this year I was invited to attend several school Harvest Festivals. They were all great fun - full of joy and thanksgiving as we celebrated and reflected on God's faithful provision for all our needs. Sadly though, the all-too frequent images of famine and poverty brought to us by the media reminded us that much more has to be done to ensure that His provision is shared equitably amongst all people. More shocking, still, is the fact that even here in Abingdon there are families who are going hungry and struggling to provide food for their families. Perhaps that's why so many schools and churches decided to donate their harvest gifts to the Abingdon Foodbank this year.



The Foodbank seeks to show God's love for our local community by providing practical help in the form of food parcels for families or individuals going through periods of crisis. We work with a network of over 20 local front-line care organisations (health visitors, Citizens Advice Bureau, the Children's Centres, Housing Associations, Oxfordshire County

Council, The Foyer, The Abingdon Bridge, schools, Age UK and many more). Each of these groups holds vouchers for the Foodbank and whenever they see a client in need, they simply give the person a voucher to come and collect a nutritionally balanced parcel of food that is sufficient for 3 days.

The Foodbank was set up almost 2 ½ years ago and now regularly receives 5-6 referrals every week – so in the last 12 months that's been about 250 referrals, 550 people fed and nearly 7,000 items of food handed out.

We've already had more referrals this year than in the whole of last year and we're having many more large families referred, so the size of parcels is also increasing.

All the food is donated. This year we've been totally over-whelmed by the generosity and wonderful support given to the Foodbank at Harvest by local schools (Carswell Community Primary School, Long Furlong Primary School, Rush Common Primary School, St. Nicolas' School, St. Peter's Wootton School, Marcham Primary School, The School of St. Helen & St. Katharine, The Manor Prep School; by local churches St. Helen's Church, St. Nicolas' Church, Marcham Baptist Church, Abingdon Community Church, Abingdon Baptist Church, Christ Church); and by local community groups (Abingdon Kindergarten, Sovereign Vale Housing Association, PHAB Fellowship). In addition, several donations were left in the entrance hall at Christ Church but with no contact details, so we don't know who they were from!

A huge thank you to anyone who was involved in any of these donations.

So, the seasons roll on and we rapidly approach Christmas – a time to celebrate and reflect on God's great love for us shown in the gift of His son Jesus. Please pray that these simple gifts of food would speak to people of God's love, would help them understand that they are loved and valued by Him and that they would be drawn to Jesus, the only one who can truly meet their needs.

Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." (John 6:35)

If you would like to know more about the Abingdon Foodbank, please e-mail foodbank@cca.uk.net or contact me via the Christ Church office (01235 539172).

Jenny Corps, Christ Church

'The Book of Books - and the author being God'

George Bernard Shaw



The celebration of the 400th anniversary of the publication of the King James Bible is marked by two dimensions. First, there is the impressive stream of books and lectures on the original project, fascinating exhibitions of bibles and other documentary evidence, and appreciations of the King James Bible as a foundation of early modern English society and culture—an aspect appreciated by Christians and non-Christians alike.

There is, second, an interest in celebrating the Bible *in English* and, with that broader interest, the stream creative of new hymns, theatrical productions and live presentations to bring the Bible alive in our own day. And that is only in Britain. Imagine what might be reported of doings through-out the English-speaking world! When we consider the intentions and King James I in promoting the project and where it's reached four centuries later stark contrasts, even contradictions, surface.

King James found in his new kingdom of England a divided Church and sought (as his motto 'Blessed are the peace-makers') to unite it. The 'King James Bible' was a chief plank in that agenda. In the face of different Christians' preferences for different translations, James thought that one 'authorized version' would help to heal breaches an official ecclesiastical project was very much 'the Church's book'. Striking, then, to realize that it is the favoured version among, say, American free evangelicals who eschew both 'church and state' and indeed the very notion of the Bible as 'the Church's book' in favour of its status as the sole and infallible conduit of Truth.

The King James Bible was designed to go hand-in-hand with the Book of Common Prayer. It was a translation sensitive to the sonorities of public speaking and proclamation, and its language, far from being the everyday speech of Stuart England, was intentionally ‘lifted’ to a loftier, reverential place suitable for the dignity of the highly stylised worship preferred by James. Even the printed text of the KJB is ‘old-fashioned’ so as to lend a hieratic impression to those who gazed upon its pages. Remarkable, then, that the KJB maintains its privileged position among Christians and communities who reject formal liturgy and sacraments as a medium for encounter with God.

Among the translators of King James’s Bible were prominent intellectuals and scientists who brought to their task all the sophistication of Renaissance learning and speculations (Sir Henry Savile and Lancelot Andrewes are especially notable). Tragic, then, that the KJB is clutched by Bible fundamentalists and creationists who drive a sharp wedge between the ‘Book of Nature’ and the ‘Book of Scripture’.

I’ve highlighted the contrasts in the origins and later life of the KJB, and suggested an extraordinary shift in purpose and perspective over the centuries since 1611. But who knows, maybe it’s meant to be that way. After all (as King James’ translators put it), ‘The wind bloweth where it listeth’ (John 3.8)!

The Revd Dr Charles Miller, Team Rector of Abingdon

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The Birth of Jesus

Across

1. Angel who told Mary that she'd have a Son
3. "The holy one to be born will be called the ___"
5. Old Testament prophet who said a ruler over Israel would be born in Bethlehem.
6. Where Joseph and Mary went to register for census
7. "Glory to God in the ___"
8. Governor of Syria when census was taken
10. Occupation of Elizabeth's husband
15. Wise men from the east
16. The angel told Mary she had found ___ with God.
19. Town in which Mary was living before the birth
23. The king of Judea at the time of Christ's birth
24. Name of the Caesar who called for a census
25. What Mary and Joseph offered at the Temple
27. The Wise Men brought gold, incense and ___ to Jesus.
28. Elizabeth's husband

Down

2. An angel told Joseph to flee to this country to keep the Baby safe
3. Devout man who waited at the Temple to see the Christ
4. God warned the Wise Men in a ___ to take a different route home.
5. Where Mary laid Jesus after wrapping him in cloths
9. What led the Wise Men from the east to Jesus
11. They were tending flocks when an angel told them of Christ's birth
12. Number of days after his birth when Jesus was presented at the Temple
13. "He will be great...and he will reign over the house of ___ forever..."
14. Name of Elizabeth's baby
17. Name for Jesus that means, "God with us."
18. Jesus would be given the throne of this father
20. Mary's relative who was also expecting a child
21. Elizabeth was filled with the ___ when Mary visited her.
22. Name that was to be given to Mary's son
26. Prophetess at the Temple who gave thanks for the Child

