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# The Mustard Seed

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Armadale Uniting Church

Issue 31, Advent 2019

## From the Editors

We're not sure where 2019 has gone, but it's been a busy year and here at Armadale we're looking forward to working through, with God's help, the challenges we're facing. In the meantime, it's a pleasure to bring this Advent issue of *The Mustard Seed* to you.

Fiona's Greetings are on this page and Krystyna sets out memories of Polish Christmases. Karel and Bill have contributed poems.

Information on our services and activities during this time are set out on page 8, and there are photos and other pieces that we hope will be of interest.

– Bill and Graeme

## Greetings from Fiona

### Advent and Christmas 2019

And so Advent is upon us...

The time for preparation is here - and now. The time for getting ready is here - and now.

The time for watching and waiting and wondering – is here - and now...

Are we ready to get ready? Are we prepared to be prepared?

And I'm not talking about Christmas shopping!

Most of us make assumptions about our lives...the time we have...how healthy we are...where we're going to go...what we plan to do...when...how and with whom.

We make assumptions about the world, how things are and have been, and live as if things will always be the same. But even a cursory look at the world around us shows that we are living in tumultuous times and all the peace, stability and prosperity we have known - and take for granted – is not guaranteed into the future. Assumptions can be dangerous.

As one of the interruptive seasons in the Christian calendar, Advent breaks into our comfortable lives to challenge the assumptions we hold about who we are and where we're heading, about how the world is ordered, and who is really in control, about where our priorities should lie.

Because in Advent, the imminent coming of the long

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Greetings from Fiona (cont)

promised, longed for Saviour is announced. And His coming will change everything.

Are we ready? Are we prepared? We need to get ready. We need to be prepared for He will disrupt and overturn what is comfortable, complacent and closed. He will disrupt, overturn *us* and our assumptions.

Even in His birth, this little Child heralds a new way of looking at the world: the way of the surprising and the unexpected, the bewildering and the awe-inspiring, the humble and the humbling.

The astonishing stories of His birth, and of events surrounding His birth, confront us again to wonder – who is this Child? Who is He for this time and for my life? In His littleness and vulnerability in the manger, ultimately on a cross, Christ takes what we assume about life and how things are and demonstrates a whole new way of being, a whole new way of life, a whole new way *to* life.

May this Advent be, for you, a blessed time of preparation and readiness for the coming Christ Child. In your heart and in your life, may you truly prepare the way for His coming..

Maranatha! Come Lord Jesus come!

Fiona

### **Mioko Wood and Heather Cameron**

We have recently been saddened by the passing of Mioko on 2 November and Heather on 5 November 2019. We will remember each of them for their strong beliefs and deep commitment to Christian values. May they rest in peace.



# Memories of a Polish Christmas

**Krystna Thomas**



Photo of my mother with me, my grandmother and aunts (approx. 1942)

I have many fond memories of Christmas in Poland, where I lived until I was six years old. A Polish Christmas is known as *Wigilia*: the Christmas Eve supper. Traditionally the day is both a fast and a feast: fast means that one does not eat anything until after sunset. After the *Wigilia* supper the tradition is to go church for midnight *Pasterka*, (Mass of the Shepherds).

My memory of *Wigilia* 1945 is still vivid, maybe because this was my last Christmas in Poland. It was the most magical day. All the children were at the windows, looking for the first star to appear, which marked the time when the fast was over and the feast could begin. It was also the time when all the children could go in the room with the Christmas tree. I still remember what a wonderful, awesome sight it was. I was in awe of the magic of a candle-lit Christmas tree dripping with decorations. The decorations were handmade, made by the whole family over the weeks before Christmas, I still remember making the paper chains and the paper pompoms.

Traditionally presents were given on 6<sup>th</sup> of December, the Feast Day of Saint Nicholas. On this day we went to Church and the children received a present from Saint Nicholas, who was dressed in Santa-like clothes.

The days before Christmas Eve were the time for food preparation, which was done mainly by the women and children of the family. A must for Polish Christmas Eve was the *Barszcz* (Beetroot soup) with mushroom *uszka* (dumplings). For the Christmas Feast, traditionally there were 12 Vegetarian courses-

- Barszcz with Uszka
- Carp Fried, Baked or in Aspic
- Rice Stuffed Cabbage Rolls
- Mushroom and Cabbage Pierogi
- Cabbage with Split Peas
- Vegetable Salad
- Bigos (Sauerkraut Stew)
- Cheesecake
- Piernik (Polish Gingerbread)
- Makowiec (Poppy-Seed Cake)
- Challah (Plaited Jewish bread)
- Kompot (Stewed Fruit)



Barszcz with Uszka

Before sitting down at the table, the *Wigilia* begins with the breaking of the *Oplątek*, an unleavened wafer, like a communion wafer. The *Oplątek* symbolizes the unity of the family, love, forgiveness and reconciliation. It is also a time to remember those no longer with us.

Everyone is given an *Oplątek*, they break off a piece and eat it as a symbol of their unity with Christ (baby Jesus for the children), then they share a piece with each family member, expressing their love, blessings, and good wishes for the next year. I love this tradition which is still continued, and loved by all our family.

After the *Oplątek* sharing, we all would sit around a big table with a white tablecloth and according to tradition, pieces of hay were spread beneath the tablecloth; a reminder that Christ was born in a stable. An extra place was set for the stranger, for anyone who may come to the door, if more than one person came, they would be given food to take away.

After the Christmas Eve feast the family would sing *Kolendy* (carols), the favourites being *Ciha Noc* (Silent Night) and my mother's favourite: *Jezus Malusienki* (Tiny Baby Jesus), which she sang together with the women of the

family, a tradition which we still keep, and Bella the singer of the family also sings it solo in Polish.

We have continued many of the Christmas traditions which our parents brought from Poland, including making uszka before Christmas Eve. This tradition is much loved by all of us and especially by the children. This preparation time, is a time of working together and teaching the next generation learning these skills. It is a very special time in this busy age, as it brings all the generations together with laughter and fun. Special bonds are made and existing bonds reinforced. It is a time when stories are told and memories rekindled: memories of loved ones, and memories of Christmases gone by. The little ones have been amazingly adept at uszka making.



Opłatek

For our Australian Christmas Eve, we begin with breaking and sharing the Opłatek, then we have the traditional Polish Beetroot Barszcz with the mushroom uszka, this is then followed by Traditional Australian Christmas fare.

Jezus malusieńki  
leży wśród stajenki  
Płacze z zimna  
nie dała mu matula sukienki.  
Płacze z zimna  
nie dała mu matula sukienki.

Bo uboga była, rąbek z głowy zdjęła,  
w który Dziecię owinąwszy,  
siankiem Je okryła

Nie ma kolebeczki, ani poduszczki,  
We żłobie Mu położyła siana  
pod główeczki.

We żłobie Mu położyła siana  
pod główeczki

Baby Jesus  
Jesus, tiny baby,  
Laying in a stable,  
He is crying from the cold,  
his mother had no dress for him  
He is crying from the cold,  
his mother had no dress for him  
But she was poor,  
she wrapped him in her headscarf,  
and covered him with hay

He has no cradle, nor a pillow,  
In a manger she placed Him  
With soft hay beneath his little head.  
In the manger she placed soft hay  
beneath his head.



# Humility

© Karel Reus, October 2019

Humility is learned  
but never learned;  
it's not a marker  
of the membership of  
any tribe of cognoscenti  
neither is it a theory  
nor a principle.  
Humility just is...

Humility is not achieved;  
one cannot strive for it  
and claim honour  
because of it.

Humility is a gift  
granted to those  
who understand their place  
in the great scheme of things.

Humility is a boon;  
not to the truly humble  
but to fellow-travellers  
on the road to God-knows-where.

Humility is most of all  
a state of mind  
which understands  
the connectedness of things.

How shall we recognise the practice of humility?  
- Humble folk would rather act than talk.  
- Humble folk prefer to encourage rather than scold.  
- Humble folk accept what is, and hope for better.  
- Humble folk lead from behind.  
- Humble folk fear evil and are not corrupted.  
- Humble folk make, rather than destroy.  
- Humble folk are foundations for goodness and joy.  
- Humble folk understand and rejoice in restraint.  
- Humble folk prefer communication to spin.  
- Humble folk understand silence and value it.  
- Humble folk seek out stillness, but never at the expense of action  
in a good cause.

How will we become humble?  
It is the result neither of earnest effort,  
nor of pride.  
It is a gift granted to those  
who are open to it

God is not ashamed at the lowliness of human beings ... he loves the lost, the neglected,  
the unseemly, the excluded, the weak and broken.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

# Christmas Eve

Without a doubt  
it was as prophesied, silent and still,  
soldiers on furlough, the armoury stacked  
with swords in the sheath.

Round and about  
I kept the watch with Jacob on the wall  
and felt no wind. A great star hung above  
the hillside sheep.

As it turned out  
There was a noise. A distant infant's cry?  
'Herod perhaps' the sergeant told us in the mess,  
'moaning in his sleep'.

Bill R

\* \* \* \* \*

## TERTULLIAN - THE FATHER OF THEOLOGY

If he ever came to preach at Armadale you would probably never forget him. He was passionate, articulate, totally committed. He boldly taunted the might of the Roman Empire, courageously defended oppressed believers, and harshly reprimanded Christians whom he considered had compromised with the world.

Tertullian was born about 150 A.D. in North Africa, the son of a Roman army officer. He converted to Christianity at the age of 40 and used his rhetorical skills and intellect in the service of his new faith. One of his famous sayings was 'the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church' In later life he lost favour with the Church in Rome when he took up with the Montanists - a group not dissimilar to contemporary Pentecostals.

Tertullian was a pacesetter as the church expanded its teaching and influence in the Latin-speaking world. He was the first to use the terms Old Testament and New Testament and first to write down the word Trinity to describe God as 'One Substance in Three Persons' though the concept was accepted before this by earlier Christians.

Despite his great contribution to theology, he was not made a saint like many other Early Church Fathers e.g. Augustine, because of his fallout with Rome - and no doubt also because of his own fiery and uncompromising personality.

*(from Wikipedia and Christianity.com)*

For me it is the Virgin birth, the Incarnation, the Resurrection, which are the true laws of the flesh and the physical. Death, decay and destruction are the suspension of these laws. I am always astonished at the emphasis the Church puts on the body. It is not the soul she says will rise again, but the body glorified.

Flannery O'Connor

# *Around Armadale*



We had a combined service with Stonnington Community Uniting Church on 29 September, and heard Fiona and Greg Crowe engage in an interesting conversation (left).



Ian Savage preached on 25 August (right) and there's always good conversation at our monthly Men's Breakfasts (below).



Long ago, God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son.

Hebrews 1:1-2(a)



We're looking for a tenant for the office space, now that Uniting@Pahran have departed (left and below)



## Advent/Christmas/January services

**Watch – carefully! Welcome – gladly! Wait – patiently! Wonder – humbly!**

**Advent Sunday, 1 December 2019:** Holy Communion, 9.30 am (regular 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in the month service).

**Alternativity**, Saturday 7 December, 10 am till 12 noon – a fun session for everyone, but especially children, to prepare well for Christmas.

Services are then at 9.30 each Sunday as usual until Christmas, with dates to note as follows -

**Christmas Eve, Tuesday 24 December:** 7 pm, Carols for Christmas Eve (“*A night to wonder*”), followed by refreshments (suitable for children).

**Christmas Day, Wednesday 25 December:** 9.30 am at Armadale, with Holy Communion (“*Come and worship Christ the newborn King*”).

**Sunday 29 December 2019:** 10.15 am – combined service at Toorak Uniting Church. No service at Armadale on this day.

**Sunday 5 January 2020:** 9.30 am at Armadale, with Holy Communion (Rev Fiona Winn).

**Sunday 12 January 2020:** 9.30 am at Armadale (Rev Fiona Winn),

**Sunday 19 January 2020:** 9.30 am at Armadale (Rev Ross Carter).

**Sunday 26 January 2020:** 10.00 am combined service at Armadale Baptist Church. (Kooyong Rd). No service at Armadale on this day.

**Saturday 1 February 2020:** Church Council Retreat, 10 am - 3 pm, Wellspring, Ashburton.

**Sunday 2 February 2020:** 9.30 am at Armadale, Holy Communion and Covenant Service.

This year, instead of a Christmas Toy Collection for Pahran Mission, we will be collecting money for \$50 Telstra phone coupons. These to be used by the Emergency Relief Office in Chapel Street for allocation to needy clients. If you wish to contribute, please contact Bill Rush.



# ***Mental Health Day***

We enjoyed an evening of music, art and song on 10 October to mark World Mental Health Day. Hugh's trio (The Mysterious Fourth) entertained us and Ruth Deane produced a work of art before our very eyes while speaking about art and mental health. There were workshop activities to compose a song and do painting, and lots of food (thanks to Margo and Wendy).



## **A PRAYER WHEN YOU'RE TIRED OF WAITING**

We give thanks for the baby born in violence.

We give thanks for the miracle of Bethlehem.

We do not understand why the innocents must be slaughtered.

We know your kingdom comes in violence and travail.

Our time would be a good time for your kingdom to come because we have had enough of violence and travail.

So we wait with eager longing and enormous fear - because your promises do not coincide with our favourite injustices.

**But we are a people grown weary with waiting.**

We dwell in the midst of cynical people and we have settled for what we can control. We do know that you hold initiative for our lives and that your love planned our salvation before we saw the light of day.

**And so we wait for your coming in a vulnerable baby**

**in whom all things are made new.**

Walter Brueggemann

### **A SENIOR'S VERSION OF FACEBOOK**

For those of my generation who do not and cannot comprehend why Facebook exists: I am trying to make friends outside of Facebook while applying the same principles.

Therefore, every day I walk down the street and tell passers-by what I have eaten, how I feel at the moment, what I did the night before, what I will do later, and with whom. I send them pictures of my family, my dog and of me gardening, taking things apart in the garage, watering the lawn, standing in front of landmarks, driving around town, having lunch and doing what anybody and everybody does every day. I also listen to their conversations and give them the 'thumbs up' and tell them I 'like' them.

And it works just like Facebook. I already have 4 people following me: 2 police officers, a private investigator and a psychiatrist.

## Susanna Wesley on Prayer

In our last issue (in August), we mentioned Susanna's prayer. Here it is in full--

Help me, Lord, to remember that religion  
.....is not to be confined to the church, or closet,  
nor exercised only in prayer and meditation,  
but that everywhere I am in thy presence.  
So may my every word and action have a moral content.  
May all the happenings of my life prove useful to me.  
May all things instruct me and afford me an opportunity  
.....of exercising some virtue  
.....and daily learning and growing toward thy likeness.  
Amen. -

\* \* \* \* \*

## THE DANGER OF ADVENT

The particular danger that faces us as Christmas approaches is unlikely to be contempt for the sacred season, but that our familiarity with it may easily produce in us a kind of indifference. The true wonder and mystery may leave us unmoved; familiarity may easily blind us to the shining fact that lies at the heart of the season. We are all aware of the commercialisation of Christmas; we can hardly help being involved in the frantic business of buying and sending of gifts and cards. We shall without doubt enjoy the carols, the decorations, the feasting and jollification, the presents, the parties, the dancing and the general atmosphere of goodwill that almost magically permeates the days of Christmas. But we may not always see clearly that so much decoration and celebration has been heaped upon the festival that the historic fact upon which all the rejoicing is founded has been almost smothered out of existence.

What we are celebrating is the awe-inspiring humility of God, and no amount of familiarity with the trappings of Christmas should ever blind us to its quiet but explosive significance. For Christians believe that so great is God's love and concern for humanity that he himself became a man. Amid the sparkle and colour and music of the days celebration we must remember that God's insertion of himself into human history was achieved with an almost frightening quietness and humility. There was no advertisement, no publicity, no special privilege; the entry of God into the world was almost heartbreakingly humble.

At the time of this astonishing event only a handful of people knew what had happened. And as far as we know, no one spoke openly about it for thirty years. Even when the baby was grown to be a man, only a few recognised him for who he really was. Two or three years of teaching and preaching and healing people, and his work was finished. He was betrayed and murdered, deserted by all his friends. By normal human standards this is a tragic little tale of failure, the rather squalid story of a promising young man from a humble home, put to death by the envy and malice of the professional men of religion. All this happened in an obscure, occupied province of the vast Roman Empire.

It is fifteen hundred years ago that this apparently invincible empire utterly collapsed, and all that is left of it is ruins. Yet the little baby, born in such pitiful humility and cut down as a young man in his prime, commands the allegiance of millions all over the world. Although they have never seen him, he has become friend

That is why we should not try to escape a sense of awe, almost a sense of fright, at what God has done. We must never allow anything to blind us to the true significance of what happened at Bethlehem so long ago. Nothing can alter the fact that we live on a visited planet.

from The Dangers of Advent by J.B. Phillips.

# Some Irish Humour

David Fallick

Murphy dropped some buttered toast on the floor and it landed butter-side up. He looked down in astonishment for he knew it's a law of the nature of the universe that buttered toast always lands butter side down. He rushed to the presbytery to see Father Flanagan, told the priest that a miracle had occurred but wouldn't say what it was. Instead, he asked the priest to come back to the kitchen in his house and see it with his own eyes.

There he asked Father what he could see on the floor.

'Well' said the priest 'it's pretty obvious. Someone has dropped some buttered toast on the floor and then, for some reason, they flipped it over so that the butter is on top'.

'No Father! I dropped it, and it landed like that!'

'Oh My Lord' said Father Flanagan 'dropped toast never lands with the butter-side up. It's a mir ...'.

He stood speechless for a moment then continued 'It's not for me to say this is a miracle. I'll have to report this to the Bishop. He'll send some people round to interview you and take photographs and all that'.

A thorough investigation was conducted, not only by the archdiocese but by scientists sent over from the Vatican. No expense was spared. There was great excitement in the town as everyone knew that a miracle would bring in much needed tourist revenue.

Then after 8 weeks and with great fanfare, the Bishop announced the final ruling:  
'It is certain that some kind of extraordinary event took place in Murphy's kitchen - quite outside the natural laws of the universe. Yet the Holy See must be very cautious before declaring a miracle. All other explanations must be ruled out.

Unfortunately, in this case it has been declared No Miracle - because they think that Murphy may have buttered the toast on the wrong side'.

## **Armadale Uniting Church**

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Regular service times: 9.30 am each Sunday, Holy Communion on the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of the month.

Children's program: 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of the month, during term time.

Usually on the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday (where a month has 5 Sundays) we hold a combined service with other Uniting Churches in Stonnington, which are not always at Armadale. If the service is not at Armadale, no service at Armadale on that day. During January, the format of our services may vary.