
The Mustard Seed



Armadale Uniting Church

Issue 40, Advent 2022

Advent and Discernment

The season of Advent, with our preoccupation with buying gifts for family, friends and neighbours can often be experienced as a combination of rush, rush, and wait, wait, wait. The true meaning of the season is in danger of being lost in the chaos.

Yet this is a time of year to revive our awareness of the countless ways God has blessed us in the gifts of love we receive from family members, friends, members of the congregation and neighbours. By simply spending a few moments reflecting on the significance in our lives of each person for whom we are preparing a gift, we will grow in our appreciation of the gift that person is for us.

If we can see many of the season's traditional activities, not so much as obstacles to the spirituality of the season, but as opportunities to become aware again of what God has been doing and continues to do in our lives, then the bustle of Advent can be a time of lifting our souls to God.

Sometimes instead of rushing to decisions or actions, or assuming that we are ready to do so, we may need to step back, to engage in dialogue, prayer, Bible study and worship, in order that we may better discern where the Spirit is leading. And we can do this as a community. Each of us has gifts to be used for the edification, encouragement and consolation of the whole body. Thus it is important for all to be involved in the process of discerning God's future vision.

We at Armadale – like the broader Church – seem continually to be facing challenges, so the process of discernment is on-going. No one person can discern the will of God, but each of us can glimpse an understanding of what God desires and through open dialogue, critical reflection, genuine respect, mutual trust and active collaboration we can enable the wisdom and way of God to emerge.

May both this Advent season and period of discernment prove be a fruitful experience for us all as we grow in our appreciation of the gifts we discover in each other.

(This article is derived from a piece by Rev Gillian Crozier in the Advent 2012 issue of *The Mustard Seed*).

A Letter to the Archangel Gabriel

I don't know your precise job description
though I know that part of it is announcing good news.
Assaulted by daily horrors, we could surely do with more of it down here.
Was it you who started the old cliché *Look for the silver lining*,
which turned into song? So not your words then,
but when you did speak, the young girl was truly astonished.

Taking your advice, I find solace in clouds.
Today, the breeze attempts to herd them over azure pasture.
My head lifts upwards. Beyond the shadow of your wide-spread wings
lies the shimmering light of summer,
and the One who imagined us.

Bill Rush

From the Editors

As you can see, this is issue 40 of *The Mustard Seed*. Issue 1 appeared in July 2009, under the guidance and inspiration - including the "Mustard Seed" name - of Rev Dr Kylie Crabbe (as she now is). It is available on the AUC website, as are some of its predecessor newsletter publications and all subsequent issues of *The Mustard Seed*. Since 2009 we've had three issues each year. For a long time, *The Mustard Seed* was only produced in "hard copy" but of course now it's largely circulated electronically, although hard copies are always produced and are readily available.

In the first issue, the objective was stated to be to plant the seeds of, and to prompt, "reflection and conversation". Whether or not this objective has been achieved is for others to assess, but we've certainly covered a lot of ground in the intervening years. In particular, we've tried to cover the liturgical seasons as well as give an insight into the activities of some of the members of the Congregation. This has been in the context of physical changes to our buildings and of course members of the Congregation have come and gone.

With God's help and support of the Congregation, we hope to continue for a while yet!

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Archangel Gabriel, Hagia Sofia

INTO THE MESS

The Quiet Carpenter

Every third year, our lectionary turns its spotlight away from Mary and gives us the perspective of her would-be husband, a quiet unassuming descendant of the House of David. It is Joseph, a quiet carpenter who upends his good life for a dream.

If we are tempted to sideline Joseph as a minor character in the Christmas story, the Gospel of Matthew reminds us that Joseph's role in Jesus's arrival is pivotal. It is his willingness to lean into the impossible, to embrace the scandalous, to abandon his notions of holiness in favour of God's messy plan of salvation, that allows the miracle of Christmas to unfold. If Joseph refuses, the fulfillment of prophecy comes to a halt.

As Matthew tells the story, the God-fearing carpenter wakes up one morning to find his world shattered, His fiancée is pregnant, he knows for sure that he is not the father, and suddenly, he has no good options. If he calls attention to Mary's out-of-wedlock pregnancy, she might be stoned to death - as Levitical law proscribes. If he divorces her quietly, she'll be reduced to begging or prostitution to support herself and the child. On the other hand, if he marries her, her son will be Joseph's heir, instead of his own biological child. Moreover, Joseph will be tainted forever by her illicit pregnancy, *and* by her ridiculous (blasphemous?) claim that the baby's dad is somehow God. The fact is, Joseph didn't believe Mary's story until Gabriel told him to. Why would he? Why would anyone?

We make a grave mistake when we sanitise Joseph's consent. We distort his humanity when we assume that his acceptance of God's plan came easily, when we hold ourselves at arm's length from his humiliation and doubt. What Joseph's pain shows is not the shiny, anodyne thing I'd like to believe it is.

In choosing Joseph to be Jesus's earthly father, God led a 'righteous' man with an impeccable reputation straight into doubt, shame, scandal and controversy. It required him to become the talk of the town – and *not* in a good way. It required him to embrace a mess he had not created, To love a woman whose story he did not understand, to protect a baby he didn't father, to accept an heir who was not his son. In other words, God's messy plan of salvation required Joseph – a quiet, cautious, status quo sort of man– to choose precisely what he feared and dreaded most.

Interestingly, in the verses that immediately precede the gospel reading, Matthew gives us a genealogy of Jesus's ancestors. He mentions Abraham – the patriarch who abandoned his son Ishmael, and twice endangered his wife's safety in order to save his own skin. He mentions Jacob, the trickster usurper who humiliated his older brother. He mentions David, who slept with another man's wife and then ordered that man's murder to protect his own reputation. He mentions Tamar, who pretended to be a sex worker, and Rahab, who was one.

These are just a few representative examples. Notice anything? Anything like messiness? Scandal? Sin? How interesting that God, who could have chosen any genealogy for his Son, chose a long line of brokenness, imperfection, dishonour, and scandal.

There is much to ponder in the Nativity story – much to consider about the surprising ways of God who brings salvation into the world via a young woman whose story about her own sex life was not believed? Via a well-meaning man who had to let go of righteousness in order to follow God? Via a

Into the mess (cont)

cultural system obsessed with male honour and female purity? Via the flimsiness of dreams? Via a helpless, illegitimate baby?

No wonder that the angel Gabriel’s first words to Joseph were ‘Do not be afraid’. If we want to enter into God’s messy story, then perhaps these are the first words we need to hear too: Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid when God’s work in your life looks alarmingly different than you thought it would. Do not be afraid when God upends your cherished assumptions about righteousness. Do not be afraid when God asks you to stand alongside the scandalous, the defiled, the suspected, and the shamed. Do not be afraid when God asks you to love something or someone more than your own spotless reputation. Do not be afraid of the precarious, the fragile, the vulnerable, the impossible.

Do not be afraid of the mess. The mess is the place where God is born.

Debie Thomas

Journey with Jesus. December 2019

Reproduced with permission

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BLESS YOU!

It would be infinitely lonely to live in a world without blessing. The word blessing evokes a sense of warmth and protection; it suggests that no life is alone or unreachable. In the parched deserts of post-modernity, a blessing can be like the discovery of a fresh well. It would be lovely if we could rediscover our power to bless each other. I believe that each of us can bless. When a blessing is invoked, it changes the atmosphere. In the light and reverence of blessing, a person or situation becomes illuminated in a completely new way. Let us begin to learn how to bless each other. Whenever you give blessing, a blessing returns to enfold you.

A Blessing for You:

To come home to yourself

May all that is unforgiven in you,
be released.

May your fears yield
their deepest tranquillities.

May all that is unlived in you,
blossom into a future,
graced with love.

From Benedictus – A Book of Blessings John O’Donohue Bantam Press 2007

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Offerings

We’re grateful for the level of support that we receive through weekly offerings, but have you thought about the amount you contribute? If it hasn’t increased for a while, perhaps you might like to consider whether a small increase might be in order. Some of us use envelopes or make direct credits. Envelopes are available on the table as you enter the Church, and you can speak to any member of Council about making direct credits.

INDIA 2022

WITH ANN & ROBIN AHIN



Our trip to India proved to be a very enjoyable and enlightening experience. We arrived in Mumbai with a certain degree of trepidation that we would be put off by the poverty, dirt and that it was an unsafe place to travel. We found India to be a land of contrasts – magnificent architecture and slums and certainly poverty, the Indians generally polite and friendly.

The big cities like Mumbai and Delhi were devoid of sacred cows in the streets. There were wealthy suburbs as you would find elsewhere, though you often found slums adjacent to high rise apartment buildings.

Once you got away from the major cities – we visited Udaipur, Bundi, Pushkar, Jaipur, Ranthambhore National Park, Agra and Delhi before flying to Singapore, the cows, pigs and monkeys in the suburban areas became more evident.

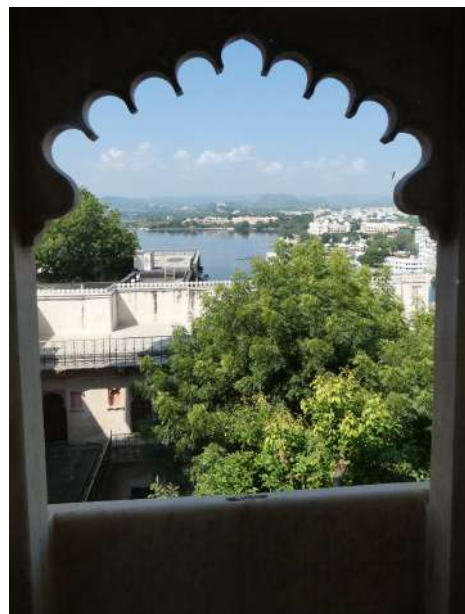
We were blown away by the beautiful architecture, not only of the Taj Mahal but in some of the other palaces we visited in places like Udaipur. The intricate relief carvings on walls and pillars are stunning, as are the scalloped archways and beautiful frescos and floors.

Rob wanted to see tigers in the wild, and luck was with us at Ranthambhore National Park, where we saw several animals like langur monkey, spotted and sambar deer. We came across a magnificent male Royal Bengal tiger padding down the track like he owned the place. We stayed with him for half an hour till he lay down and had a nap. That was definitely a highlight, as was the Taj Mahal, which is just beautiful. The symmetry and beauty of the structure is stunning.

All in all, we thoroughly enjoyed our time in India, augmented by our friendly, efficient tour guide who went out of his way to be helpful and informative. On our long drives we would have “storytime” when he



would tell us about the caste system or arranged marriages or anything else that we suggested. We would then compare and contrast our view with Indian customs, which was always interesting and informative. It was a much more interesting trip than we envisaged.



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Advent/Christmas services 2022

Our weekly services will continue at 9.30 am every Sunday during Advent, including of course Advent Sunday, 27 November 2022. In addition we will have a Christmas Eve service on Saturday 24 December (at 6.30 p.m. but to be confirmed).

Christmas Day, Sunday 25 December: 9.30 am, with Holy Communion.

We also meet at 10 am each Wednesday in the Church for Quiet Contemplation (see website for arrangements during January).

YOU ARE WELCOME FOR BREAKFAST!

Women's Breakfast: On the first *Thursday* of the month. Contact Margo Anderson for details 0447 035 355

Men's Breakfast: On the first *Friday* of the month. Contact Graeme Harris for details 9504 8234

Trust the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.
Proverbs 3:5

Around Armadale



(above left) We light a candle each Sunday and think of those not present. Chris Booth (chaplain at Uniting Prahran) led us in worship for two Sundays while Fiona was on long service leave (above right). Women's breakfast (below).



Rev Dr Chris Page led us in worship on 6 November (left)

Rev. Marika Liyapidiny

The Rev. Marika Liyapidiny was the first Yolngu woman (Aboriginal woman from the North East Arnhem region of the Northern Territory) to be ordained as Minister of the Word in the Uniting Church in Australia. She was born in 1945 at Yirrkala, then a Methodist Mission, into the Gumana family. In 1981 she became a full time Health Worker among her own people and was daily involved in the physical, mental and spiritual suffering of her people. She was awarded an O.A.M. in 1981 in recognition of her service.

At the same time, she was an Elder of the Yirrkala congregation and experienced God moving by the Holy Spirit in the lives of her people. This led her to begin training for the ordained ministry. In September 1991 she was ordained and took up placement in the Yirrkala Parish. As the first ordained Aboriginal woman, her ministry was not always accepted, but she would say “God called me, though I am a woman”. Her insights through her teaching and preaching were well received and she was an inspiration to many people beyond her homeland. One of her greatest thrills was to travel to the Holy Land and retrace the steps of Jesus.

Liyapidiny never ceased to give leadership and share love. She was a strong supporter of the role of women in the ministry of the church. She died on August 31, 1998, having given herself unsparingly in service to her Lord and her people.

From ‘People to Commemorate’. Mark the Evangelist Uniting Church, South Melbourne.
Note: The Armadale Church Council, on behalf of the congregation, recently gave a donation to Nungalinya College in Darwin where Marika Liyapidiny trained for her ministry.



The rich person who gives to the poor does not bestow alms - but pays a debt. Ambrose of Milan

Website

Don't forget to keep an eye on our website. It's at
<https://armadale.ucavictas.org.au/>

We try and keep it up-to-date, but we always welcome any feedback (you can send this to Graeme). We would also welcome any items of interest that you think might be suitable to be posted.

‘T’ IS FOR TEAMWORK



Since I stepped down as Chair of the Church Council I have had time to think about, and appreciate, the value of teamwork. During my tenure, we at Armadale Uniting Church confronted several difficult issues, including the loss of the manse and its income, the complete reconfiguration of the church and adjoining hall, and a long period without permanent ministry.

That the worship and work of this place continues week by week, and year by year, depends on all who undertake the varied and necessary duties – reading scriptures, leading intercessions, providing and arranging flowers, welcoming new arrivals, operating the sound system, preparing communion, serving refreshments, maintaining our financial records and other tasks. There are many parts and many players.

For many years I was very well supported on Council by those who served, and those who continue to serve in this role. In particular, I would like to highlight the very significant contributions made by Ian Thomas, Graeme Harris, Cheryl Mason and David Fallick.

Ian has been our Church Secretary for as long as some of us can remember. In his role he links the congregation and both Synod and Presbytery. Every year he takes responsibility for the Annual General Meeting and the election of officers for the following twelve months. As a small congregation we are blessed to have Ian with us as an authorised lay preacher who has acted as leader of worship on very many occasions over the years. We appreciate and are beneficiaries of his many well researched and thoughtful sermons. Ian also prepares the necessary rosters and oversees our response to the NCLS surveys.

Graeme was Council secretary for many years. With his legal background he has been able to advise us on various legal matters. His interest in community affairs keeps us abreast of what is happening in the wider Stonnington area. Graeme began and maintains the Men's Breakfasts which continue to be well supported. He also keeps our website and directory up to date, and has prepared and edited *The Mustard Seed* for publication since 2013.

For many years Cheryl has been the link between the church and the wider community which uses our premises for various, mostly musical, events. Cheryl liaises with those who hire the church and meeting rooms for one- off or longer periods, ensuring that they are aware of their responsibilities, allotting them keys, making sure they are returned, and that the property is left as found. By her work, Cheryl has ensured that the church has been the recipient of many thousands of dollars over the years which have greatly helped our annual budgets.

Until recently, David Fallick spent many years attending to the many property issues which inevitably arise with old buildings. Indeed, when David first took on this task, he had responsibility also for the Denbigh Road manse until its sale under *Uniting our Future*. After the departure of the Champion

continued on next page

Teamwork (cont)

family, the house was let, and David also took oversight of that property and dealing with subsequent tenants. Most recently, David saw through the project of repair of rotting roof timbers over a corner of a side transept. This proved to be a considerably more complicated job than expected. During this time and on many other occasions, David left his own work to meet with tradespeople, obtain quotes etc. The time and effort he put in over so many years on behalf of the parish has been monumental and we all owe him a great deal. David and Kaye have also been great supporters of Uniting Prahran and the Winter Breakfasts.

But as mentioned, so many members of the Church community willingly contribute to the life and work of the Church, by serving on the Church Council, helping out on the rosters and in other, sometimes unseen, ways too. The community spirit is strong and alive at Armadale!

My sincere thanks to all these faithful people. Bill Rush

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BULLIES AND SAINTS

by John Dickson

Zondervan Reflective 2021

An honest look at the Good and Evil of Christian History

The author is an Australian historian especially interested in the history of early Christianity. Dickson provides an honest account of the mixed history of Christianity and asks skeptics to listen again to the melody of Christ, despite the discord produced by too many believers. He also asks Christians to reflect soberly on their own participation in the tragic inconsistencies of Christendom and pleads with them to live in tune with their Maestro. Dr Dickson is co-founder of the Centre of Public Christianity.

REVIEWS:

from Greg Sheridan, Foreign Editor of The Australian:

‘John Dickson is a scrupulous historian, a fair-minded judge, and a wonderful storyteller. *Bullies and Saints* is an invaluable, thoughtful, and at times rightly provoking consideration of the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly, in the long Christian story. In prose that is supple and easy, it captures the inevitable complexity and cross-grained contexts of all human endeavours, even divine human endeavours. And it understands that professing Christianity does not cure you of the human condition, with all its perplexing possibilities, all its heroism and terror, its majesty and degradation. And yet there is a light that shines.’

from the Hon. Kim Beazley, former Governor of Western Australia and parliamentarian:

‘This is an important book. My father was a deeply religious man and in public life. Around him were copious efforts to throw a Christian cloak over a multitude of political judgements driven by secular ambitions and direction – often deeply harmful. He used to say that the task for a Christian in public life or anywhere is to act in a manner that would not deny others an experience of the cross. This book by John Dickson taught me exactly what he meant. It is a book of the ages for this age. The worst efforts by many have obscured or distorted the message, using it for power, greed, lust, prejudice, and ignorance. Their historical and contemporary efforts have destroyed the access to faith for many. But throughout the centuries, and now, others have shone a light on Jesus’s message of love, charity, kindness, selflessness and salvation – values and behaviours which are timeless. Decency is open to everyone of whatever faith or none. However the fundamental belief of Christians is that we are all made in God’s image is a deep grounding. Why this is so is here in these pages.’

METHODIST CENTENARY 1981

The centenary of the Methodist church in Kooyong Road was held in 1981, before the renovations which were a few years later. Here are some photos (also on our website). The Minister at the time was Rev Howard Abbey, who is seen in the top photo at the bottom right.



INTERESTING CONVERSATIONS

In retirement, John Anderson the former Deputy Prime Minister of Australia, has produced many podcast discussions with eminent thinkers and citizens. Of particular interest to Christians, are his conversations with John Lennox, Emeritus Professor of Mathematics at Oxford. Both these Johns are deeply convinced believers whose faith was nurtured by C S Lewis, perhaps the most influential Christian writer of the 20th century. In an era when Christianity seems to have been pushed to the edges of serious discussion and influence, it is refreshing to find two such prominent people speaking so logically and robustly of their religious convictions. Their conversations are accessible via YouTube, laptop or on computer.

Christianity is built upon a beautiful paradox, that the birth of the homeless One should be celebrated in every home.

G.K Chesterton

April Blackwell leads a Christian Meditation group at the church on Tuesday evenings at 7.30pm.

Sessions usually conclude about 9 p.m. For further information contact April @ 0419 807 892

Armadale Uniting Church

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Minister: Rev Fiona Winn
Organist: Rowan Kidd
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Regular service times: 9.30 am each Sunday, Holy Communion on the 1st Sunday of the month.

Quiet Contemplation: 10 am each Wednesday.

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

Usually on the 5th 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.