
The Mustard Seed



Armadale Uniting Church

Issue 46, Advent 2024

Thinking about Advent

Barbara Allen

Advent. Advent: a season in our religious calendar, a time set aside for us to prepare for the Christ-Child's 'coming.'

That is what 'Advent' (Adventus) means: 'coming' and, according to some, it also extends to 'arrival'; the coming of the babe, and Christ's second coming. Our salvation is summed up in that one word, which signifies two important religious events for Christians.

My question is this: how do we prepare for both the arrival (of the babe) and the coming (the second coming) of the risen Christ? The babe in human form, and the risen Christ in heavenly glory? I would expect, like most, myself included, we prefer pondering the babe, love incarnate, imagining cradling the beautiful little Jesus, rather than shielding our eyes from the blinding light of the Second Coming with its accompanying judgement etc. Yet if we worship that tiny babe, we also worship the Risen Christ. If we sign on for the religious significance of Christmas, then we are in for the long haul, the scope of the story-which includes Easter.

'A stable birth.

Umbilical cord shapes

a connective cross.'

As we enter the Advent season, the four weeks before Christmas, I suggest that we pack our own hearts, our internal luggage, with its timetable, perhaps a compass or a map, or a GPS (to make sure we are travelling in the 'right' direction, for Christ is our true North) to consider the journey of faith: what it means to 'come' to the Christian faith, or to 'arrive' at the threshold of new life?

My grandfather was always early for events. If he and my Nan were catching a country train, they would be at the station two hours before departure. I know that my dear Nana didn't complain about this. She met lots of folk before the train left, and whilst on the train. Her handbag was plump with lollies, and she gave the impression of having all the time in the world to make your acquaintance. I am sure she entertained some angels.

Are we early? Or late? Have we packed the right items for the journey, or do we get confused, or seduced by the secular calendar? What do we risk missing if we become too focused on the physical

Advent (continued).

Christmas preparations rather than on the spiritual preparations? Do we lose the Baby, Jesus hidden, covered by Christmas wrapping? Without a religious core, though, Christmas, "Christ's Mass" could risk being an empty holiday for exchanging gifts (why do this if you don't believe that Christ was the best gift ever?) and feasting (in the name of...?) and decorating (who is coming? Is it someone's birthday?) Of course, we exchange good will to all, but I hope as Christians we do this all year round.

'O come, O come, Emmanuel... O come, O dayspring, come and cheer our spirits by your advent here.'

Our Future at Armadale

Our position at Armadale has been openly discussed at two meetings and we have been provided with updates as well (most recently on 3 November). The situation is well known to most of us: we're ageing, our numbers are slowly declining and our finances are such that we can't guarantee adequate financial support for a ministry placement and other expenses for five years (even on a less than full-time basis). Hence we're not in a position to make a call, even if a minister were to be available (which is improbable given there's a shortage of ministers).

Much as we would like to "grow" and would be willing to do so, the reality is that there seems no clear path whereby this could occur.

We've been fortunate in having the services of Rev Barbara Allen for the past few months, and Ian Thomas and Karel Reus have also contributed greatly (and are continuing to do so). Barbara has greatly inspired us in many ways. However, a supply ministry is usually a short-term arrangement and the burden of arranging services each week and maintaining the property falls on just a few of us. Willing though we are, this isn't really sustainable on an on-going basis.

In these circumstances, Council's view is that Armadale ought to close in the early months of next year. Council is liaising with Presbytery about the issues that arise as a consequence. If you have any questions or suggestions, please contact a member of the Council.

From the Editors

We are heading into challenging times. Our future at Armadale seems very limited (see above) and change is obviously coming. We are not certain what the future holds for *The Mustard Seed*.

In the meantime we hope the variety of material in this issue is of interest.

Peace to all this Advent season.

– Bill and Graeme

Contents

Advent	1
Our Future at Armadale	2
Editorial	2
Lifeline for the Old	3
Lyn Ferguson	4
Sri Lanka	5
Around Armadale	7
Christmas and the Wrong Side of History	8
Kylie Crabbe appointment	9
Peter	10
Senior's Facebook	10
Duke Chapel	11
Christmas Services	12

Lifeline for the Old.

Barbara showed us these banners from Jerusalem on 3 November 2024.



These two banners came from an organization in Israel, based in Jerusalem, known as Lifeline for the Old, or Yad L'Kashish. I visited the centre back in the 1990s.

It was founded in 1962 by a school teacher. It offers unique services to hundreds of needy elderly, the physically and emotionally challenged, and new immigrants. Craft work, including sewing, book binding, and metal work, offers them the opportunity to lead productive lives, with dignity, self-respect and pride, as well as helping them integrate into Israeli society. They usually have no prior artistic experience and simply 'learn on the job.'

The elderly receive some financial payment for making a wide variety of beautiful artistic products which are sold in a gift shop, as well as on-line, and other benefits, including a monthly stipend, a monthly bus pass, a snack and hot lunch on-site, and subsidized eye and dental care.

Barbara Allan

WEDNESDAY REFLECTION

We meet together for Quiet Reflection each Wednesday morning at 10 am in the Church, and then have coffee at a local cafe. You'd be most welcome to join us.

Lyn Ferguson



Lyn Ferguson was a loved member of our congregation for over 40 years. In her younger days, she taught art at the University High School - and looking around our church walls there is much evidence of her artistic talent.

This she generously shared with us. Lyn also contributed to Armadale UC as a Sunday School teacher, and in many other quiet ways.

In the wider Church, she was a member of the Victorian UC Synod's Liturgy Committee. During the years of her incapacity she was a loved and welcome presence among us each week. Thank you, Keith, for your long, loving, and faithful care of her, and for ensuring that Lyn remained a visible part of our community for so long.



Lyn made a number of banners for the Church. Two of them are above.

Sri Lanka

Chris Kunaratnam

Sri Lanka, formerly known as Ceylon, is the place of my birth. The Portuguese first colonised the country in 1505, the Dutch in 1630 and then Britain from 1815 to 1948, all wanting the valuable spices, like cinnamon and tea, which grew abundantly in the country

My family came to live in Melbourne in the 70's as my Dad wanted us to have a good education. I have been back many times when my grandmothers were alive and I had many aunts and uncles and family friends, living there. So sad that of big families for both my parent, there is only 1 cousin left in Sri Lanka who is looked after by carers.

I last visited Sri Lanka in 2017 and returned in July/August this year for 3 weeks. I had forgotten what an amazing country it is with beautiful beaches, ancient historical sites going back 450 AD and wildlife safaris. And of course, the tea. After Covid, political unrest and economic collapse, it was good to see the country is recovering and tourists returning.



Elephant (left), tropical beach (below left) and hotel in eco resort (below right).





Tea estate (above). 10th century ruins (top).
Off to pick tea (above right). Peacock (right)

YOU ARE WELCOME FOR BREAKFAST!

Women's Breakfast: On the *2nd Friday* of the month. Contact Margo Anderson for details 0447 035 355

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

Around Armadale



(left) Hugh gave us a performance on 13 October. Barbara has been taking communion each month (below)



We usually enjoy a coffee after Church at a local cafe (above). Rob and Ann A caught up recently with Dorothea B (right)



Christmas and The Wrong Side of History

When you think about it, nearly everyone and everything connected to the first Christmas was on the wrong side of history.

Zechariah and Elizabeth were on the wrong side of history, for sure. They were an elderly couple living in an occupied land. They had no children, no legacy to pass on, no son or daughter, no grandchildren. They were prepared to die, unhonoured and unsung. They were on the wrong side of empire and culture, even on the wrong side of fertility.

Mary and Joseph were on the wrong side of history too. Mary, a teenager with no husband, no dowry, no way to explain the new life within her that her family and culture could possibly comprehend. There was no way around the scandal and shame of a baby born out of wedlock. And Joseph, who in the eyes of his family and friends, was now willing to live with a whore. His reward would be a life of labour, carpentry without a country, and the reputation of a man who had let himself be cuckolded.

The shepherds lived on the wrong side of history – anonymous labourers whose life would make the term, “blue collar” seem extravagant. For their life, hope was that enough of their flock would survive. No “opportunity for advancement” here. How many Bethlehem residents believed their story? Did enough people laugh at them to convince them in later life that it must all have been a prank or hallucination? They were close to the bottom of the social scale, and the word of a shepherd was to be taken lightly.

And what about Simeon and Anna? Two elderly devout Jews ignoring the Roman occupation and babbling on about a coming Messiah.

Anna never left the temple. “Don’t listen to her, she’s crazy.!” Both of them, praying to a God who had not stopped an exile or being overthrown by foreigners. Simeon and Anna - two more religious nut cases?

Poor Zechariah, poor cuckolded Joseph, poor straying Mary, poor daydreaming shepherds, poor deluded Simeon and Anna. If only they could have accepted reality.

If only they had not been on the wrong side of history. What then?

Adapted and abridged from Bible and Theology.. . Dececeber 2020 . . .

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.

Kylie Crabbe appointment

Kylie Crabbe – or more accurately Rev Associate Professor Kylie Crabbe - has been appointed to the position of Head of College, Pilgrim Theological College, beginning in January 2026. Many of us remember her time at Armadale, where she was ordained, in May 2010, with gratitude and affection. Amongst the many ways that she left her mark at Armadale was her role as the moving force in establishing *The Mustard Seed*.

She is currently serving as Associate Professor of Biblical and Early Christian Studies in the Institute for Religion and Critical Inquiry at Australian Catholic University (ACU).

The Synod announcement is here -
<https://pilgrim.edu.au/announcementnewheadofcollege/>

The announcement tells us that she joined ACU in late 2017 from the University of Oxford, where she undertook her doctorate and was Lecturer in Theology at Trinity College (2015-2017), Instructor in New Testament Greek for the Faculty of Theology and Religion (2016), and Assistant Welfare Dean at Trinity College (2017). Prior to this work in the UK, Kylie was the Minister at Armadale Uniting Church.

Kylie has published and taught widely in New Testament studies and Second Temple Judaism, and she has particular interests in understandings of time and eschatology in antiquity, emotions in historical work, and disability and intersectionality in biblical studies and ancient and contemporary settings.

Kylie at her ordination (in 2010, so perhaps this picture will bring back memories).



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

PETER

It's a hard life
and the whipped sea's a terror.
Sometimes though, its slate beauty
lifts my heart.

It's hard work casting and hauling
and net-mending's endlessly boring,
except for the back and forth
with the boys.

And now, this stranger.
What is it? Something in his voice?
The way he stands against the sky?
Eyes that sum us up in a flash?

A word and the world is changing,
and fishing is not what we thought.

Bill

* * * * *

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, I walk down the street everyday 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.

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.

The Duke Chapel

On our recent trip to Durham, North Carolina, we attended a service at the Duke University Chapel.

This impressive “chapel” is the centrepiece of the Duke University Western Campus. Duke University is named after James B. Duke and was established in 1924 when James B. Duke, through an Indenture of Trust, designated a gift that transformed the previous Trinity College into a comprehensive research university. Hence, this year, 2024, is Duke University’s centennial.

Among the buildings of Western Campus, Duke University Chapel was the first to be planned and the last to be built. The cornerstone was laid on October 22, 1930, but construction continued for the next two years. The tower is 210 feet tall, and there are 77 stained glass windows depicting between 800 and 900 figures.

It’s at the centre of the original buildings of the Western Campus, The architectural style of the Chapel is English Gothic, but it is modelled on no particular cathedral, college chapel, or parish church. The cornerstone was laid October 22, 1930, and construction of the Chapel took more than two years. It was first used at commencement in 1932 and was formally dedicated June 2, 1935.

While the Duke family was Methodist, Duke Chapel services have always been ecumenical, and the Chapel itself is a sanctuary open to all people throughout the year for important personal moments of prayer, reflection, grief, and gratitude.



However the very well-attended service we went to was very familiar: the Gospel reading was Mark 9: 30-37 (those who humble themselves before God will be exalted by God). I wondered if the reading at Armadale on that day was the same?

There were originally six statues in the entrance portal, five of which are non-contentious, but in 2017, the university removed one of the three statues on the right side of the main entrance portal. The original sculpture of Robert E. Lee had been recently vandalised after confrontations over the removal of Confederate monuments in other parts of America. The university then conducted a year-long process to explore the many different facets of memory and history at Duke, with decision made to leave the space empty as a reminder of the

Duke Chapel (above) and statue of James B. Duke in front of the chapel (left)



Duke Chapel (cont)

need to reflect on "how the reality and symbols of our past continue to shape our present."

I suppose it's not for us to say, and perhaps statues can be seen as a way of "glorifying" the person and what they are now perceived to have stood for. However, Duke University and the region seem far less enthusiastic about "disowning" the tobacco heritage of the region. This was the source of the funds for the endowment, as the Duke family fortune derived from tobacco!

Graeme H

Empty plinth at entrance to Duke Chapel



Advent/Christmas services 2024

Our weekly services will continue at 9.30 am every Sunday during Advent, including of course on Advent Sunday, 1 December 2024. In addition we will have a Christmas Eve service on Tuesday 24 December at 6.30 pm.

NO SERVICE on Christmas Day, Wednesday 25 December 2024. There will be services at 9 am at Stonnington Community UC and at 10.15 am at Toorak Uniting Church.

Normal service at 9.30 am on 29 December 2024. Thereafter, no services during January 2025. The first service for 2025 will be on Sunday 2 February 2025.

We also meet at 10 am each Wednesday in the Church for Quiet Contemplation. The last gathering for 2024 will be on 18 December 2024, and the first for 2025 on Wednesday 29 January 2025.

Armadale Uniting Church

86A Kooyong Road
ARMADALE Vic 3143

Minister: Vacant
Organist: Rowan Kidd
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<https://armadale.ucavictas.org.au/>

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

Quiet Contemplation: 10 am each Wednesday (except January).

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.