
The Mustard Seed



Armadale Uniting Church

Edition 22 - Advent 2016

From the editors...

Advent marks the start of the new Church year, and for the next 12 months the lectionary readings will focus on Matthew. Hence, we've included an article by Ian Thomas giving us some background to this Gospel. The article originally appeared in our Lent 2014 issue, but Ian has kindly revised it for us.

We've received an update from Dorothea Bogle about what she's been doing, and there's an interview with Yvonne Smith.

There are some pictures from the tree planting marking Betty Terrell's 90th birthday and from Rob and Ann Ahin's trip to the Kimberleys, as well as some poetry and an Advent creed.

— Bill Rush and Graeme Harris.

Year A – Matthew's Gospel: A summary

Ian Thomas

The Gospel of Matthew is widely regarded as the most important of the four gospels. It is important because it provides a bridge between Old Testament theology and New Testament theology. It highlights the folly of trying to create a Messiah in your own image that can be manipulated (or ignored) to meet your own standards and desires, and contrasts that with the reality of the Messiah that lives in each one of us and who demands standards far in excess of any man-made moral or legal codes.

In spite of being placed first in the New Testament, Matthew's gospel clearly post-dates Mark's Gospel as it is heavily reliant on it for a large part of its content (600 of the 660 verses in Mark's Gospel have a direct parallel in Matthew's Gospel), although a significant amount of material comes from the mysterious "Q source" which seem to be a compendium of the sayings of Jesus. Further material unique to Matthew's gospel is attributed to a third source known as the "M source".

The gospel is structured around a Prologue dealing with the lineage, birth and early life of Jesus; five discourses - the Sermon on the Mount (Ch. 5-7), the Mission discourse (Ch. 10), the Parabolic discourse on the nature of the kingdom (Ch. 13), the Church discourse (Ch. 18), the Future discourse (Ch.23), while the Passion narrative extends through Ch. 21-27, and the final chapter (Ch. 28) contains the Resurrection and Commissioning narratives.

In the five "discourses" Matthew provides for us the essential teachings of Christianity and also gives us a

In this issue

Editorial	1
Year A - Matthew's Gospel	1
Hello from the Hills	3
Interview with Yvonne Smith	5
Betty Terrell's 90th Birthday	7
Advent and Christmas services at Armadale	8
John Bell poem	8
An Advent credo	9
Travelling to the Kimberleys	10
Serious Joy	11
And Mary said....	12

glimpse of what life in the Kingdom of God is like. The invitation is to live a kingdom focused life today, not just to hope for the future coming of the kingdom.

In an interesting contrast to Paul, Matthew presents a view of a Christian as being strongly bound to “the law”, but that the inner motives of the heart and mind are much more important than simply slavishly following customs and the edicts of the law. Paul on the other hand presents a view that the Christian life is above the law; we are free from the dictates of the law, because our hearts and minds demand even higher standards than those required by the law.

Matthew’s emphases in the gospel probably reflect the ‘Jewishness’ of the author (unknown) himself and the audience he was addressing – most likely a small community of Jewish Christians living in Antioch in Syria sometime between 80 and 110 AD. They were probably feeling somewhat displaced and irrelevant in a movement that was being overrun by Gentiles. He is at great pains to use the writings of the prophets and Jewish history to bolster the claim that Jesus is the long promised Messiah for the people of Israel. The section on the lineage of Jesus is used to prove that Jesus is descended from David and therefore is qualified to be the Messiah. It was probably also an attempt to reinforce the importance of the small band of Jewish Christians and their Jewish traditions in what was becoming a Gentile based movement. Maybe there is a message here for small threatened congregations in today’s world.

In the advent story of Jesus, Matthew invokes the miraculous virginal conception (miraculous conceptions were a common story line in the Old Testament writings) to insert divine involvement into the story. As mentioned above, the mysteries of the genealogy were another strategy to advance this line of the narrative. The references to dreams and angels and the movements of the heavenly star (which have no astronomical record) all have their roots in the Old Testament prophecies, as do his frequent use of significant numbers. All of these literary devices are used to prove that prophecy has been fulfilled and that the God of Israel is intimately

involved in events surrounding Jesus. We also see in this narrative a statement that Jesus would forgive sin and through the righteous behavior of Joseph we are introduced to the notion that flows through the gospel – that obedience to and interpretation of the law (Torah) must be tempered by the appropriate level of compassion.

We should also remember that these birth stories are imaginative literary products, not precise descriptions of historical events. They are more about providing an insight into the grown person Jesus rather than the baby in the crib.

The Magi in the birth story are echoes of the past when leaders of nations came to Jerusalem bearing gifts and also hint of gentile involvement in the ongoing story of the development of the Christian church.

Sadly, the pain at the heart of the whole story – the crucifixion of Jesus by the Jewish leaders and the people of Jerusalem of the time, and the inner recriminations of Jewish Christians over their link to this event - have been interpreted so literally by some that it has provided a basis of authority for anti-Semitic movements through the ages with horrific consequences.

The message of Matthew is that Jesus is the Messiah – the promised Son of God, who is a king of a new kind of kingdom in which obedience to traditional law is tempered by compassion, where sins are forgiven and hope is restored for lost souls in the present day.

There is a large quantity of commentary available on the Web which discusses all of the issues mentioned above (some in great detail) and all are accessible simply by typing in “Matthew’s Gospel” or “Commentaries on Matthew’s Gospel” or “The advent story of Jesus in Matthew’s gospel” or similar sets of words into the Google search engine. The material comes from many perspectives – protestant, catholic, academic and does provide interesting insights into what is a significant source of information and inspiration for those seeking the Kingdom of God.

Let us light a candle and say to the dark, we beg to differ.

Anon

Hello from the Hills

A letter from Dorothea Bogle



Dear Congregation,

It is now more than four months since I left to take up residency here in the Adelaide Hills. Well, when I say “here”, I have also been travelling overseas for many weeks. Time for an update but where to start? Perhaps I follow the advice of the King in “Alice in Wonderland” - “Begin at the beginning”, said the king gravely “and continue until the end, and then stop”.

So to the beginning ... First impressions of Brechin Lodge in Stirling? A good solid honey-coloured stone house with a pleasant garden, somewhat overgrown yet with considerable potential. There are many different areas in the garden all of which blend together harmoniously - the front lawn, the wild woods, the camellia forest, the veggie patch, the lower slopes soon to be planted up with fruit trees and a tennis court-to-be. It is a short walk to Stirling in one direction and to Aldgate in the other so easy shopping (although maybe not quite as close as Glenferrie Road). The drive into Adelaide CBD takes approximately 20 minutes and there are many picturesque small towns and wineries in the vicinity (yet to be explored). “Convenient” is the word that springs to mind. Most importantly, Cathy, Gustaf and Ailsa are here and in charge of upgrades and garden planning.

My first six weeks were spent settling in and adjusting to the weather (Eek!) and the context. Soon it was time to take off and reunite with friends and family in the UK. Then to Madeira to spend happy times with elder son, Michael and family amongst the terraced “lavadas”, the ubiquitous banana plants and the bright flowers of this small volcanic island off the African coast. Next, a return to the eyrie in the Himalayan foothills (The Shivaliks) where the tail-end of the monsoon still raged (more rain). There was the usual visit to McLeodganj among the lovely Tibetans where I always feel joyful and relaxed and then back to Kamal’s great Nepalese cuisine in Shimla. The final leg of this epic adventure took me to Singapore, to stay with younger daughter, Lysette and her little family. I do enjoy being there and this time there was the added inducement of a trip to Indonesia to visit the wonderful thousand-year old Buddhist stupa of Borobudur. Totally awe-inspiring. A place of tangible serenity and deep spirituality (see photos).

Lysette asked me what I intended to do when I returned to The Hills. The list of priorities started with a decision about which of the small local Uniting Churches to join. I may decide upon Bridgewater Uniting Church (BUC) which is a short drive. The congregation are welcoming (I have three offers of regular lifts already) and there is a lively youth fellowship and a Sunday school with plenty of littlies. It is just different. Another item on my list is finding a new exercise group to join. The close camaraderie I enjoyed with Ulla and Co. was special, in addition to the regular routine exercise, so this will not be an easy one to replace. U3A meets at The Hut in Aldgate and I intend to attend some of their talks on literature in the new year and probably join their mah-jong circle. I will also look into volunteering locally.

New opportunities. However, I do miss our special journeying together on the spiritual pilgrimage and the closeness, warmth and care of you all at AUC. Such a very special community where I am privileged to have been a member. You are in excellent hands with our Fiona back at the helm.

With love — Dorothea



(left) a photo of the little ginkgo tree recently purchased from a local nursery with your generous parting gift.

Paintings to hang, doors to paint (below). Borobudur (right) and at Madeira (bottom).



AN INTERVIEW WITH YVONNE SMITH



Where were you born?

In Kerang, Victoria in 1928.

What do you remember?

At the age of four I was taken into care by a kindly Christian lady with whom I spent some happy years. She took me to the Sunday School at St Paul's Anglican Cathedral, Bendigo.

Where did you go to school?

At the age of five I started at the Quarry Hill Primary School and later to the Violet Street State School where I became dux. When I was seven, I was taken to the White Hills Children's Home and then to a new foster family where I was considerably less happy. However I did enjoy school – later at the Bendigo High School where I particularly liked English and History. I also enjoyed Sunday School at the Ironbark Methodist Church.

What happened when you left school?

My first few years were spent as a pharmacy assistant. I had a very good employer and I learnt a lot. This was wartime. I met Trevor who was in the Navy, and we married when I was 20. My boss "gave me away" and his daughter was my bridesmaid. Trevor and I were baptised in the Tottenham Baptist Church. Full immersion!

Where did you live then?

Trevor's work with the railways had us move from Braybrook, to Sale, and then back to Bendigo where we built our first house. After we had been in our new home for only five weeks, two policemen knocked on my front door and asked if they could come in. Their news was terrible and I didn't believe it at first. Trevor had had a heart attack at work and was dead at the age of 45. I was left with our three young children.

How did you cope?

I was in a state of shock for some time but kept going for the sake of the children. At this time I was very angry with God. For a while we survived on my husband's superannuation until I got a job preparing weekly payrolls for a clothing factory. Later I did financial work for the Bendigo Building Society. As my children had grown up by then and were all living in Melbourne, I made the move to the city, living in Canterbury, Burwood, then eventually buying my present house in Vail Street, Prahran.

What about your church life?

I joined the Denbigh Road Church when the Rev Gerrit Peterschlingmann was minister and then moved to the Armadale Uniting Church when Union occurred. For some years I was Secretary of the Elders Council during the ministry of the Rev. Max Champion. At one stage Max asked me to befriend Norma McNolty whom he had met and who was going through a difficult time. Eventually I persuaded Norma to come to church. She found a home within the Armadale congregation and was baptised as an adult. At various times I was President and Secretary of the UCF which Norma also joined.

What are your other interests?

I am Secretary of the Malvern branch of the Legacy Widows Club. I love reading.

What is your favourite hymn?

Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. (TiS 454)

Anything you would like to say about your Christian faith?

Perhaps because I did not have a father present in my life, I have always thought of God as my father. On three specific occasions, I have had a very strong experience of God's real presence and guidance. Although I can't make it to church so often these days, I am very glad to belong to the Armadale congregation.

WITH LOVE TO THE WORLD

A few months ago the Church Council gave a complimentary copy of this Uniting Church publication to each adult member of the congregation. Its purpose was to encourage members in their reading and contemplation of the scriptures, and as a preparation for weekly worship so that "we will not come to Sunday morning spiritually and mentally cold". If you have found this booklet in anyway helpful you may wish to subscribe yourself. To receive a copy of the three annual issues beginning Feb-May 2017 (mailed to your address), please send a cheque or credit card details to *With Love to the World*, P.O. Box 560, Strathfield, NSW 2135. A subscription can also be taken by phone (02) 9747 1369.

Every year we celebrate the holy season of Advent, O God. Every year we pray those beautiful prayers of longing and waiting, and sing those lovely songs of hope and promise.

Karl Rahner

Betty Terrell's 90th

We were pleased to help celebrate Betty's 90th birthday, and planted a tree in her honour.



Next of kin/contact details

Please consider giving Fiona contact details of your next of kin/contact, so that they're available if a situation arises where contact needs to be made with someone on your behalf.

THE CHRISTMAS BOWL APPEAL

The Christmas Bowl Appeal is a cherished tradition among the Australian family of churches. Every year more than 2000 churches from 19 denominations come together to help the world's most vulnerable.

The appeal had its genesis on Christmas Day 1949 when the Rev. Frank Byatt, a Methodist minister and ecumenist, placed a simple empty bowl on the table. He humbly asked his friends and family to contribute to what they felt the cost of what they had eaten had been. He asked them to consider their own good fortune in being able to share in a Christmas meal in comfort and safety.

The Christmas Bowl Appeal is our way of forging a loving connection between the community here in Australia and people around the world experiencing dreadful hardship and suffering. From that small beginning nearly \$2.5 million dollars is now raised annually. Armadale Uniting Church has participated in the project for many years, and will do so again this year.

Advent/Christmas/January services

Advent Sunday, 27 November 2016: Combined service with Stonnington Community Uniting Church (Ewing), 59 Burke Rd, East Malvern (cnr Coppin Street) at 10 am. Rev John Smith will take the service. No service at Armadale on this day.

Services are then at 9.30 each Sunday until New Year, with dates to note as follows —

1st Sunday in Advent 4 December 2016: “The New road....”. We’ll be joined by the Thursday Group from Prahran Mission for Holy Communion.

Christmas Eve, Saturday 24 December: Carols for Christmas Eve, at 7 pm followed by refreshments (suitable for children).

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

New Year's Day, Sunday 1 January 2017: 9.30 am at Armadale, with Holy Communion.

We will be combining with the other Uniting Churches in Stonnington for the remaining services during January. Details are being finalised, so please see the website for details.

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You keep us waiting,
You the God of all time,
Want us to wait
For the right time
In which to discover
Who we are, where we are to go,
Who will be with us,
And what we must do.
So ... thank you for the waiting time.

John Bell

Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. Let us begin.

Mother Teresa

AN ADVENT CREDO

(From *Walking on Thorns*, by Allan Boesak, Eerdmans, 2004).

It is not true that creation and the human family are doomed to destruction and loss —

This is true: *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.*

It is not true that we must accept inhumanity and discrimination, hunger, poverty, death —

This is true: *I have come that they may have life, and that abundantly.*

It is not true that violence and hatred should have the last word, and that war and destruction rule forever —

This is true: *Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given ...his name shall be called wonderful, councillor, mighty God, the Everlasting, the Prince of Peace.*

It is not true that we are simply victims of the powers of evil who seek to rule the world —

This is true: *To me is given authority in heaven and on earth, and I am with you even until the end of the world.*

It is not true that we have to wait for those who are specially gifted, who are the prophets of the Church before we can be peacemakers —

This is true: *I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions and your old men shall have dreams.*

It is not true that our hopes for the liberation of humankind, of justice, of human dignity of peace are not meant for this world and for this history —

This is true: *The hour comes, and it is now, that the true worshippers shall worship God in spirit and in truth.*

So let us enter Advent in hope, even hope against hope. Let us see visions of love and peace and justice. Let us affirm with humility, with joy, with faith, with courage: Jesus Christ – the life of the world.

SAMMY STAMP

At the moment Betty T is unable to assist the Sammy Stamp sorting team at Synod each Thursday. Your used stamps can be left in the designated collection box in the office and they will be delivered in due course.

Travelling to the Kimberleys

Rob and Ann Ahin recently spent some time in the Kimberleys—for the 3rd time! These are some photos from Rob.



Graeme and Bill are always pleased to receive contributions from all members of the congregation. These might be relevant photos, letters to the editors on an aspect of Christian or church life, your favourite hymns, concerns, travels, reflections, memories, book and movie suggestions and reviews, your life story, etc. In short, whatever you think might be of interest to others in the congregation. We would welcome anything from 50 to 500 words.

Serious Joy

You know about serious joy,
deep in the chambers of the heart.
It can't be ignored.
It is a piece of God's own heart
thrown to you with dart precision.
And when it pierces your heart,
God sings the sound
consoling you, filling you,
as if with an angel's soft sigh.
Rilke says a smile goes somewhere.
I imagine it touching the atmosphere,
its pink helium making the world
lighter, more buoyant,
spinning the universe.

Marlene Marburg

(Marlene is a poet, spiritual director and formator at Kardia Formation, Hawthorn).

www.kardia.com.au)

TOY COLLECTION

As in previous years, you are invited to leave gifts under the tree in the church in support of the annual Prahran Mission Toy Appeal. This should be done by Sunday, 11 December, after which items will be taken to the Mission for distribution prior to Christmas Day.

Contemplative Worship at Armadale

This group meets in the church lobby on the 2nd and 4th Sundays at 7 p.m. It is based on Ignation meditative practice. For further information contact John Bottomley on 9531 3288 .

And Mary said ...

A free translation of the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) from The Message.

I'm bursting with God-news;
I'm dancing the song of my Saviour God.
God took one look at me, and look what happened –
I'm the most fortunate woman on earth!
What God has done for me will never be forgotten,
the God whose very name is holy, set apart from all others.
His mercy flows in wave after wave
on those who are in awe before him.
He bared his arm and showed his strength,
scattered the bluffing braggarts.
He knocked tyrants off their high horses,
pulled victims out of the mud.
The starving poor sat down to a banquet;
the callous rich were left out in the cold.
He embraced his chosen child, Israel;
He remembered, piled up the mercies, piled them high.
It's exactly what he promised,
beginning with Abraham and right up to now.

We sing another version of Mary's words in hymn 161 (TiS) *Tell out my soul.*

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Regular service times (except January): 9.30 am each Sunday.

Children's program: 4th Sunday of the month, during term time.

During January, and occasionally at other times, we hold combined services with the other Stonnington region Churches, instead of meeting at Armadale.