

WHEATLEY URC NEWSLETTER



December 2019

Covering Thoughts

Choices constantly challenge us or delight us. Do we clean the house or visit a friend, pick a sweet or savoury snack when hungry, plan a holiday abroad or go to Bournemouth again? Often both alternatives are equally appealing. At other times the options fill us with dread and we wish that things could be different. We are encouraged to believe that accepting whatever comes and revelling in it makes for a richer life. It is easy to say this when life is going well, but what of those who have suffered flooding this winter, or others driven from their homes by forest fires?

When we were walking the Moray coast in the summer we passed through a forest that had been damaged by fire. The sight and smell of that remained with me even when we returned home and I had to paint not only the bleak burned woodland but also how I imagined the fire would have been as it engulfed the trees. What you see on the cover is a part of that painting. It is called Burning Bright and hopefully it suggests something of the beauty, warmth and illumination of fire while holding a warning of its dangerous power to devour.

John O'Donohue in his book Divine Beauty explores how negative and destructive experiences can be the means of teaching us something of value, giving us a gift of insight that we would not have received without them. He describes how beauty can be discovered in the darkness of despair and pain, and he also suggests that while words are often inadequate to convey the wounded beauty emerging from hard experiences, it can be expressed through music, poetry or art.

Most of us given the choice would go for the pleasant option, but life does not always give us choices. We inherit our genes. Our health and environment are not entirely ours to control. Accidents happen. People let us down. So what do we do when bad things happen to us? Let us try not to complain but see if we can accept what happens as a treasured gift.

Christine

A Thought for December

Did you watch 'His Dark Materials' on Sunday evenings on BBC1 this last month? It is an adaptation of the first book in Philip Pullman's trilogy of 'Northern Lights', 'The Subtle Knife', and 'The Amber Spyglass'.

I discovered these books when I accompanied Mark on a sabbatical trip to Australia. We had heard a review when they first came out that although they were written for older children, they were very readable and enjoyable by adults.

For those who have neither read the books nor seen the TV adaptation, the story is of the adventures of a young orphan girl growing up initially in Oxford. But this is not the Oxford of today, although at first it seems to be medieval Oxford, it is gradually revealed to be an alternative Oxford in an alternative Universe. The most striking thing about this alternative world is that each person is accompanied at all times by a creature who converses with them and shares their innermost thoughts, fears and desires. Pullman calls this creature a 'daemon' but don't think of 'devil', think more about an embodiment of a conscience or a soul. In children their daemon is a 'shapeshifter' and can change form from an animal to a bird to an insect until in adolescence it begins to settle to one form. The daemon must always be within a few feet of its human – and vice versa, so the daemon can lead its human - or hold her back. It is taboo to touch another's daemon or interfere with it in any way. As the story unfolds, we learn of a horrifying plot to separate children from their daemons in an attempt to preserve their 'innocence' and how Lyra becomes involved in the heroic mission to rescue kidnapped children and their daemons.

In Australia, far from my (teenage) children, I had the strongest sense of the bond between the person and her daemon being like a mother's bond to her child. One person becoming two with the severing of the umbilical cord at birth but continuing in invisible form throughout life.

Philip Pullman is a powerful storyteller but a determined atheist, whose imagination was nurtured by his clergyman grandfather. It just might be that despite his intention to criticise organised religion this allegorical story is saying much about the relationship of God and Man.

When we hear again the Christmas story this year let us listen for how it speaks of the unbreakable bond between God and each one of us; looking for the fully human baby, bound from birth to God by an invisible bond.

With blessings for a happy Christmas

Phyllis Williams

Prayers

Please remember in your prayers the members in Malcolm Benson's pastoral list: Ann & Fred Hardiman, Ann & Norbert Gadja, Graham Dobson, Joel Rasmussen, Ann Wild, Jeff Clarke, Siobhan Fraser and Alyn Shipton.

We also ask you to pray for the members of the Communications' Team: Phyllis Williams, Christine Bainbridge, Zena Knight, Bobbie Stormont, Moira Watson

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Amnesty 'Write for Rights' Campaign

Again this year I will provide some booklets, probably the second Sunday in December for anyone who wishes, to join in Amnesty's campaign for 2019.

However, if you visit [amnesty.org.uk/write-rights](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/write-rights) you will be able to access all you need. For this reason I will order fewer booklets than previously.

Hopefully lots of us will join in again this year. It is a small thing we can do that really does make a difference.

Robert Harding

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Christmas Cards

If you send Christmas cards to your friends at church, why not send just one, to be pinned up on the noticeboard and then send the money saved to a charity of your choice.

Ann Hardiman



Prayer before Worship

Lord God, breath of all life,
As we gather for worship
We seek answers to our questions,
Balm for our wounds,
Peace for our troubles,
Meaning for our suffering,
A listener to our prayers,
Stillness for our busyness,
A witness to our joys,
A candle in the dark,
A companion on the way,
Guide us and protect us
Amen

Peter Devlin

~*~



Cogwheel Celebration Weekend *11th and 12th January 2020*



We're planning a full programme of events to celebrate the completion of our project.

Although the exact programme is not yet confirmed, we will be including a range of events to appeal to all ages and tastes.

There will be a concert on the Saturday evening with Alyn Shipton and Roger Simmonds on the bill, a Family Board Games Café on Saturday afternoon, a quiet service of meditation and movement on the Sunday morning and the celebrations will culminate in a service of Dedication for the Mulberry Room on Sunday afternoon.

As ever we will be offering true Wheatley URC hospitality throughout.
So do make a note in your next year's diary so you won't miss out.

New Life, New Hope – our 2019 Advent Wreath

A conversation with a child at school, many years ago, still resonates in my mind. She often confused her words, substituting similar sounding ones. These are called malapropisms I believe. She referred to Thomas as one of 'Jesus's recycles'.

This year's Advent wreath project follows the theme of 'New Life, New Hope'. Following on from last year's theme, 'God's World in Our Hands', it encourages us not to be wasteful or greedy with the earth's precious resources. Our Harvest wall art theme, 'An Honourable Harvest', was inspired by Robin Wall Kimmerer's book, *'Braiding Sweetgrass'*. Here she talks about the earth's gifts, taking only that which is offered to us and in addition, giving something back in gratitude; reciprocity.

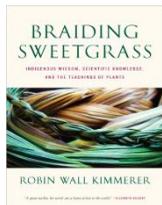
Robin is a professor, scientist, botanist and a citizen of the Potawatomi Nation in America. Her writing is influenced by the rituals and beliefs of these peoples, who have been outcast throughout history. Their frugal lifestyle and deep respect for the world in which they live, carry a powerful message. Berries shared at their ceremonies, remind people of the delicious gift given to us, but in return, the seeds must be planted for their continuation. The berry teachings have been abandoned in our greed for fossil fuels. The gifts of wind, sun and water do not harm the fragile environment and if we had invested in them, we would not have to fear the climate change issues today.

The Advent wreath is constructed from old tin cans, maps, book pages and bits of fabric no longer needed in their original state. I have tried to use up candles and other bits which were purchased for previous projects. The challenge has been to create a beautiful wreath from refuse.

In contrast to the old refuse, I have used new, growing herbs to represent, 'New Life'. Many of these herbs were used during biblical times and I was interested to read that thyme would most likely have been in the manger where Jesus was laid, as it was commonly fed to the cattle then. It grew all over the land. Herbs were, and still are, used for medicinal purposes as well as to flavour food.

In order to keep these herbs alive, there are hydroponic containers made from recycled bottles. Hydroponic gardening is used in places where there is little or no fertile land on which to cultivate plants. Of course we can also do this at home.

The message in this year's Advent wreath is a reminder that we should use the earth's gifts respectfully. Likewise, God uses us to make His world a better place. He never casts us aside, even when we feel we are no longer of any use. From our birth we are continually 'recycled', until our time on this earth is over and we return to Him.



* *Braiding Sweetgrass, Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teaching of Plants*, by Robin Wall Kimmerer is published by Milkweed editions. ISBN: 978-1-57131-356-0]

Pauline Shelley

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Advent Prayers

We used these prayers in Advent last year, when lighting the candles in the Advent Wreath. You may like to use them week by week this year, for your own prayers and reflection.



Week 1 – Faith

Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.' So Abram went, as the Lord had told him.

[Gen 12: 1-4a]

Eternal God, we praise you for the people of faith who have gone before us, from ancient times and down the generations to our own day. We thank you for our own faith journeys, which have led us to this point in our lives, and to this place where we find love and fellowship.

Week 2 – Hope

A voice cries out,

“Prepare in the wilderness a road for the Lord!

Clear the way in the desert for our God!

Fill every valley; level every mountain.

The hills will become a plain,

and the rough country will be made smooth.

Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed,

and all people will see it.

The Lord himself has promised this.” [Isaiah 40: 3-5]

God of justice, we remember the prophetic voices which brought a message of warning, justice and hope. We have our own hopes for the future, for ourselves and for our world. We pray for the work and witness of our church, that we may be able to serve our community in the coming days.

Week 3 – Love

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. [John 13: 34-35]

Compassionate God, we remember that you came amongst us as a vulnerable child, cared for by loving parents. We thank you for the love we know in our lives. Help us to share that love with others, especially with those around us who are particularly vulnerable or marginalised.

Week 4 – Peace

For a child has been born for us,

a son given to us;

authority rests upon his shoulders;

and he is named

Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. [Isaiah 9:6]

Prince of Peace, we pray for a divided world. Violence and war bring suffering to so many, disputes bring division amongst leaders and people, breakdown in personal relationships bring hurt and mistrust. Help us as your people to be instruments of your peace.

Pauline Main & Pauline Shelley

Community - Home and Away

Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust Ride & Stride - September 2019

I am pleased to now be able to reveal the results of Wheatley URC's efforts in this respect. Together we raised a magnificent £508.00 this year, which will be shared 50/50 between the work of OHCT and Wheatley URC.

My grateful thanks to all who took part as striders, riders, sitters and sponsors, it could not have happened without any one of you. Particular thanks are due to striders Sybil Beaton, Ann Hardiman and Frances Simpson who collectively raised £202.50 in direct sponsorship and Jill and Gordon Ewbank from Wheatley Community Church who cycled in our name, raising £185.50 in sponsorship.

I led a walk along the route of the 280 bus between Wheatley and Thame (with a little help from the bus), calling at nine churches of various denominations and none, including Waterstock and Albury with Tiddington where we had our picnic lunch.

At Thame URC we were entertained to music from two bands rehearsing for The Thame Arts Festival and we shared their tea and cakes! We were also greatly impressed by our visit to the spacious, modern, brick and timber finished, beautifully peaceful St Joseph's RC Church with its large attached community



rooms and facilities. (Well worth a visit if you are in Thame with a little time to spare). I was joined on the walk by Liz, Sybil Beaton, Frances Simpson, Rob Holdaway and Pauline and Chris Shelley and between us we raised £120 in donations.

Tony Barry

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A First



The Elders' first meeting in our new Mulberry room on Thursday 31st October

Link to Hope Shoebox Christmas Appeal



I am very happy to report that I delivered **49 boxes** to the collection point in Brill on 3rd November. This is an excellent result and a truly ecumenical effort as all the churches participated: the URC, St Mary's, Our Lady of Lourdes and the Wheatley Community Church. A huge thank you to everybody who participated in one

way or another. The Link to Hope trucks are going to Eastern Europe around the beginning of December and will bring joy to the poorest of the poor. You can read more on their website;

<https://linktohope.co.uk/shoebox-appeal-2019>

Laurence Devlin

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Foods from Around the World: Evening for Refugee Resource



A very successful evening to raise money for Refugee Resource in Oxford was held in Wheatley on November 8th. People hosted and cooked delicious food from one of the Refugee Resource 'Come to Our Table' recipe books. Below is the recipe for one of these tasty dishes. Thank you to all who hosted.

Koresh Ghaimeh

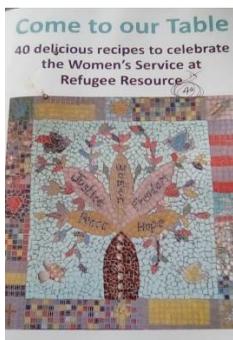
Iran – (6 servings - from the kitchen of Najmeh Khafrizarjani)

Ingredients:

750g stewing lamb or beef	3 or 4 crushed dried limes
250g split peas (used instead)	(freshly squeezed lime juice can be used instead)
3 or 4 onions	salt & black pepper
500g potatoes	1 tbsp spices (tumeric, paprika)
½ cup cooking oil	2 or 3 tbsp tomato paste

Directions:

- Before cooking, soak split peas in warm water for 2-3 hours
- Peel and thinly slice onions, then fry in oil until golden brown. Wash and cut meat into small pieces and fry in onion until colour changes. Add 3 glasses of water and bring to boil. Let boil slowly for 1 – ½ hours until mostly cooked, adding more water if needed.
- Peel and wash potatoes and cut into small pieces. Add potatoes, split peas, salt, pepper, spices and tomato paste and continue boiling slowly until cooked. Add more water if needed.
- If using dried limes add in with other ingredients. If using lime juice, add in towards the end and continue cooking for another 3-4 minutes.
- Adjust seasoning to taste. Serve this delicious Khoresh with rice.



You will find another delicious recipe in the January edition of the newsletter. 'Come to our Table' recipe books 1 and 2 are available to buy for £7.50 from Liz Barry. All proceeds go to Refugee Resource Oxford.

Bobbie Stormont



CHURCH CALENDAR for December 2019

Everyone is invited to stay for coffee or tea after 10 am Sunday services

Date	1 st Dec	8 th Dec	15 th Dec	22 Dec	25 th Dec	29 th Dec
Service	Morning Service with H.C.	Morning Service	Morning Service with H.C.	Morning Service & Carol Service	Morning Service Christmas Day	Morning Service
Time	10 am	10 am	10 am	10 am & 4pm	9.15am	10 am
Worship Leader	Rev. Pauline Main	Richard Bainbridge	Rev. Colin Thompson	Laurence Devlin Rev. Colin Thompson	Rev. Pauline Main	Lay Led Elders' Team
Vestry Elder	Liz Barry	Laurence Devlin	Catherine Harding	Malcolm Benson	Peter Devlin	Laurence Devlin
Welcomer	Peter Devlin	Moira Watson	Tom Goss	Moira Watson	Laurence Devlin	Liz Barry
Steward	Angela Holdaway	Robert Harding	Pauline Shelley	Bobbie Stormont	Sybil Beaton	Ann Bettess
Reader	Catherine Harding	Angela Holdaway	Mike Matejtschuk	Chris Shelley		Ann Hardiman
Prayers	Ann Bettess	Ann Hardiman	Tom Goss	Christine Bainbridge		Liz Barry
Flowers	Advent	Advent	Advent	Flower Team	Flower Team	Allison Towner

Elders' names in **Bold** are on Communion duty.

Simple evening worship in the style of Taize at Barns Close on Sunday 8th December.



COMMON LECTIONARY READINGS for December 2019

Note: leaders may choose to use other readings

Date	1 st Dec	8 th Dec	15 th Dec	22 nd Dec	29 th Dec
First Reading	Isaiah 2: 1-5	Isaiah 11: 1-10	Isaiah 35: 1-10	Isaiah 7: 10-16	Isaiah 63: 7-9
Psalm	Psalm 12 2	Psalm 72: 1-7 & 18-19	Psalm 146: 5-10	Psalm 8: 1-7 & 17-19	Psalm 148
New Testament	Romans 13: 11-14	Romans 15: 4-13	James 5: 7-10	Romans 1: 1-7	Hebrews 2: 10-18
Gospel	Matthew 24: 36-44	Matthew 3: 1-12	Matthew 11: 2-11	Matthew 1: 18-25	Matthew 2: 13-23

OCCASIONAL EVENTS in December 2019

1 st Dec	Sunday	9.00am 2.30 to 4.30 pm 6.30pm	Food Bank Carol Service Choir Practice Afternoon tea in Hall Pulse – Discussion Mulberry Room
3 rd Dec	Tuesday	2.15 pm	St Mary's Guild – Christmas Party
5 th Dec	Thursday	10 am to noon 7.20pm	Coffee Morning, Church open Elders' meeting
8 th Dec	Sunday	9.00am 6.30pm 7.30 pm	Carol Service Choir Practice Pulse – Film Night Mulberry Room Taize at 3 Barns Close Holton
9 th Dec	Monday	2.00 to 4.00 pm	Not So Young Club
10 th Dec	Tuesday	1.00 pm	Lunch Club Two
15 th Dec	Sunday	8.00am 9.00am	Morning Meditation and breakfast Carol Service Choir Practice
16 th Dec	Monday	2.00 to 4.00 pm	Not So Young Club
17 th Dec	Tuesday	1.00pm	Lunch Club
19 th Dec	Thursday	6.00pm	Longest Night/"Blue Christmas"
22 nd Dec	Sunday	6.00pm	Carol Service & seasonal refreshment

WEEKLY EVENTS (NB several activities are term-time only)

<i>Mindfulness Sitting Group</i>	<i>Monday 8.50 to 9.40 am</i>
<i>Brownies & Rainbows (Term time)</i>	<i>Monday 5.30 to 7.00 pm</i>
<i>Choir Around the Piano (Term Time)</i>	<i>Monday 7.30 to 9.00 pm</i>
<i>Wheatley Singers (Term Time)</i>	<i>Tuesday 7.10 to 9.00 pm</i>
<i>Pre-School Music Group (Term time)</i>	<i>Wednesday 9.30 am and 10.30 am</i>
<i>Guides (Term time)</i>	<i>Wednesday 7.00 to 8.30 pm</i>
<i>Prayers and Breakfast</i>	<i>Thursday 8.00 am</i>
<i>Mindfulness Sitting Group</i>	<i>Thursday 8.50 to 9.40 am</i>
<i>Table Tennis</i>	<i>Friday 10.00 am to 12 noon</i>
<i>Hymn Practice</i>	<i>Sunday 9.30 to 9.45 am</i>

Disclaimer: The Editors of this Newsletter welcome letters, articles and announcements from individuals and organisations but reserve the right to publish or not, and to edit.

Deadlines: Monday 16th December 2019 is the deadline for the January Newsletter. Please send copy to: newsletter@wheatleyurc.org.uk and not to individuals and please try to use A5 layout. Paper copy can be given to Bobbie Stormont – again A5.

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“Sorry We Missed You”

Ken Loach’s latest film “Sorry we missed you” is a searing indictment of the way that the rights of workers in the gig economy and in-home care-work are eroded in order to save money for those who “employ” them.

Based on hours of interviews with those affected, it’s a companion film to “I, Daniel Blake” also set in Newcastle. The man of the family is a delivery driver. His wife is a nurse and home-care worker on a zero hours contract. They are hanging on to life by a thread, despite the fact that they both work.

Do you like to track your parcel when you send it? Yes. Why not? But consider this. If you and I can track our parcels as they make their way to us, so can the firm who dispatches and delivers. So, every movement of the guy who knocks on your door with a delivery can be monitored, every toilet break checked, every missed delivery punished. Holidays? Not paid. High rise flats? Well there’s a limit on each delivery time so what if the lift is not working, or what if the person isn’t in and the neighbour won’t sign for the parcel?

If this makes uncomfortable watching, Ken Loach is unrepentant. “These are all true stories” he says. He and his team had been researching food banks for “I, Daniel Blake” and found that many of those who used them are in work.

If it were only Ken Loach who speaks this way, we might think his campaigning a little strong or exaggerated, but a recent Inclusive Growth Commission chaired by Stephanie Flanders (ex BBC economics correspondent) found the same thing. And Theresa May, before she became so entangled in Brexit that no other aspirations could be pursued, identified those who were “just about managing” as needing substantial attention. Loach is simply saying that there are also those on the other

side of the “just about” line. They’re not managing at all - despite working every hour of the day.

This has implications for all our politics whichever party we’ll vote for this month. We used to feel reassured that the country was faring okay if most people had work and the unemployment rate was low. No longer.

As the election looms, might we keep in mind the question: how can we, politicians and people, churches and charities, work together to change fundamentally a system that appears to be increasingly dependent on exploiting the weakest members of our society?

What can we do? We can pray and work; work and pray. Pray for a sea-change in public opinion that would create a wind of change; a wind that would catch the sails of our political representatives.

Over the past several years, since a colleague and I were invited to teach mindfulness in Parliament, I have had the privilege of coming to know many members of both Houses, and of all parties and independents (some very newly independent). I have not met a single one who has anything but the highest ideals and deep passion for doing the right thing, and work tirelessly and with little thanks. But they, like many of us, get caught in the business of getting by day by day, doing their best to work for the little of the common good that seems do-able within a reasonable time horizon. So how do they prioritise? By staying incredibly sensitive to the public mood. This is where we can make a difference. We can ask questions; we can look out for and support those charities and organisations that already have the ear of government. We can stay in touch with the URC and sister churches' *Joint Public Issues Team* (look for it on the web - it's even got a Wikipedia entry).

Can we make a difference from a small church in rural Oxfordshire? Why not? Already our sermons have been downloaded a total of 34,675 times, an average of 141 times per sermon, listened to by people all over the world. Let’s continue to pray to change the wind direction, and work to change the world.

Mark Williams

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Children & Poverty - my experience as a judge

“Whoever receives one child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.” This famous saying by Jesus, reported in Matthew 18:1-5, shows the importance that Jesus gave to the most vulnerable members in his society. And indeed, this is echoed in another famous contemporary saying, attributed to Mahatma Gandhi, “The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members.”

It seems then that the pitiful progress achieved in alleviating poverty and prioritizing children’s welfare is a serious indictment of our society. Child poverty has been rising consistently since 2011/12 according to a recent report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation which reveals that 4.1 million children now live in poverty, a rise of 500,000 in the last five years. That represents 9 children in a class of 30! “This is much faster than we would expect based on population growth: the total number of children has risen by 3%, while the number of children in poverty has risen by 15%,” adds the report. Nearly half of children in lone-parent families live in poverty (49%) compared with one in four of those in couple families (25%).

Poverty is a common feature in many of the cases I deal with which involve children. There are 7,400 children in care (or “looked after” as they are officially called) in this country. Poverty combined with mental health issues, addiction and violent partners form the background to care proceedings which are brought before the courts by Oxfordshire County Council. It is worth adding to illustrate this, that three women a week are killed by their partners and 80 children a year killed by their parents. Sadly, many children I deal with, are victims of sexual abuse and exploitation, their vulnerability made infinitely worse by the ease with which sexual predators can use social media to access pornography, establish contacts with paedophile networks and groom innocent victims. Single women, usually poor and with low self-esteem, are also often targeted by sex offenders who are then able to gain access to children that way.

Consequently, much of my time as a judge is spent protecting children, including from parents and family members: I often make orders to protect children from exposure to violence in the home, female genital mutilation or forced marriage and it is within my power to remove a child from his/her family if it can be shown that he/she has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm as a result of parental neglect. These children are then placed into foster care or in some cases adopted. This hopefully can improve their chances in life but as the report of the Joseph

Rowntree Foundation also reveals, “children who have experienced poverty are more likely to have problems with relationships, including an increased likelihood of being bullied and fighting with their friends. In turn, these problems influence the way children perform at school and their likelihood of finding a way out of poverty as adults.”

But not all is doom and gloom as there has been huge progress in how the law deals with children in the last thirty years: The Children Act 1989 put the emphasis firmly on the welfare of the child and the right of the child to have a relationship with both parents provided it is safe. This involves an analysis of their wishes and feelings and their emotional and physical needs and the parents’ ability to meet their needs. We are therefore routinely helped in legal cases involving children, by child psychologists, parenting assessments, care plans set up by Social Services and family therapy. In many cases, fostering or adoption is the right outcome for children who can receive the love and attention they never had. Michael Gove, Nelson Mandela and Steve Jobs among others were adopted!

Another area of progress concerns the way the police deals with children and vulnerable women: They now receive expert training to interview children and domestic abuse of women and of children is taken very seriously, much more than before. Single mothers entering a new relationship can obtain details of a new boyfriend’s criminal record. This is called Clare’s Law. There are also mother and baby units run by Social Services where mothers can get intensive monitoring and supervision so that they can be helped to take the necessary measures which will allow them to keep their children.

Judges dealing with cases involving children is nothing new: Famously King Solomon was able to judge which of two women, each claiming to be the mother of a child, was in fact the biological mother. My colleagues and I may not have his wisdom, but we try to do our best!

Peter Devlin



Voix Celeste

There was a time
Of silence,
Of darkness,
Of whiteness of snow, perhaps,
Sparkling in starlight,
On the quiet hillside.

Then was a time
Of angels singing in the sky, rejoicing!
Music of Heaven
Premiered on Earth, perhaps;
Echoing everything
Hopeful, true and beautiful
Ever heard here before!

This was a time
When the open-air audience
Were startled shepherds!
And scattering sheep, perhaps.
On this lovely night
A celestial message was spoken,
And all the angels sang
Praise to the King of Heaven,
And peace on Earth!

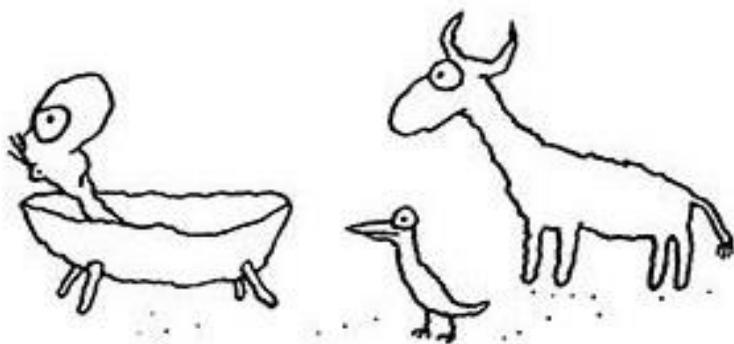
Then was the time
The shepherds left their sheep,
In the care of the angels, perhaps,
And made their way (singing, perhaps),
To a stable in Bethlehem,
As the angel had directed,
Where the Saviour of the world
Had just been born!

So much they did not know,
And so little we know, millenia later;
But now, as then,
All that is needed, perhaps,
In every dark night,
Sparkling, or not,
Is trust, obedience and acceptance
Of His amazing love,
Who comes to save us,
Not just at Christmas-time,
But always,
And forever!

'Glory to God in the highest... !' (Luke 2:14a)

David Herring

Love is born
With a dark and troubled face.
When hope is dead
And in the most unlikely place
Love is born,
Love is always born.



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