

Advent...

Looking together at the Gospel of Mark



"The Gospel of Mark is stunning. From its opening declaration heralding an astounding new move of God, right through to its somewhat surprising ending, Mark leaves us in no doubt that this is the greatest story ever told, one that changed the world forever." Tracy Cotterell

Join us this Advent as we read this amazing story together. Beginning on **Tuesday 30 November** we will be hosting a weekly gathering to read select passages in the Gospel of Mark, reflecting on what this account of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus means for our Monday to Saturday lives.

Meetings will be held via **Zoom** (no need to travel on cold winter nights!) each Tuesday starting at about **8pm**, with a mix of Bible reading, discussion and prayer, and lasting no more than ninety minutes. There will be six sessions, continuing into January with a break over Christmas (no meeting on 28 December).

We will be using Mark: Living The Way Of Jesus In The World written by Tracy Cotterell and published by the London Institute of Contemporary Christianity. You can buy a copy at their website. Although you can still take part without the book, it contains a lot of extra material which I am sure you will find useful and interesting.

Everyone is welcome and there is no limit on numbers. Put the dates in your diary and look out for further details and the Zoom link to follow. If you have any questions please email me.

Sam Elliot



Advent & Christmas Services

Sunday 5 December

11:00 Holy Communion

led by Mark Dennis (Trinity Elder & lay preacher)

Sunday 12 December

11:00 Worship for all ages, including Children's Nativity Play

Sunday 19 December

No morning service

18:30 Carols & Readings by candlelight

followed by mulled wine & mince pies

CHRISTMAS EVE

17:30 Christingle service

A joyful celebration for children and families to share the light of Jesus and spread a message of hope

23:15 Communion by candlelight

This traditional, reflective Communion Service provides an opportunity to take a deep breath before plunging into the joy of Christmas Day. We sing traditional carols and share in the bread and wine. Entering the church on the 24th, we walk out into Christmas Day ...

CHRISTMAS DAY

10:30 Christmas Day celebration

A short service to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, Hope of the World. Children are invited to bring one of their presents

Sunday 26 December - Boxing Day

No service

Nativity crib scenes

A selection of Christmas crib scenes will be displayed on Sunday 12 December - our Nativity service. Thank you to those who have offered to bring theirs along to church to share with everyone.



Further offers will be most welcome. Please contact Catherine Paul (catherine.f.paul@btinternet.com) as soon as possible.

Faith in Action Christmas gifts

Now that Faith in Action has resumed a near normal service, a traditional Christmas lunch is planned for the service users with a gift for each. Traditionally Trinity members have provided the gifts and last year we had a wonderful response to the request for backpacks.

This year we would like to return to the tradition of providing wrapped gifts labelled for a man or woman (over 90% of our service users are men). Suggested items are new hats, gloves, scarves, warm socks, toiletries, chocolate and biscuits.

If you are able to provide a gift, please bring it to church on **Sunday 12 December** or contact Cathy Dundee who will arrange collection.



Thank you for your generosity and support.

Cathy Dundee & May Nicol

DECEMBER



A very happy birthday to those celebrating birthdays in December, including

Andrew Davies, Chris Jeffery, Harry Khurshid, Greta Malherbe, Dena-Jo Nunoo, Kwabena Sarpong, Yaw Sarpong, Johannes van der Walt, Sophia van der Walt, Jacob Woo and Janet Young.

Used stamps

For many years, Edna Sloan has collected our used postage stamps to be sold in aid of St Raphael's Hospice. Edna has now decided to retire from this and will not be collecting any more stamps after 31 December.

Our thanks go to Edna for helping us to support the Hospice in this way over the years.



Fairtrade Stall



Come and buy at the stall on Sunday mornings during coffee. Still available.... Advent calendars, chocolate coins, chocolate angels, Christmas cards, wrapping paper and more.



Covid 19 has had a massive impact on policy towards the homeless. Last winter, virtually all those sleeping rough were moved into hotels, which would otherwise have been closed because of travel restrictions. This obviously reduced the need for traditional winter night shelters. However, there are always a few who fall through the gaps so the need remained. But the need to comply with Covid protocols meant that the normal night shelter model of having a dozen people in the same room overnight, as well as eating together, was clearly not safe (remember that most of the population did not get a vaccination until the spring).

Most places in London mothballed their night shelters but, in Merton, the Merton Winter Night Shelter (MWNS) group (which comprises about twenty faith organisations in the Borough) supported a YMCA initiative to provide emergency accommodation in a 5-bedroom flat owned by the Lantern Methodist Church in Griffiths Road, Wimbledon. This operated from 1 December to 31 May with onsite volunteers and the evening meal being provided externally; Trinity's contribution was provision of the food on Sunday evenings from 1 February until the project ended.

This winter it has taken a while to work out how the winter shelter can operate in the Borough. The YMCA have proposed using the Lantern Methodists' flat again; the MWNS group are much keener on operating a traditional shelter in compliance with Covid protections given that most volunteers are double or triple vaccinated and regular testing is much easier. Volunteering in a night shelter is much more interesting than at the flats because there is much more contact with guests. A plan has been drawn up to use the Salvation Army Hall in Kingston Road (from where both Faith-in-Action operates and the Wimbledon Mosque used for their night shelter shift pre-2020) as a 'static shelter.' All organisations can operate from this venue providing an evening meal, overnight cover and breakfast as in past winters. In fact, for Trinity, this would be a return to our first night

shelter experience in 2011/12 when we operated from St Andrew's, Herbert Road.

Currently, the plans are still being finalised and the Council need to clear the proposed Covid protocols at the static site. (We hope that, by the time you read this, clearance will have been given). All volunteers, for example, will need to do a lateral flow test before each of their shifts and guests' sleeping stations will be separated by protective screens for the 8 spaces available. The aim is to operate from 3 January to 27 February with the hope that the shelter can be extended into March depending on the resources available.

We are very keen that Trinity can continue its long support for MWNS. In the first instance, we are focussing on covering our usual Sunday evening/Monday morning slot from 6 to 27 February. Our regular volunteers are aware of what is happening but we will be delighted to hear from anyone else who would be interested in getting involved. There may also be opportunities to volunteer in support of the YMCA at the Lantern Methodists' flats. In any event, we will keep you updated with how the plans come together and how else you can show your support.

Ralph Goodchild (ralph.goodchild@gmail.com & tel. 07531 428750),
May Nicol (maymbnicol@aol.com & tel. 07768 310666 and Robin
Goodchild (robin.goodchild@sky.com & tel. 07714 095007)



Christmas collections for Crisis

Again this Christmas, our offerings at all our Christmas services will be donated to the work of Crisis - the national charity for homeless people. You can also give online using the 'Donate' button on the church website.



Preparing for Christmas at Trinity

Can you imagine how many things are done behind the scenes this month to prepare for our Christmas services? Here are just a few of them.....

- All the services are planned and prepared, with readers, prayers and music arranged.
- Trinity's Christmas card is designed, printed and delivered to neighbours.
- Advent candles are bought, and the Advent wreath is made.
- The Nativity is rehearsed, and costumes sorted out.
- The Christmas tree is installed and decorated.
- Candlesticks are put up for Carols by Candlelight.
- The choir rehearses for Carols by Candlelight.
- Mulled wine & mince pies are organised.
- Christingle components are bought.
- The church is prepared and the sound system is operated.
- Services are prepared for projection on the screens.



The ministerial vacancy

A meeting of the Vacancy Team with two representatives of the Synod Area Pastoral Committee - to discuss the Pastorate Profile for Trinity and the scoping of the proposed role of our next minister - took place on 1 November.



I am pleased to report that the Pastoral Committee Convenor has advised us that, following the 1 November discussion and having reviewed the Pastorate Profile carefully, the Pastoral Committee has recommended that the Trinity pastorate should be scoped at 100%. This means that Trinity should have a full-time minister (who would be expected, as is the traditional practice, to support other URC congregations as and when necessary). The Southern Synod Moderator has been advised accordingly.

As has been explained on several occasions over the past year, the URC nationally - in common with other denominations - is struggling with a serious shortage of ministers. In the URC, deployment of ministers across the country has become gradually unbalanced and is now seriously so. It has been decided that, for a time, there is to be a moratorium, across the whole of Southern Synod, on the filling of existing and any new minister vacancies. A Southern Synod strategy on the deployment of stipendiary and other ministers is being developed, and is expected next Spring. Trinity will continue to monitor the position closely in the meantime.

Thus, it is not possible yet to predict when we will be enabled to advertise 'our' minister vacancy within the denomination, but it is now almost certain that the Trinity vacancy will not be filled during 2022.

There will be a report on the vacancy position at Trinity during the Church Meeting on 24 November.

If you have any questions about the above, please do ask or email me.

*Sandy McLeish, Vacancy Team Leader
November 2021*



The Wise men: who were they?

Who were the Wise Men? Were they Magi, or kings from distant places? And how many were there? Whilst St Matthew concentrates on the important story - of rich gentiles worshipping the poor infant Jesus, none of the other questions is answered. It is understandable that Christians down the ages should have wanted to know more.

The earliest tradition is that they were Magi, members of a priestly caste of the Zoroastrian religion from Persia and that there were three of them (possibly because they bore three gifts to take with them). Zoroastrians believed, like the Jews, that there was one God and that, sometime in the future, a redeemer would come to save them. They did not claim descent from any biblical figures: they were true Gentiles. The Magi performed a similar function to the Levites in Judaism: ministering priests were chosen from their tribe and they wielded considerable power. St Matthew tells us that the wise men "saw a star as it rose" (this was probably a planet as stars are not mobile). The magi practised astrology: they would have picked up a planet as it moved across the heavens. They were regarded by their community as being very wise.

However, a later tradition maintained that they were kings. There may not be any conflict between these two theories. One of these kings was thought to be a Persian, as well as being a Magi. Another was said to come from Armenia, and a third from India. At that time Armenia was at the northern tip of the Persian Empire, which also included that part of India west of the River Indus. The probability is that they were all Zoroastrians. The possibility of an African king is also mentioned and this will be discussed later.



St Matthew is very specific when it comes to identifying the gifts the Wise Men took to Bethlehem: frankincense, myrrh and gold. Both frankincense and myrrh come from countries either side of the mouth of the Red Sea: Yemen

and Oman in the north, and Somalia in the south. At the time of Christ, the trade was already 200 years old. The Egyptians burnt incense in their temples and the rich used it to perfume their homes. In Jerusalem, in the first Temple they constructed an Incense Altar. For the Jews, incense was seen as a metaphor, both for prayers going up to God, as well as his presence amongst his people. In 1500BC an Egyptian queen is recorded as having taken her fleet down to the mouth of the Red Sea on what was a buying mission. Solomon did likewise at about the same time. To illustrate how valuable incense was regarded, in the Song of Songs, the Queen of Sheba gives Solomon a collection of aromatic ingredients, including frankincense and myrrh, described in one particular English translation as "the rarest perfume".

A place in Yemen called Ophir was said to produce the finest gold known to man (the Gold of Ophir is frequently mentioned in the Bible). The Wise Men obviously wished to take with them the most precious gifts they could find, and it seems highly likely that they came to Yemen to find them. There was already a large Persian community in Yemen, attracted by the incense trade, and, indeed, the Wise Men may have been part of this community. If there was an African king in their group it would probably have been in Yemen that he would have joined them.

How would the Wise Men have travelled to Bethlehem? There was already an ancient route by which incense was supplied to the Holy Land: the Incense Route, beginning at the southern tip of Arabia, passing through the Yemen, where they would have joined it. They might have broken their journey in Petra. After Petra the road divided into two, the westerly route towards Egypt and the road to the north, which they would have taken, towards Judea. The going would not have been easy: The Incense Route is full of precipitous passes and, at the end of their journey, they would have had a steep climb to Jerusalem itself, which is situated on a mountain.

When we think of the Wise Men we probably remember admiring the beauty of an Italian masterpiece, rather than marvel at the extraordinary scene of three rich men worshipping a poor baby in a manger. The message is perennial.

With thanks to Vernon Williams for forwarding this article by John Kennedy, a former neighbour and resident at Liberty House who died in 2019.

From the archives

The third part of our look back at Dr Macgregor's visit to the Far East in 1922/23

Part 3: Homeward Bound

On 8 February 1923 Dr Macgregor left Swatow, spent an 'interesting weekend' in Hong Kong and sailed from there on the 12th, bound for Singapore aboard P&O steamer "Khiva".



***Dr Macgregor (centre, with hat) and Dr Maclaren (in dark suit)
at the Swatow Mission Station***

He wrote to his congregation back home from the deck of this 'fine, fast ship', 'sailing', he said, 'over a sea of the deepest and most perfect blue, as smooth as the river at Richmond, and accompanied at times by flying-fish.'

He arrived at Singapore on the 18th. At that time Singapore, along with Penang, Malacca and Dinding, was part of the British ruled 'Straights Settlements' and here he met with the leaders of the three Presbyterian churches, preaching at Prinsep Street church (dating from 1843 and still active in 2021) which housed two of the congregations, and at Tanjong Pagar church. From there he journeyed north into what is now Malaysia, travelling through tropical forest and passing Mount Ophir before spending Sunday at Muar Presbyterian church where he shared in the Communion service during which six men and one woman were baptised.

After ten days in Singapore the Doctor sailed for Port Said. He spent ten days or so in the Holy Land before embarking on the last leg of his journey, arriving back home at Wimbledon on 12 April. Unfortunately he immediately fell ill 'with a severe attack of bronchial catarrh' but he was recovered in time for a congregational social held early in May to welcome him home - he had been away for nearly eight months - and he gave a 'concise and informative account of his varied and interesting experiences'.

Meantime the Revd Dr Hugh Lenox Hodge had completed his time as Minister-in-charge of Trinity on 25 March when a 'crowded evening congregation came to hear him for the last time and to take farewell of one whom they have learned to love and esteem highly'. At a social hour Dr Hodge (who had been paid an honorarium of six guineas a week) was presented with a 'wallet of Treasury notes' and Mrs Hodge with a gold watch. Soon after this he received and accepted a call from First Baltimore Presbyterian Church and he served as minister there for ten years before dying whilst still in office.

Looking back on his tour, Dr Macgregor 'spoke enthusiastically of the Chinese character and the splendid industry and fortitude of the people' adding that they 'need more grit and determination to carry things through. We must look to the Christian church as the greatest agency for creating this. The spirit of the Church is hopeful.'



**There will be a January edition of Trinity News.
Final copy date: 27 December**

Christian Aid

We have heard from Christian Aid that the Christian Aid Week 2021 donations have peaked at over five million pounds! In view of the difficulties there were in collecting this is a really good result. Christian Aid says 'We never fail to be surprised, delighted and grateful for the partnership of churches, volunteers and communities across the UK and Ireland. Thank you.'

Christian Aid's Christmas appeal is focussing on South Sudan where the climate crisis in South Sudan is polluting fragile water sources, killing crops and destroying homes. Combined with years of conflict and the Covid-19 pandemic, it's forcing mums to make impossible choices for their children. Adut was one mum forced to make an impossible choice. She had to give her children dirty water. She knew it wasn't safe, but she had no choice. Not anymore. Adut now has access to a borehole near her home. That means clean water for her children to drink and peace of mind for a loving mum.

Through donations you could help families in South Sudan and around the world stand strong with more boreholes, farming support and the chance to set up a small business.

Christian Aid have set up specific fundraising pages for the churches which support Christian Aid. If you go to – <https://giving.give-star.com/online/christian-aid/trinity-urc-wimbledon-christmas-2021-no-more-impossible-choices> you can make a Christmas donation.

Christian Aid week 2022 is 15 to 21 May.

Mike & Margaret Tulloch

PEACE LOVE HOPE JESUS PEACE LOVE HOPE JESUS

Commitment for Life

Commitment for Life has produced a report about life in Palestine in the occupied Palestinian territory entitled 'Where is Palestine?' and can be downloaded from –

[https://urc.org.uk/images/Commitment for Life/Where Is Palestine 0.pdf](https://urc.org.uk/images/Commitment_for_Life/Where_Is_Palestine_0.pdf)

Margaret Tulloch