

Morialta Vision

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Our Minister reflects on the Christmas narrative

I came across an interesting article on the Christmas story that led me to think again of the Biblical stories of the birth of Jesus. As I was reading and reflecting, I became aware of the traditional perceptions we might have of the story, compared to what actually is not mentioned in the Bible. There are no animals and certainly Mary does not ride a donkey. There is no inn keeper, or stable. There were wise men, but we do not know how many and they entered the house and

not a stable or shed. There are no camels. Mark's gospel does not have a birth story at all and John's gospel begins talking about Jesus being the Light that was coming into the world and Jesus as the Word of God. So during the next few weeks of lead up to Christmas I invite you to take the time to read each first few chapters of the Gospel stories forgetting what you think you know. Then read again in the light of surprise.

Wishing you all a very happy and blessed Christmas.

Rev Bob

Moderator, Bronte Wilson - Christmas Message

As Christmas approaches, many of us take the opportunity to reflect on the past year and think about what the future may hold.

The year of 2019 has been a year of change and instability – in the world, in our country and in the Uniting Church here in South Australia. We have seen natural disasters, new governments and the formation of multiple presbyteries, to name a few. Even in my personal life, I have had a few changes, one of which was my recent appointment as the Moderator of the Uniting Church in South Australia.

Many things are changing around us, but one thing stays the same and that is the unchanging love of God.

His love is expressed in the coming of Jesus which is the Good News that sustains and gives comfort. This allows us to ponder what it really means to be the "Uniting Church" in our communities.

Each of us have the option of choosing not to be connected with others, or we can try to connect in a real way with those we encounter.

We can share in special celebrations, such as community Christmas carols, nativity plays, Christmas tree festivals, and other special occasions. We can build relationships with the people we meet.

Many Uniting Church congregations share in a special Christmas meal, especially for those who are alone during Christmas. Others take time to remember that Christmas is not a joyful time for all and hold "Blue Christmas" services.

For some, we bring extra gifts and food to distribute to those who are doing it tough, through the work of the many organisations in the UnitingCare SA network. There is also an opportunity to give through the UnitingCare Australia Christmas Appeal. By purchasing a bauble tag at Target or donating online, hundreds of families and individuals who are our neighbours here in South Australia will be supported by the dedicated work of UnitingCare.

Another opportunity is to share our money through the Christmas Bowl. Since its humble beginnings in 1949, Christians have been called to address the contrast between our abundance in Australia and the needs of others around the world. Now called "Act for Peace" and run by the National Council of Churches in Australia – eighteen denominations working together to put the word of the Gospel into action – well over \$2 million was raised last year to help within Australia and around the world.

In whichever way you celebrate this Christmas, may you experience God's love and peace as you remember our Saviour's birth and share the joy with those around you and beyond.



Mr Bronte Wilson, our new moderator, with Rev Felicity Amery, (left), UCA President Deidre Palmer (centre), and retiring Moderator Rev Sue Ellis (right).

Chairperson writes ...



Warm greetings to all in the Morialta community, and welcome to this pre-Christmas issue of Vision! As you can see here, there will be some new decorations on our

tree at home this year, to remind me of the Russian church roofs I saw on my recent work trip. I came home to a just-as-busy-as-ever Morialta! The lead-up to the market is always a busy time and this year was no exception – and we were rewarded with the best financial outcome ever, plus the community-building that takes place alongside all the hard work. We also received a number of unsolicited comments about how welcoming and alive the market felt – a real affirmation of our hospitality as we seek to hold to the way of Jesus. Thanks to everyone who helped!

I've taken the opportunity offered by the approaching end of the year to look at our Scenario 2 documentation and see what's been achieved or begun during the year – so here is my report card! Remember that we have adopted a new Mission/Vision statement to

guide and focus us, and all of what follows should be thought about in the context of that statement!

- Playgroup maintained as a priority, resourced by an intercultural MUC volunteer team; YES
- Prioritise spending on playgroup coordinator salary YES
- 'Introduction to Christianity' group with intercultural focus established and resourced, initially for members of English Conversation Group. YES
- We maintain YES, resource YES and advertise more explicitly our Gateways reading groups (Friday evenings and 'by day') BEGUN
- We seek volunteers from outside our congregation to support our programs and activities: BEGUN
- Concerts remain as regular fundraisers YES; physical support for these and an ongoing market sought from external volunteers and/or folk from our community groups BEGUN

And in addition:

- Community Centre MMT is developing plans for a revamped foyer and coffee machine for enhanced HOSPITALITY

- Communications OMT is hosting a working group to move towards a redeveloped website, and enhancing advertising through postcards, signage and banners
- Conversations are continuing and ideas are bubbling up! Watch this space!

A key point to remember is that we need to embrace the implications of our desired scenario (what we will actually need to do to get there), not just the outcome as described. This may require some risk-taking! Let's continue to talk about these issues and be ready to think 'outside the box'.

And remember, if you'd like to talk about anything I've written, or have any questions or comments on anything Morialta-related – please be in touch by phone, email or in person. I look forward to hearing from you!

Have a wonderful Christmas, and a great New Year!

Margaret Cargill
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2019 Exhibition and Market *From Bruce Ind*

It's over for another year. The market and exhibition were a wonderful expression of community.

Nearly 100 people assisted, and while the market and exhibition were a success in monetary terms (break down of receipts accompanies this article), it is the sense of welcome and the feeling of hospitality that will stay with those who visited Chapel

Street on November 23. The artistry of our people is beyond doubt. Whether it is baking, growing, painting, stitching or any other number of skills brought to bear, the market and exhibition was a festival of creativity.

Special thanks to the stall conveners, who do an amazing job in organizing items for sale, and also the people who assist.

This year Lesley Tideman ran the Café, Anne Ind the Bric a Brac, Bev Tredrea

the "Come Again Boutique", Pam Ayles the Plants, Margaret Clogg the Cakes, Craig Mackenzie the BBQ, Jan Sillett the "Gift Boxes of Love", Miranda Clarke the Books, Carole Lyons Gifts and Crafts and Joan Morrison Gourmet Goodies. The force behind the Art Exhibition was Mary Thornley and chief raffle ticket salesperson was Marion Beard.

Editor's note - A massive thanks to Bruce who is our amazing "Mighty Market Man".

Exhibition and Market Income 2019

This year, for the first time, the revenue from the Market and Exhibition on the day broke through the 5-figure barrier, with the final tally being \$10,546.95. Funds are still coming in from the remaining crafts and other goods still for sale. As usual, the leftover books were donated to Oxfam, the remaining

bric-a-brac went to the Uniting Church op shop at Woodville Gardens and some of the surplus clothing was passed on to residents at Magill Lodge.

For those interested, the individual stall revenues were as follows:

Café	\$829.15
Bric a Brac	\$1,662.20
Come Again Boutique	\$375.50

Plants	\$893.00
Cakes	\$1,261.45
BBQ	\$347.60
Gift Boxes of Love	\$1,184.60
Books	\$529.70
Gifts and Crafts	\$1,621.70
Gourmet Goodies	\$1,335.00
Art Exhibition	\$121.00
Raffle	\$386.05

Mighty Magill Christmas Market & Exhibition



Beyond Morialta Mission Projects

The team would like to thank you for the wonderful support you have given to our projects for 2019. We have raised a total of \$3150.

This money will be distributed equally to Frontier Services and Uniting World's projects – education for healthy families and safe communities in Kiribatu, and education and care or girls (dalit caste) in North India.

At our recent meeting of the congregation we voted for three projects for our generous giving for 2020. They are Frontier Services, Timor Leste community health & nutrition education, and Pacific Islands disaster readiness and climate change.

At the heart of our faith is generosity. May the love of God guide you in all that you do in His name.

Beverley Tredrea
(for Beyond Morialta Mission Projects)

Inter-faith forum at Morialta

7.30pm on 9th February 2020

The Social Justice Team, together with Modbury UC's Sunday Forum Team, will co-host this gathering. Guest speaker will be Professor Mohammad Abdalla from Uni SA's Centre for Islamic Thought and Education. He is one of Australia's most prominent and respected Muslim leaders, combining the roles of academic, community leader and commentator.

He has worked in Islamic Studies for over 20 years, and played a leading role in establishing Islamic Studies as an academic area of study in Australia.

In an age of conflict between faiths this evening offers an opportunity to learn more about the other ones and to seek ways in which we can build peace, understanding and acceptance in Australian society.

Supper will be provided and we invite you to put the date in your diary now!

Christmas: The missing message

Adapted from an article by Richard F. Ames in Tomorrow's World in 2011

What does Christmas mean to you? For many people, it is the most festive time of the year. Families come and gather together under a Christmas tree to exchange gifts and enjoy a special meal.

Children beg Santa Claus to bring them their most desired presents. All around are traditional decorations – holly wreaths, mistletoe, bright lights and tinsel. One may even find a "nativity" scene and a sincere desire to mark the birth of Jesus Christ.

For most retailers in professing Christian nations, the Christmas season is the most profitable time of the year, accounting for up to 40 percent – sometimes more – of annual sales. Christmas-related promotions may begin months before December 25.

"Christmas shopping" is one of the central traditions of the season but even that is changing in the Internet age. Instead of the department store with carols and Christmas songs, about one-third of consumers will be spending at least half of their Christmas shopping budget online.

So, is Jesus' message about consumerism? Is it a message of stress for those who rush about buying consumer goods for friends and loved ones? Is it a message of guilt for those

who do not spend enough, and a message of greed for those who are eager to receive the generous gifts of those around them?

Many of the millions who exchange gifts this year will assume they are following a tradition established by the Magi - the "wise men" from the East who came to pay their respects to Jesus. But is there more to that story than the common traditions assume?

Scripture describes the arrival of the Magi in Jerusalem, as they searched for the prophesied King of the Jews, "... wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him'" (Matthew 2:1-2).

But had the Magi come to offer "birthday presents"? No! They had come to "worship" a child they had recognized as King of the Jews! They were offering tribute to a king!

The theme of King and Messiah remains one of the popular Christmas-time traditions today. Many of us listen every year to the famous oratorio written in 1741 by English composer George Frideric Handel, announcing the revelation of the Messiah: "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).



The New Testament Church of the first century knew the prophecies of Christ's coming, and they knew Christ's message – yet the New Testament Church did not observe Christmas! Rather, it observed the same Holy Days that Jesus Christ observed.

For example, the day of Pentecost, which was one of the annual Holy Days, commanded in the Bible. As the NIV Study Bible states: "Pentecost is also called the Feast of Weeks (Dt 16:10), the Feast of Harvest (Ex 23:16) and the day of first fruits (Nu 28:26)".

It is no accident that your Bible does not show Jesus or the Apostles observing Christmas – or any day set aside to commemorate Jesus' birth. Yet today, billions every year set aside December 25 as the day to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

However, for many people who celebrate Christmas, the meaning of the Christmas story is lost in hate, stress, sadness and the frantic rush to get everything done that the day now demands. Sadly, the real message of peace, loving and caring for the stranger (others), and standing with the marginalised is crowded out.

Connecting with life

Rev Bob Hutchinson

In so many ways we attempt to create shalom for ourselves. Unfortunately though, our attempts are often the exact opposite of what God shows us as the real route to shalom.

We think we can find security by preemptive attacks on our enemies, and then we find ourselves more at risk.

We think we can find peace by excluding those who challenge and disagree with us, only to find our safe community growing smaller and smaller, until we only have ourselves to agree with (and even that fails sometimes!).

We think we can find joy and abundance by amassing money and stuff, only to discover scarcity growing around us, and our planet dying, and the reality of losing it all robs us of any joy we might have known.

We think we can find love by turning inward and making our own needs, potential and purpose more important than relationships, or the service of others – even those closest to us – only to find that our self-absorption leaves us alone and empty.

We think we can find God by ignoring the realities of our world and escaping to an other-worldly faith, while waiting for a heavenly bliss after death, only to

discover that our souls remain dissatisfied and God feels distant and unattainable.

If we are to know shalom, we need to change how we do things. We must allow ourselves to be driven to the risky acts of listening, dialogue, hospitality, service, justice and compassion. Then, as we give ourselves to create shalom not just for ourselves but for others, we discover that shalom finds us, and God's reign is truly within us.

John Van de Laar <http://sacredise.com/lectionary-resources/advent-2/>

Christmas around the world

Christmas is celebrated in many countries around the world and almost every country or ethnic group has its own traditions. Here is a sample of countries as presented on various websites.



The Philippines

No other country in the world celebrates the season quite like Filipinos, the third-largest Catholic nation in the world. The Philippines out-do most other countries by commencing celebrations in September - making it the longest Christmas celebration in the world.

Philippines Catholicism is a holdover from the Spanish colonial era, as are traditions like the marathon nine-day series of Christmas masses called *simbang gabi*.

So, too, are the festive parols, or star-shaped lanterns, that brighten windows during the entire holiday season. The lights, which are meant to reflect the Star of Bethlehem in design, are named after the Spanish word for lantern, *farol*.

Last year, the lighting of the traditional Christmas lanterns carried particular meaning in the aftermath of Typhoon Yolanda.

In the Philippines, Merry Christmas is "Maligayang Pasko."

Sweden

The Yule Log is customary in European-derived Christmas traditions. Most of us know the Yule Log from seeing it crackle brightly on many an American TV program. The French bake a confectionary version of the holiday-themed Yule Log.

But Sweden skips the wood and goes for the goat instead. The Yule Goat isn't a real animal; it's typically made almost entirely of straw. In the Swedish tongue, the Christmas goat is known as the *Julbok*. The *Julbok*'s origins are rooted in mythology, but it's been warmly adopted by Swedes as part of modern Christian tradition.

The Swedish town of Gävle has erected a giant version of the Yule Goat since 1966. And every year since, people have tried to torch it, kidnap it and otherwise harass the apparently rather expensive symbol of Christmas joy. At least 28 of the 45 goats have succumbed to what the authorities dub as "vandals."

But, according to *The Local*, an English-language Swedish newspaper, "half of (Gävle's) inhabitants take pride in the giant animal, while the other half take equal pride in attempting to burn it down."

Merry Christmas in Swedish is "God Jul."



Finland

Finland seems made for Christmas. Reindeer run rampant in Finnish Lapland and *Joulupukki*, a bearded mythical figure who looks and acts for all the world like Santa Claus, is said to make his home where those same reindeer roam.

But it's not all snowflakes and cookies on Christmas Eve, because at noon on Christmas Day the Declaration of Christmas Peace is read in a formal ceremony in Southern Finland. The statement, which has been tweaked a bit since it was first read in the 13th century, offers an emphatic reminder that any sort of unruly behaviour that challenges the holiday "shall under aggravating circumstances be guilty and punished according to what the law and statutes prescribe for each and every offense separately." In other words, hooligans, don't mess with Finnish Christmas.

The peaceful declaration goes on to wish the inhabitants of Finland a joyous Christmas feast. There, a feast is made joyous with the addition of Christmas ham, smoked and pickled fish, cheeses and sweet Christmas breads. The people in the northernmost parts of Finland sometimes even eat reindeer for Christmas - sorry, Rudolph.

In Finland, people wish each other "Hyvää Joulua" on Christmas.



Christmas in France

In France, Christmas Day is always preceded by a "Reveillon", which means staying awake to usher in the next day, according to Susi Seguret, who leads the Seasonal School of Culinary Arts in several different cities, including Paris.



This means essentially gathering with friends, often a dozen or more, and enjoying a multi-course dinner, in company of many bottles of wine and much champagne. It is a time to dress to the nines, even if at home, and to get out the best china and silver and crystal and all the candles.

The meal includes fresh oysters, a fish course, a poultry course, a meat course,

an extensive cheese platter and delicate desserts.

In the south of France, around Provence, *les treize desserts* — the 13 desserts, representing Jesus and the 12 apostles — figure into the season. The components of the dish vary by local or familial tradition, but tend to include dried fruits, nougat and other traditional sweets.

In northern France, particularly in Alsace, traditional Christmas markets abound. They burst with holiday sweets like the *bredele* and gingerbread as well as warming mulled wine. On Dec. 6, white-bearded St. Nicolas walks through the streets of Alsace, passing out sweets to all of the "good" children. Sound familiar?

Merry Christmas in French is "Joyeux Noel."



Worship & Faith Education Team October 2019

Worship continues at 8:15am and 9:30am each Sunday with a combined service every 5th Sunday of the month at 9:30am. The 8:15am service continues to be reviewed.

Special worship themes have included:

- Mission Sunday 4th August – Beyond Morialta Missions Team led worship with the emphasis on Frontier Services Parkin Sturt Patrol. A financial offering was taken at this service.
- NAIDOC (National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Day Observance Committee) Week was celebrated with worship on 4th July.
- Migrant and Refugee Sunday 25th July with special guest speaker Dr Chen.
- Break the Silence – Social Justice Sunday 22nd September with W&FEMMT having suggested SJMMT take up that topic.
- International Day for alternatively abled people 24th November – SJMMT lead worship.
- Advent and Christmas season began on Sunday 1st December.

- Morialta hosted CMLA (Centre for Music, Liturgy and the Arts) on Tuesday 29th October for shared inspiration and creativity in worship.
- January 2020 worship services will be held in the hall as usual.
- SP@CE has been put on hold for the time being.
- Milpara Aged Care Facility – monthly worship including Holy Communion with a team including minister, musician and small support group continues with Rhonda Amber as coordinator.

Leaders and members have attended UCA President's Conference in Fiji; John Bell visit; Worship in the 21st Century and others.

Beyond Our Walls (BoW)

Since October 2013, the team has produced 65 full services there have been 3,049 YouTube viewings and 1,170 DVD's distributed. Over 3,907 views of readings and sermons have also occurred on YouTube.

BoW Oversight Group – A full review has been deferred until 2021 when everyone who has any part in BoW will be consulted. Questions to be asked are: 'What should stop, what should start and what should be kept.'

Faith development

- Gateways continues to meet fortnightly and are reflecting on The Great Spiritual Migration by Brian McLaren.
- Gateways by Day was led by Christine Garner in four sessions in September/October reflecting on Christianity and World Religions.
- Coffee at Sweet Beanz or Hibernia meets with the minister.

Issues of concern

W&FEMMT membership and leadership will need some attention in the coming new year.

Plans

Lent and Easter 2020: Lenten reflective topics plans have begun.

The presence and the work of our minister Rev Bob Hutchinson, the many leaders and special skills people and members and participants at Morialta Uniting Church are much appreciated and valued.

Rev Jenny Swanbury
Team Leader

Social Justice Team November 2019

Key activities

Concerns about the treatment of refugees continue to be one of our major priorities. SJMMT recommended that Church Council write to the Member for Sturt encouraging the Government reconsider its plans to repeal the so-called Medivac Bill. Three of our members took part in the rally to support its continuation.

Special services were held in NAIDOC Week (7th-14th July), on Refugee and Migrant Sunday (25th August), Social Justice Sunday (22nd September) promoting "Breaking the Silence" and International Day for People with Disabilities (Sunday 24th November).

We continue to liaise with W&FEMMT regarding how Morialta recognises special days nominated by the UN and the UCA which focus on issues of

concern. We have prepared PowerPoint slides featuring the special days that MUC have decided to focus on for display in the electronic notice board. We also continue to advise preachers and worship leaders when a Sunday they are rostered for is a UN or UCA nominated day or week.

Issues of Concern

As well as refugees, other major issues of concern are the Government's lack of response to the Uluru Statement, press freedom, cuts to the foreign aid budget and their apparent continuing lack of commitment to deal with Climate Change. SJMMT wrote to the Member for Sturt to query the Government's announced legislation that may prevent organisations, such as the UCA, advocating secondary boycotts to their members. We are concerned that the legislation may force the UCA to revoke its divestment policy and its advocacy to members to

also divest from all companies involved with fossil fuels.

Key Plans for the next 6 months

Together with Modbury UC, we will co-host an event with Professor Mohammad Abdalla from Uni SA's Centre for Islamic Thought and Education on Sunday February 9th, from 7-8.30 pm. The evening will likely focus on Professor Abdalla's suggestions for how we can foster links across our faith communities and build greater understanding and social cohesion.

Members of the SJMMT include Adam Yearsley (Elder), Bruce Ind, David Purling, Judith Purling, Jenny Swanbury, Christine Secombe (corresponding member) and Colin Cargill (Team Leader).

*Colin Cargill
Team Leader*

Communications Team October 2019

Key activities

- Letterbox drop – Council agreed that letterbox drops would be considered on a case by case basis.
- An electronic noticeboard on rear window of hall – proposal will go to Church Council.
- Other proposals sent to Council include a video screen for the foyer, promotional external signs, new Church/Community Centre logo, change of website platform, permanent wall noticeboard.
- John Secombe has resigned from the team and Annette Latham has joined the team.

Issues of concern

- Knowing when events are going to occur in the life of the church, to enable a proactive communication strategy/approach to be taken rather than a reactive response.
- Getting information from other teams for things that need to be communicated to the congregation and the wider community far enough in advance to be effective.

- How to use Facebook/Website more effectively
- Gather information from teams and interested members of the church community to inform the development of the new website for Morialta

Ideas for addressing concerns

- To develop a process to track events (calendar) to enable proactive advertising.
- Approach other groups within our church to advertise their activities.

Key plans for next 6 months

- Establish a working group to clarify the functionality required of Morialta's website
- Compare Morialta's requirement with those offered by the Uniting Church SA Synod Congregational Website Program
- Encourage access to the newsletter online to reduce the number of printed copies.
- Develop a recommendation to Council to purchase and erect external signage on the Community Centre. (Includes exploring requirements of Burnside Council, identifying and managing risks.)

- Investigate possibility of moving items from noticeboards to electronic screen in foyer.
- Investigate alternative methods for making minutes of meetings readily available to the congregation, including email, a 'members only' link on the website, asking members 'would you like to receive the minutes?'
- Develop a process for approval to publish/advertise community events and slogans etc.
- Increasing the use of Facebook/website
- Explore options for an accessible working calendar that links to the website

About our team's work:

To support the ministry goals of Morialta Uniting Church by facilitating and developing effective communication processes.

Members: Sharon Mackenzie - Leader, Helena Begg (Elder), Matthew Mackenzie (Notes), Colin Cargill, Annette Latham from 2 Sept 2019, Rev Bob Hutchinson

*Sharon Mackenzie
Team Leader*

The original Christmas story is really about refugees.



Getty Images

Based on an article written by Rev. Dr. Serene Jones in *Time* – December 2015

As our eyes fall upon the familiar manger scenes scattered throughout our churches and homes this Christmas season, it is hard not to think about the millions of people from that same manger land who are seeking refuge from terror and oppression now 2,000 years later.

Where will they go? Who will give them shelter?

As Oliver Willis with Media Matters tweeted: “if only we had a seasonally appropriate story about middle eastern people seeking refuge being turned away by the heartless.”

This less-than-140-character comment has inspired thousands of words in response, attacking Willis for committing a grave offense against the Christmas story. “Christmas is about Christ,” they insist, “not Syrian refugees. The holy family was simply returning to Bethlehem for a census.” Factually, these critics are right. But they miss the much larger point of the Christmas narrative.

The Christmas story is not about a refugee family, but it is about a family seeking refuge. Ordered by an occupying government to travel by foot for days on end so that Caesar Augustus could count the number of people under his order, an expectant mother at the peak of her pregnancy is forced to undergo the single most dangerous experience of a first-century woman’s life not at home, but away in a manger.

It was a fiercely political environment through which they wandered. Why should we pretend like it wasn’t?

Like modern-day Pharisees, the “Christ-only” Christmas people dig in their heels and thump their holy book, refuting faith, hope and love with distracting technicalities, legalistic interpretations and references to allegory and symbolism.

I believe the Christmas story should open our eyes and our hearts to those most vulnerable in our midst. To those whose only hope is to travel by foot and inflatable raft for days in search of a liveable life – many of whom look very much like the Middle Eastern Mary, Jesus’s mother.

While most Western Democracies are happy to admit refugees from the Middle East who believe like the Jewish Mary or the Christian James, brother of Jesus, some have balked at welcoming refugees who are Muslim. This not only qualifies as religious discrimination, it is in stark contrast to foundational Christian values.

When Jesus is asked how one inherits eternal life, he responds with the story of the Good Samaritan. The most startling part of the story is that in Jesus’ time Samaritans were perceived similarly to Muslims today.

Imagine the Pope, (or the President of the UCA Assembly) when asked how one gets into heaven, answering with a story about a young Muslim from Syria. But this is the story Jesus tells.

Jesus tells us to welcome the stranger, to feed the hungry, to go and sell all our possessions and give the money to the poor. Jesus asks that we treat all of humanity with the same love, kindness and generosity that he modelled throughout his life.

The Christmas story reminds us of a family struggling under the yoke of an oppressive regime, of a God who became human to take on our struggles and strife and to embody divine love, whose light shines on all. As he tells us, whatever we have done for the least among us we have done to him.

As followers of Jesus we are called to welcome the strangers of our time, to return the care shown by the Good Samaritan to today’s marginalized communities, and to open our hearts and our doors to those seeking refuge this Christmas season, whatever their religion. Isn’t that the real Christmas Story?

Rev. Dr. Serene Jones is President of Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York.

presoffice@uts.columbia.edu.

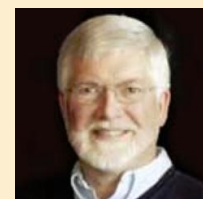
At the heart of Christianity is a powerful ethic

It is what the first followers of Jesus called *The Way* – a way of living based on love and compassion, reconciliation and forgiveness, inclusion and acceptance, peace and non-violence, generosity and justice. The ethic is what makes Christianity good.

Without it, Christians can become rigid and intolerant, self-righteous and condemning, hate-filled and violent, selfish and unjust.

In other words, without the ethic of Jesus, Christians can represent the worst humanity has to offer.

Kurt Struckmeyer
From “A Conspiracy of Love”



Kurt Struckmeyer is an artist, writer, and theologian. His theological avocation only became a full-time occupation after he retired from the General Motors Design Center in 2005.

International Day of People with Disability (IDPwD)

IDPwD is a United Nations sanctioned day, celebrated internationally on 3 December, which aims to promote public awareness, understanding and acceptance of people with disability. It also seeks to increase awareness of gains to be derived from the integration of people with disability in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life.

In the recently published "Australia Talks" survey, sponsored by the ABC, only 24% of Australians socialise regularly with people with a disability. It seems in Australia, the worlds of people with and without a disability rarely intersect with 67% people having only rare or occasional contact and 8% have no contact with a differently abled person.

We at Morialta are extremely fortunate as a number of people who are vital to our community live with a so-called disability. Not that we notice or treat them differently, as they are very much part of who we are and their leadership

and ministry are integral to our community.

Hence, we are amongst the fortunate 24% of Australians who can answer "often" when asked the question "How often do you socialise with a person with a disability?"

Based on the Australia Talks Survey, it seems that many people living with a disability have little opportunity to socialise with people outside of their own network and to become involved in the wider community. It also seems that only a minority of Australians have close intimate friends and networks that are hugely diverse.

National Day of the Differently Abled was celebrated at Morialta on 24th November with a service which opened with an affirmation made in 2018 by the Uniting Church in Australia.

The 15th Assembly of the UCA affirmed that:

- Christ is most fully present when all people in the Body are unconditionally accepted as people of worth. All people are created in the image of God, including people with disability;

- Along with all members, the faith, gifts, hopes and dreams of people with disability are to be valued and honoured; and

- God is a God of justice and peace, who seeks reconciliation amongst all people.

In seeking to be a community of reconciliation, the Uniting Church acknowledges that for many people with disability its life and faith has not always borne witness to this vision.

The Uniting Church seeks:

- to embody a community life that in its theology and practice is accessible to all people;
- to ensure that within its own life people with disability are treated justly and have their hopes and rights realised; and
- to advocate for justice and equality for people with disability in the wider community.



Community Building and Fund-Raising Report

During 2019 the team raised around \$7,300 for Morialta Projects.

The biggest event was the Kym Purling Concert which raised over \$2,000 for Morialta and a similar amount for a Nepalese charity nominated by Kym.

Several other ventures proved quite profitable., including two concerts, one with the Second Wind Ensemble and the other with the Adelaide Connection Jazz Choir. These raised a little over \$1600 after sharing the proceeds equally with the jazz choir and donating \$260 to the ensemble's music scholarships.

The Quiz Night, with Rev Bob as quiz master, raised over \$2000.

Carole and Helena organised pop-up stalls throughout the year and Judith organised another very successful "Guess Who's Coming to Lunch". Although this does not raise money – it builds connections and cements friendships among our community.

We are currently working on a program for 2020 and we would like your feedback. It is difficult to set dates for events more than three months ahead, as it depends on when the AV Team are available, when the performers are free and when it fits with other events at Morialta. We try to avoid more than one event per month.

Events we are planning include concerts by the Second Wind Ensemble sometime after Easter, and the jazz choir, possibly in September. Both groups enjoy performing in our church and these events provide funds for the students for instruments and travel.

We are also hoping to slot in the Adelaide Male Voice Choir, and Mandy Hutchinson's nonet, if we can host them when they are available.

A movie afternoon in mid-year featuring (hopefully) a history of movies shot in SA is also on our bucket list, presented by a retired professional movie buff. We just need to host it with a bit of support.

At the recent meeting of the congregation those present were asked to respond to a series of possible events.

A traditional choir – such as the male voice choir or similar choirs – proved very popular.

The jazz choir and a group such as the Second Wind Ensemble – were also moderately popular

Small instrumental groups were popular.

Quiz night was moderately popular, and the movie afternoon was very popular.

Around 40 to 50% of people agreed that selling wine by the glass and serving afternoon tea was a suitable way to raise extra funds.

Another suggestion was a concert by a classical opera singer, which we will continue to pursue, and there was a request to consider making cheaper tickets available.

Colin Cargill for the CB&FR Team (Helena Begg, Carole Lyons and Judith Purling)

What history really tells us about the birth of Jesus

Adapted from an article by Robyn J. Whitaker – published in the *Conversation* in December 2017



I might be about to ruin your Christmas. Sorry. But the reality is those nativity plays in which your adorable children wear tinsel and angel wings bear little resemblance to what actually happened.

Neither does your average Christmas card featuring a peaceful nativity scene. These are traditions, compilations of different accounts that reflect a later Christian piety. So, what really happened at that so-called “first Christmas”?

First the Inn

The matter of the inn with “no room” is one of the most historically misunderstood aspects of the Christmas story. ACU scholar Stephen Carlson writes that the word “kataluma” (often translated “inn”) refers to guest quarters. It could be that Joseph and Mary stayed with family but the guest room was too small for childbirth and hence Mary gave birth in the main room of the house where animal mangers could also be found.

Hence Luke 2:7 could be translated “she gave birth to her firstborn son, she swaddled him and laid him in the feeding trough because there was no space for them in their guest room.”

The wise men

Where Luke has shepherds visit the baby, a symbol of Jesus’s importance for ordinary folk, Matthew has magi

(wise men) from the east bring Jesus royal gifts. There were probably not three magi and they were not kings. In fact, there is no mention of the magi’s number, there could have been two or 20 of them. The tradition of three comes from the mention of three gifts – gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Notably, the magi visit Jesus in a house (not an inn or stable) and their visit comes later after the birth. Matthew 2:16 records King Herod’s orders to kill baby boys up to the age of two based on the report about Jesus’s age from the magi. This delay is why most Christian churches celebrate the visit of the magi on “Epiphany” or January 6.

Notably absent from these biblical accounts is Mary riding a donkey and animals gathered around the baby Jesus. Animals begin to appear in nativity art in the fourth century AD, possibly because biblical commentators at the time used Isaiah 3 as part of their anti-Jewish polemic to claim that animals understood the significance of Jesus in a way that Jews did not.

When Christians today gather around a crib or set up a nativity scene in their homes they continue a tradition that began in the 12th century with Francis of Assisi. He brought a crib and animals into church so that everyone worshipping could feel part of the story. Thus, a popular pietistic tradition was born.

A radical Christmas

If we pare back the story to its biblical and historical core - removing the stable, the animals, the cherub-like angels, and the inn – with what are we left?

The Jesus of history was a child of a Jewish family living under a foreign

regime. He was born into an extended family living away from home and his family fled from a king who sought to kill him because he posed a political threat.

The Jesus story, in its historical context, is one of human terror and divine mercy, of human abuse and divine love. It is a story that claims God became human in the form of one who is vulnerable, poor and displaced in order to unveil the injustice of tyrannical power.

While there is nothing wrong with the devotional piety of Christian tradition, a white-washed nativity scene risks missing the most radical aspects of the Christmas story. The Jesus described in the Bible had more in common with the children of refugees born on Nauru than the majority of Australian churchgoers. He too was a brown-skinned baby whose Middle-Eastern family was displaced due to terror and political turmoil.

Christmas, in the Christian tradition, is a celebration of God becoming human as a gift of love. To enjoy adorable, albeit a-historical, nativity plays and all the other wonders of the season is one way of delighting in this gift.

But if we nostalgically focus on one baby whilst ignoring the numerous babies who suffer around the world due to politics, religion and poverty, we risk missing the entire point of the Christmas story.

Robyn J. Whitaker is the Bromby Senior Lecturer in New Testament, Pilgrim Theological College, which is an Australian theological college and a member college of the University of Divinity. It is part of the Uniting Church in Australia Synod of Victoria and Tasmania's Centre for Theology & Ministry.

A meaning of Christmas

Adapted from an article written by Andrew Hamilton in *Eureka Street*

The Christian story has a depth that challenges all our practices. In it God’s coming among us takes place in solidarity with the most hassled kinds of people: a heavily pregnant woman compelled to travel for tax purposes, a couple homeless when the baby is due,

people sleeping out in the fields, ostracised shepherds, and refugees forced to flee for their lives.

The celebration of Christmas encourages all people of good will, whatever our religious beliefs, to walk for a time in solidarity with people at the bottom of the pile, to take time to dream of what we are invited to be, and to reflect on what kind of a society we want.

The inn with no room, the people in the parks, the threat of Herod, the disreputable shepherds, the refugees in Egypt and the rumour of angels are the characters in the Christmas story. Their counterparts are found in our personal and public stories today. They make a claim on us all the year round.

Andrew Hamilton is consulting editor of Eureka Street.

Consider the bee

I was fascinated with this bee in our foxgloves. This sent me off on a discovery tour on what the internet had to offer.



Bees (the honey bee - *Apis mellifera* in particular) along with honey, are mentioned not only in the Bible, but in other holy books too, including the Koran (Quran) and in the Hindu Vedas. Honey is used within the context of good, abundance and blessing. There are frequent references to "a land flowing with milk and honey" - which we can perhaps take to be an allegory for a land of abundance, or land that would provide abundantly for the people. Honey may represent the message or word of God. In ancient times among various peoples and religions, bees were seen as messengers of the Gods. For example, according to Egyptian mythology, when the god Re cried, his tears turned into bees upon touching the ground, to deliver messages to humankind. Honey is sometimes referred to as a precious gift.

The mythology and symbolism of bees in Christianity & Judaism

Bees and honey are mentioned quite often in the Bible. This can only mean that bees, in particular, play a significant role in both Christianity and Judaism. They symbolize a lot of positive attributes that we can identify through a variety of scriptures. In this article, you will learn the specific definitions of the two religions as well as be able to differentiate them, understand the symbolism behind the bee, read the scriptures that involve bees, and other bee facts in terms of religion and spirituality. Bee references have been around for centuries. They have been part of various scriptures in the bible. They have been consistently used to describe various positive characteristics such as wisdom, wealth, and industry. Equally, honey has its own limelight in many religious texts.

The characteristics that describe bees fall upon various belief systems. In some cultures, they are considered to be messengers that bring news from the spirit world, which is a quite interesting point-of-view.



Being mentioned in the Bible quite often, bees have quite the significance in both religions. In Judaism, in their celebration of Rosh Hashana, it is part of their rituals and customs to eat symbolic food which included dipping bread or fruits into honey. This symbolizes the hopes of a happy and prosperous new year. In Christianity, on the other hand, the bees have been likened to the attributes and characteristics of Jesus. Their industriousness, strength, and wisdom are collectively seen in him. The bee is truly a remarkable creation that has perfected the way of enduring a systematized living. Having been mentioned in the bible many times proves to show how much these insects have influenced people from olden times to today's modern society.

David Purling

God Who Creates, God Who Redeems

Prayer by Rabbi Stephanie Kolin

God Who Creates, God Who Redeems,
 God of shalom-of peace, God of sh'leimut - of wholeness,
 We remember standing at the shore of the sea, afraid,
 Our enslavers in hot pursuit, ready to take us back to captivity.
 We remember the tumultuous sea before us that showed no signs of parting
 And we remember you told us: v'yisa'u - go forward.
 We stepped forth. The waters parted.
 We moved our bodies from slavery to freedom.
 You moved our souls from oppression to redemption.
 God who Creates, God who Redeems,
 If it can happen once, it can happen over and over and over.
 V'yisa'u.
 Let us cross the sea with all who are enslaved, with captors on their heels.
 And together, let us make those waters part.

From "The Great Spiritual Migration" by Brian D. McLaren



A volunteer rescuer helps a girl at sea. The boat she was on with her family and other Afghan refugees to cross an arm of the Aegean from the Turkish coast to Lesbos in late 2015 - ran aground on a rock off the coast of the island. (UNHCR)



Shirley Maywald A life of selflessness 1923–2019

Shirley always placed other people at the centre of her life. The way that she went about supporting, serving, loving and caring for others, without for a moment thinking of her own needs first, was Christ-like.

Born in Gawler on 12 April 1923, to Tom and Freda Tunkin, Shirley Eleanor Tunkin was the first of two children. Sadly, when Shirley was three years old, her father failed to return home one Friday night, a mystery that was never solved. Eventually, with her mother and brother, she moved to live with her grandmother and uncle in Penrice, near Angaston.

Shirley's earliest memories go back to living with her staunchly German Lutheran Granny Dohnt. The Church was central in their lives, with Shirley's mother playing the organ at the Angaston Lutheran Church. Every Saturday afternoon, Shirley and her brother would walk from Penrice to Angaston for Sunday School.

After commencing her schooling in Angaston, Shirley's family moved to Nuriootpa where she continued school until she was fourteen. School was a happy time, but for most girls in that era, it really only served as a necessary

stepping stone until they joined the workforce. Shirley spent most of her subsequent teenage life working at "Sheard's," an all-purpose store in Nuriootpa that was both a Drapers and a grocery store. The shop still stands today as the Community Store. Shirley's income was fifteen shillings per week, of which she paid seven shillings and sixpence to the family coffers, leaving her an equal amount for food, clothes and incidentals.

When she was 21, Shirley married a local boy, Martin Maywald, and together they began their family in Nuriootpa. Children Kay, Andrew and Mark were born during the ensuing post-war years, but life was not easy. When an opportunity came in 1951 to buy a shop in Waikerie, Shirley and Martin decided that this seemed the best way to make a more prosperous life for their growing family. After nearly thirty years in the Barossa, they became owners of the Waikerie 'deli come fruit and vegetable come restaurant' shop. Living behind the shop for thirteen years enabled Shirley to juggle a young family, and indeed the arrival of Dean after a six-year gap, with serving hot meals in their restaurant three times a day. With a regular breakfast clientele, Shirley was early to get the wood stove going for her first customers who would arrive from 7.30am. As the business grew, they went into partnership with Martin's brother John, and were able to supplement Shirley's expertise with more staff, but they were still years of very hard work.

However, in 1964 a new opportunity came their way and they purchased the Gift Shoppe next door. This meant a slightly more genteel occupation as purveyors of giftware, china, glass and jewellery. Shirley enjoyed working in both shops, meeting and greeting

people, and no doubt always ready to go the extra mile. At this point they were able to build their own home in Waikerie, and despite their busy life, they always made time for one of them to attend Church each Sunday.

With retirement in 1984, the habit of service to others found a ready outlet in volunteering. Over the next eight years, Waikerie benefitted from Shirley's active participation in the District Hospital Guild. This involved both fundraising and hospital visiting and every Friday she was the official community car driver, ferrying people to and from appointments. At Meals on Wheels she variously worked on both cooking and delivery. Her active involvement with the Church continued steadfastly. While Martin's prodigious community input was formally recognised in 1989 with the award of an Order of Australia Medal, Shirley clearly stood quietly as the strong, supportive woman whose diligence and capacity for good cheer enabled a happy home to flourish.

As retirement was starting to look very like an extension of a hardworking life, they moved to Rostrevor in 1992. But old habits die hard, and Shirley soon found an outlet for her desire to be of service to others. These included the Council on the Ageing (COTA), assisting with office tasks, and the coffee shop at North Eastern Community Hospital. And (of course) she was very much part of our Church community, first at Bonvue Road, and latterly at Morialta.

Shirley's life was defined by hard work. She was unfailingly gracious and had a ready smile. For a lady who claimed she is 'nothing special,' she was indeed a special lady.

Adapted from an interview by Alison Lockett 2010.

A meditation on those who have died

When we have genuinely loved someone, we donate a part of ourselves to that other in a way that is beyond recall.

And when they go from us, they take that part of us with them.

When they go from us in the permanence of death, they take that part of us permanently.

.....

So the calm we eventually experience, when our necessary period of mourning is done is not a sign that things are again as they were

before - that cannot be. It is rather a sign that part of us lives now, already in eternity, with our loved living dead.

*Karl Rahner SJ (1904-1984)
German Priest and Theologian*

Kindness Day

As I write this article on the 13th November 2019, I am aware that today has been classed as 'Kindness Day'. The word kindness is often associated with gentle acts of helpfulness, thoughtfulness or sympathy but my thoughts are on a more robust type of 'kindness' and the woman I associate with it.

At one time in my life I was privileged to have worked in a unique organisation. It was a working environment like no other and it still makes me proud to have been part of what it embodies. The experience supplied me with a benchmark for how to stand up for others and my beliefs, and it's only in looking back that I realise how fortunate I was to have been involved in something so inspiring.

The woman who created this special place was born as Prudence Royle, the second daughter of parents who met when her mother was a nurse and physiotherapist at Guy's Hospital, London and her father was the chaplain there. Prue (as she became known) grew into someone of deep, practical, spiritual faith and determination. As a colleague once said of her – Prue was just like you and me, quite ordinary to look at, but in fact she was someone extraordinary who created something remarkable because she refused to settle for anything less than what she believed to be the 'right' way to look after the terminally ill.

While still training as a nurse, Prue worked on a children's ward looking after and befriending, a little girl of eight who had an inoperable brain tumour. Nursing this child had a lasting effect on Prue and some years later she was sponsored on a month's secondment to St Christopher's Hospice, in London. By this time Prue was qualified and married to the Reverend Brian Clench and had two stepdaughters, but she had been so impressed by the level of compassion and care in the hospice, that she returned to work at the Royal United Hospital, Bath, determined to provide something similar for the local folk.

However, not everyone shared her views and she found herself up against

what she described as 'polite opposition, prejudice, apathy and withdrawal'. Many of her nurse and doctor colleagues didn't want what they termed 'a death house' in the city and refused to support her ideas. However, Prue was resilient and determined. Within two years, and before she even had adequate funding, she left the NHS and set up a domiciliary service caring for the terminally ill from her own home. This was the Dorothy House Foundation and Prue became the first person to begin such a service in this way. As a committed Christian she chose the name because Dorothy translates as 'gift of God'.

A year later Prue and her husband sold their house to the Macmillan Cancer Relief Society who gave the financial backing enabling Prue, in 1979, to turn her home into an in-patient unit for six people. Within a year the house next door was acquired for an education and administration centre and a day-care was developed within the combined buildings. Prue became an impassioned speaker at any organisation that she felt could help with fundraising and her intense belief in what she was doing encouraged many professionals (doctors, nurses, physiotherapists) to give of their time as volunteers until enough money was found to provide them with a salary. Colleagues described her as having a delicious sense of humour. A smile was always on her lips and she was never without a twinkle in her eye, even when she made herself available at any time of night or day and relied on very little sleep. Prue never refused a call for help and drew on her deep faith to give her succour.

In 1983, Prue was appointed MBE for her hospice work and through her speaking at Rotary meetings she was asked to help with the establishment of hospices in Minnesota and Romania. The British Council invited her to lecture in Japan and she spoke in Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong.

By the mid-1980s Prue was concerned that as the NHS became involved in palliative care, the ethos on which hospices had initially been founded would change. She believed that many of the founders of the modern hospice movement had been inspired by their

Christian faith and this was as integral to the work as all their zeal, resilience and professional qualities. A young Christian GP, Peter Atkins, had similar concerns and joined with Prue to set up a conference at a retreat centre in Surrey. From this emerged the St Columba's Fellowship which sustains the Christian foundation on which hospice care is based.

In 1995 Dorothy House moved to new premises in the village of Winsley and became established in a beautiful manor house which gives the patients wonderful views over the surrounding countryside. By now Prue had relinquished to others, the reins of looking after the Foundation which she'd created and moved to Windsor as Director of the Thames Valley Hospice. While in Windsor, Prue married for the second time to David Dufour, becoming stepmother to three more children. She also decided to train for the priesthood! Her parishioners loved her and treasured the nurse's practicality which she brought to things liturgical, accompanied by her unshakeable belief in God and her passionate love for mankind.

In 2004 aged 62, Prue died in a hospice of a brain tumour; the same illness that afflicted the little girl who initially motivated her to find a better way to live the final months, weeks, days of 'living with cancer'. Prue was an inspiration. She never feared opposition or being 'out of step' with those who didn't share her beliefs. She was compassionate to all; breathtakingly humble and yet powerfully vocal in speaking up for her beliefs. She was an exceptional Christian who valued and encouraged those who worked for her, and I'm delighted to know that I can be counted as one.

Prue Dufour/Clench/Royle was many things to many people but to all of them she was kindness itself.

From Jan Thornton



Morialta Magpie



Margaret and Ray were presented with certificates for 10 years of volunteering for Guide Dogs SA NT.



Morialta members shared in the celebration with Sally and Damon when they brought Lucy for baptism in October.



Gil performed some concerts for members of Morialta and others.



Morialta's youth members enjoyed making bonbons for the residents at Magill Lodge.



Barbara has been coming to Keep Fit for 41 years and turns 80 at the end of December. She celebrated with morning tea after class.



Katrina performed with the State Opera in The Mikado by Gilbert and Sullivan.



Congratulations to Damon and Sally, who were married in November.

Fellowship News

Fellowship held it's AGM in November – the committee for 2020 is President, Margaret Clogg; Secretary, Margaret Dix; Treasurer, Kath Cheel; Committee members, Arlene Lomman, Margaret Whibley, Joan Wagner and Dale Corrigan.

Following the AGM, Lesley Tideman spoke to us about the year she and Arthur spent living in Iraq. The talk was extremely interesting, outlining the challenges of living and working in a very different country, the people they met, and the friendships they formed.

The December Christmas break-up was attended by twenty nine people and was a lovely end to another great year.



Bonbon-making for the *Uniting Communities* Christmas hampers

Christmas break-up celebration dinner



WELCOME TO MORIALTA UNITING CHURCH COMMUNITY LIBRARY HUB

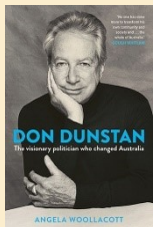
Sincere thanks

We are sad this edition of Vision carries the last of many book reviews and articles written by Jan Thornton. Jan has been a great supporter of Vision, especially her travel pieces and her book reviews. Most of us just read a book and enjoy it, or take a trip and enjoy it, but few of us are motivated and generous enough to willingly share the experience with others. Jan has done that in spades and her talent as an entertaining and informative writer will be missed.

The Morialta Library and Community are also indebted to both Jan and John for their generous contributions to maintaining the Library. Through their efforts in negotiating free books from Burnside Library, Morialta folk not only have a constant flow of new books to read, but our budget has also benefited greatly. Our sincere thanks to both Jan and John and we extend our best wishes for the future to them both.

The Editor, the Publisher and the Library Team

Book Reviews



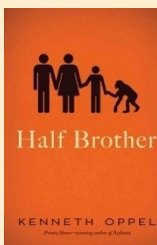
Don Dunstan by Angela Woollacott

This is a remarkable book full of both hitherto known, and unknown information about this very public persona who still remains an enigma. It is hailed by critics as ‘the first comprehensive published account of his life and career’ and is certainly jam-packed with facts and snippets to keep the reader enthralled.

Angela Woollacott is the Manning Clark Professor of History at the Australian National University and my only complaint about this worthy tome, is that Woollacott almost gives too much information and presents it in a manner leaving the reader in no doubt it is written by an academic.

I can only urge you to plough through Woollacott’s dry presentation manner and attempt to understand what shaped this man and his beliefs. Dunstan really did make a great impact on Australia in general and on South Australians in particular. If anyone is interested in what elements shape us as a people, then this book will be a fascinating read.

Reviewed by Jan Thornton



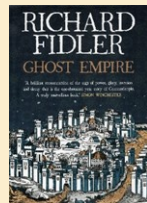
Half Brother by Kenneth Oppel

This unusual story manages to incorporate some very complicated questions about life and morality into a simple tale about a boy and a chimpanzee.

Set in Canada in the 1970s, we are introduced to the Tomlin family through the eyes and emotions of a 13-year-old boy, Ben. What begins as a simple account rapidly escalates into complex questioning of what makes us human and requires the reader to think hard about family, the individual and the real meaning of love.

I defy you to read this without being able to identify with at least one of the characters, and don’t forget to keep a box of tissues nearby. You may need them!

Reviewed by Jan Thornton



Ghost Empire by Richard Fidler

Ghost Empire is essentially a history of the Middle East from Western Asia to Western Europe, centred on Constantinople (Istanbul). I found it extremely enlightening and I felt great empathy with the author when I was only a few pages into the book. I was asking the same question as he does – “Why were we not told more about these stories in our history lessons?”

To make it more relevant to 21st century readers, Fidler blends the historical facts with contemporary observations made by him and his son, Joe, on a visit to Istanbul in 2014.

It is obvious that Fidler has a passion for the rich history of Byzantium and the Byzantine Empire - centred around the legendary Constantinople. In the journey he takes us through some of the most extraordinary violent, as well as grand, times in history. Fidler brings to life the turbulent stories of the decaying Roman Empire, as he and son Joe explore modern Istanbul looking for the many ghosts and crumbling buildings of the Byzantine and Roman Empires. In the closing chapters, Fidler also ponders how the fall of Constantinople to Islam may have contributed to an age of European maritime exploration. The search for alternative trade routes which carried western culture and Christianity to the Americas, Africa, Asia and Oceania.

Many of us have come to know Richard Fidler since he became host of the hour-long ABC radio program “Conversations” in 2005. I feel he has applied his obvious talents for listening with his curiosity and good humour to gain an amazing understanding of the complex history of the region.

Although Fidler is passionate about his subject and obviously knows it well, there are sections where he seems to breeze over the surface, just ticking off rather than exploring in depth. But maybe that is just as well as it is already a large tome.

Ghost Empires is an important read if you have a desire to understand some of the complexities of what is still a very complex and unstable region.

Reviewed by Colin Cargill

May you be blessed with the spirit of the season, which is peace, the gladness of the season, which is hope, and the heart of the season, which is love!





PRAYER FOR CHRISTMAS EVE

Here is the emptiness of my night
 may it be filled with your glory
 Here are the silences of my heart
 may they be filled with your songs
 Here is the watchfulness of my eyes
 may they be opened to wonder
 Here is the listening of my soul
 may it hear the joy of your love
 Here is the hopefulness of my journey
 may it lead me swift to your side
 Here is the searching of my anxious mind
 may it find rest in your peace
 Here is the wood and straw of my days
 may they be a bed for your presence
 And here is the humble cave of my life
 may it be your home, gentle Saviour.

*Andrew King
 Minister in the Canadian United Church.*

Diary Dates

Friday 20 December 12noon	Church office closes
Sunday 22 December 7.30pm	Blue Christmas
Tuesday 24 December 7.00pm	Christmas Eve worship
Wednesday 25 December 9.00am	Christmas Day worship
Sundays 5 January to 9 February 9.30am	Sunday worship in the hall
Monday 6 January 9.00am	Church office reopens
Sunday 26 January	First newsletter for the year
Sunday 9 February 7.30pm	Inter-faith forum at Morialta (See page 4 for details)

Acknowledgements

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Living Streams ~ Giving Life



Deadline
 for the next Edition

1 February

To discuss ideas for Vision articles
 contact the editor, Colin Cargill