

THE PARRAMATTA MISSION HERITAGE COMMITTEE'S

# ADVENT COLLECTION

## 2015

A special conclusion to our Parramatta Mission 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year:  
1815 – 2015.



With contributions from the Parramatta Mission Heritage Committee,  
& the Ministers, congregation members, staff and friends of Parramatta Mission.



Parramatta  
Mission



uniting  
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Council of Bishops & AC

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## Welcome to our ‘Advent Collection’

2015 has been a very special but challenging year for all of us. A 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary has been celebrated here at Parramatta Mission and many other, wonderful events have happened in our congregational lives – and in the broader scope of the Mission’s work. However, in Australia and throughout the world, there has also been some immense tragedy – including the recent violence in Paris and the ongoing plight of Syrian and other refugees.

This Advent collection marks both the official close of our Anniversary year – and an opportunity to share some joy, insight and peaceful reflection with each other at the commencement of a season which is so heavily weighted by international and domestic concerns. It contains some re-printed contributions from previous collections and some new items – including transcripts of prayers given at our recent ‘Parramatta to Paris’ prayer vigil.

To all of our contributors, past and present, we say a warm “thank you” and hope that the collection brings some uplift to everyone in this period when calendars are full, time is tight and stress levels are on the rise. Please take a moment to stop, rest and read this wonderfully diverse set of writings – and to take in its wide-ranging Advent sentiments and stories.

Parramatta Mission also needs everyone’s support this Christmas. By volunteering and/or making a donation of gifts, money or food for those in need, lives can – and will – be transformed. We invite everyone to continue giving and to join us for up and coming Christmas worship services and special events at Parramatta and Westmead. Information about dates and times is contained in this booklet. You can also phone Reception: 9891-2277.

Please also remember our *Community Peace Dinner* on 5 December. It will be a special opportunity to join others from our community for both a meal and a time of reflection, sharing and seasonal celebration. If you can’t attend, please support this event in prayer, as its intention of community-building and hospitality is a crucial one.

Thank you to all who have supported the Parramatta Mission Heritage Committee in 2015 and throughout the various activities of our Anniversary. “Happy Christmas”!

The Parramatta Mission Heritage committee (est. 2009): Liz de Réland, Keith Hamilton, Inise Foiakau, Sosi Toa, Lorna Porter, Neil McGrath & Samantha Vulawalu.



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### *Benediction*

## **What is arriving this Advent?**

When I look out the window of my office, the front or back door of home, or any point around our church in Parramatta or at Westmead, I do not see sheep and shepherds, cattle and feed troughs. Not even at Advent or Christmas.

I have lived in a country town and also on a farm, where the sights and smells of animals is common. Advent services and events held in non-air conditioned buildings in Cootamundra when the temperature was still over forty in the evening were memorable. The Advents when living 15 minutes from the beach in Taree and Newcastle were also memorable.

My first Advent and Christmas as a Minister of the Word involved a whole new set of challenges. It was the summer of 1989. It was in Newcastle. With others, we introduced the Advent wreath and candles to a congregation who had not previously had candles in church. We also introduced coloured cloths to match the liturgical seasons – the colour of Advent, purple, the colour of Christmas, white. Nothing to do with Advent, but I did also buy my first brand new car that same year; yes, a Ford Falcon. I also took the risk of having a lay member of the congregation preach the sermon on the theme of what Christmas means to him.

Advent also involves the change of gospel focus for the forthcoming year in the cycle of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. (John gets shoehorned into the other years). On that first Advent of 89 I prepared an introduction on the gospel for that year, Matthew as I recall, in which I set out some interesting historical information about authorship, date, place and context of writing, and some themes. This seemed to go well, so I repeated the exercise in following years.

I love the bush. Always have. Being among the gum trees, the smell of eucalyptus...the summer noise of the cicadas. Delightful. But – we live in the city. Stories of shepherds and sheep, or cow sheds and feed troughs are not our everyday experience. When I find myself dreaming about the bush, I have learnt that I am ‘escaping’ some current situation. Having said that – and having lived in a country town, Advent was the time of harvesting wheat. A particular memory of Advent in Cootamundra was working long hours to keep wheat trucks on the road. The air often had a smell of dust from harvested paddocks. The sun – blistering hot. Another memory from Cootamundra is of all the churches combining for carol services held on the footpath, as the sun went down after another very hot day.

Advent in Rooty Hill and St Marys involved Christmas parties with various church groups. For some years in St Marys a bush dance was held involving the child care centre – Susannah Children’s Centre, and the congregations. One year, as we were packing up late on a Saturday night, we decided that we would not put the furniture back for the morning. We set the hay bales in a circle, a communion table in the middle. Everyone turned up in country clothes and we had a different kind of service on the Sunday.

Wherever I have lived, I have wondered what does it mean to celebrate Advent and Christmas in that place? When I was the minister at Lambton, Jesmond and Waratah in Newcastle, we reflected on that theme each year and during my last Christmas there, all the songs and prayers were written by congregation members about Christmas in Newcastle.

My last 8 years have been in the CBD of Parramatta. What is different about Advent here? Stories of sheep on hills and cattle lowing seem out of place, even though we can be among the farmlands on Windsor Road in less than 30 minutes. The city is never far from the bush. We actually do not have to go far to be among the gum trees. In recent weeks, I have twice visited my old high school, Greystanes High, and assisted at a BBQ fundraiser for PM, standing under the gum trees.



While we are close to the geographical and demographical centre of Sydney, and considered the second CBD of Sydney, we are close to the bush. While Parramatta has changed from being a country town – with its silos and oil seed refining long gone, and the annual country show at Westmead usurped by Westmead Hospital – we bridge images of both city and rural landscapes.

Perhaps a symbol of Advent this year is the scene outside my office window. Nearby, holes are being dug to begin building, and next to that, not 100 metres away, a new structure is rising which will become the new Western Sydney University building, opening early 2017. The new Parramatta Square is imminent, with its advent not far away, and our own redevelopment plans are also in progress. At Westmead, the university is about to start redevelopment, the hospital precinct will be expanded, and our own building redevelopment brief is a work in progress. Anticipation of the ‘new’ is a theme. An Advent theme.

Ultimately, the Christmas story is not about sheep and shepherds, cattle and feed troughs. It is about looking for the presence of God being born in the ordinary things of life. Just as the Jacarandas have burst into bloom, so our lives can burst with hope and vitality – and with an openness to what God is doing that is also ‘new’.

***Keith Hamilton***

## Christ the Redeemer, Ice-cream Vendors and Advent...

During our recent trip to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, my wife Nita and I decided to go and see the *Christ the Redeemer* statue, the largest art-deco-style sculpture in the world which stands on the top of Mount Corcovado. This thirty eight metre tall statue is one of Rio's most recognizable landmarks and a *must see* for tourists.

When we went to buy tickets for our transport to go to the top of the mountain, the young man inside the ticket counter turned his computer screen towards us instead of issuing our tickets. The screen was cloudy white. The message was clear: the sky is not clear at the top, don't go. While we appreciated his honesty, we were disappointed for we had only one more day in Rio and we did not want to miss the statue.

We decided to wait, hoping that the weather might improve later in the day. We sat on a bench in a park watching people playing card games, doing exercise and children playing. Soon we spotted an ice cream vendor pushing his hand barrow, selling ice creams. After a while he sat on a bench, took out his lunch and started eating. It was only after a few spoonfuls had been eaten that he saw a homeless man nearby. Immediately he stopped eating, called the man, gave him his lunch and walked away. We were spellbound by the selfless sacrifice of the poor ice cream vendor. We said to ourselves that we were going to spend money, time and effort to see a concrete statue of *Christ the Redeemer* – whereas Christ was right here, redeeming people in and through ordinary folks like the poor ice cream vendor.



Later we went to see the statue and were not disappointed. It was breathtaking. The sky was clear. We had a fantastic 360 degree view of Rio from the top. The story could have ended here. But it didn't.

The next day we went to downtown Rio and while enjoying the spirit of a vibrant city, another surprise was waiting for us...

We saw a man putting half of his body inside a rubbish bin scavenging for some food. Finding nothing, disheartened, he just trudged along the busy road. And surprise of surprises, again it was another ice cream vendor who, seeing his plight, called him and gave him an ice cream. It was almost surreal. We couldn't believe our eyes. We felt as if Christ was telling us, "See, here I am again, redeeming my people in and through the least of my friends."

Since our return people have asked us about the highlights of our trip. There are many but these two incidents surpass all. The images of these two ice cream vendors are permanently etched in our hearts. They remind us that in and through ordinary people Christ comes to us, speaks to us and redeems us. And isn't that what Advent means?

*Manas Ghosh*

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## **The Work of Christmas**

When the song of the angels is stilled,  
when the star in the sky is gone,  
when the kings and princes are home,  
when the shepherds are back with the flocks,  
then the work of Christmas begins:  
to find the lost,  
to heal those broken in spirit,  
to feed the hungry,  
to release the oppressed,  
to rebuild the nations,  
to bring peace among all peoples,  
to make a little music with the heart...

And to radiate the Light of Christ,  
every day, in every way, in all that we do and in all that we say.  
Then the work of Christmas begins.

*Howard Thurman*

## **Let Me Not Keep Christmas**

Let me not wrap, stack, box, bag, tie, tag, bundle, seal, keep Christmas.  
Christmas kept is liable to mould.  
Let me give Christmas away, unwrapped, by exuberant armfuls.  
Let me share, dance, live Christmas unpretentiously, merrily, responsibly with overflowing  
hands, tireless steps and sparkling eyes.  
Christmas given away will stay fresh—even until it comes again.

*Linda Felver*

## ***Ruach*** – Spirit

Advent is a time when we prepare for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a bit weird for us when we know the story of Jesus' life, death, burial and resurrection – but it doesn't matter. There is something about the joy of Christmas which breaks through the horrors and injustices of the world – and we sure need it.

This year is the first Advent for me with the Westmead Congregation and Parramatta Mission. There is much which is challenging at present – and this seeks to act as a distraction from the opportunities we face to witness to the Westmead community about the love of God. Yet there is also a sense of excitement and anticipation of all that God is doing.

I can't wait to get out the Christmas decorations, lead the Advent Bible Studies, share in our First Advent service with the Fijian Congregation and so much more. There is something where the events of this last year and especially in the last few weeks make it even more important to witness to the peace, love and mercy of God. We need to be not just witnesses to God's peace through Jesus, but models of it in our community.

God's Spirit is stirring something up, and it is wonderful to be open to where she is leading. I am not always sure – although I often have an idea of something. It is when God's Spirit has stirred others up and together we can discern the time is right for engaging with what God is calling us to do. So – preparing for Christmas in this Advent season gives us the opportunity for some self-reflection, for some planning for next year and for getting excited. It doesn't matter how old or young we are, where we come from, our language, our gender, our intellectual or physical capacity, we can prepare for what God is doing – and get excited!

It will be a busy time, with many celebrations, but there will also be times of rest. My prayer for all in Parramatta Mission this Advent season as we move towards Christmas is to be alert to the presence of *\*Ruach* – God's Spirit at work in the world. For *Ruach* brings something out of nothing and births so much more than we can ever imagine. She sweeps through the earth in power and gentleness and enables us to enter God's Mission in the name of Jesus Christ.

My prayers and blessings are upon all who are part of our churches, and all who we engage with in ministry. May God's Blessing be upon us all!

***Christine Bayliss Kelly***



*\* In Hebrew, the word for Spirit (**Ruach**) is feminine. In Aramaic (the language generally considered to have been spoken by Jesus), the word is also feminine.*

## Women's 'Peace on Earth' Banners

The two new banners which are hanging in Leigh Memorial Church this Christmas represent the combined creative efforts of women from all of the Parramatta Mission congregations and beyond. They were commenced as part of the 2015 Women's High Tea – and Parramatta Mission's 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary acknowledgements.

Each square has been individually hand-sewn/ decorated using various materials, embroidery and appliqué by an inter-generational, culturally diverse range of women who stand solidly together in the name of PEACE, LOVE, UNITY & GOODWILL this Christmas time.

“Thank you” to Robyn Dunbar for her leadership, skill & dedication in bringing the banners to fruition & to the multiple, wonderful women who have contributed to this project from its inception. These have included family members and friends of Parramatta Mission members – and/or those from other congregations and the broader community.

Special thanks to Margie Gray for her assistance with the sewing of the banners and to Julie Hamilton, Donna Kelly and members of the Women's High Tea committee for their dedication to women's fundraising, support and enrichment at Parramatta Mission.



## Living Advent(ulously) with Luke

Why wait for 1 January? Happy New Year! The first Sunday in Advent marks the beginning of a new year. We change gospels. If you had not noticed, this past 12 months we have been travelling in the company of Mark. For the next year Luke will be our companion. And so we will live in the company of the good Samaritan, the prodigal son, the parables of the lost coin and the lost sheep, the rich man and Lazarus. Those parables you only find in Luke. Forget, for just a moment, that the other gospels exist – and see how this gospel speaks to you. For let us be clear: it shares much in common with Matthew and Mark, but there are differences and they're important.

Come Christmas - if we only had Luke, - yes, we would have Zechariah in the temple, Gabriel coming to Mary, the births of John the Baptist and Jesus, the shepherds in the field, the chorus of angels singing their songs of peace. BUT there would be no need for children to dress up as wise men; we would not know about the threat from Herod and the infant Jesus and his family would not have to flee and be refugees in a foreign land, Egypt. Those things only occur in Matthew. We would have the 12 year old Jesus in the Temple, though – the other gospels do not.

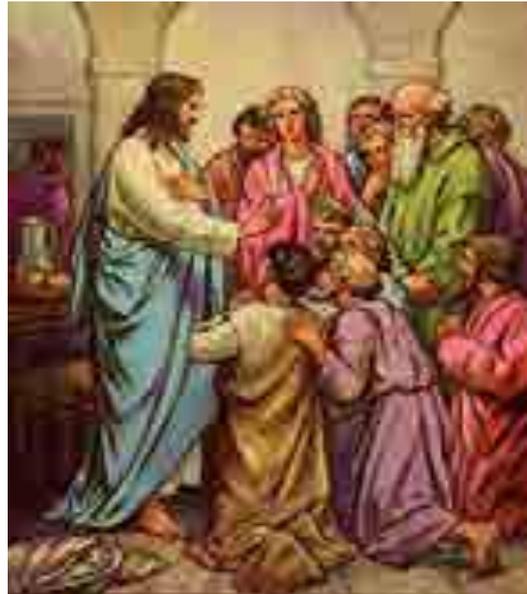
And we're just scratching the surface. Imagine that we only had Luke's gospel – and it was this gospel alone that shaped our understanding of the Christian faith. There is no sermon on the mount: instead we have a sermon on the plain. Where Matthew says, "blessed are the poor in spirit", Luke says "blessed are the poor"; where Matthew says, "blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness", Luke simply says "blessed are those who are hungry" – in addition to which he throws in four woes for good measure – which Matthew does not.

The gospel of Luke has what we call a bias towards the poor. It is the only gospel where Jesus opens the scroll in the synagogue in his home town and reads from the prophet Isaiah: the Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor, release to the captives, the recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

What's more, Luke has more stories to do with women than the other gospels do: there is the account of the women who support his ministry, not to mention the role given to Elizabeth and Mary, the unnamed woman who anoints his feet with her tears – as well as other.

What's more Luke alone has Jesus say from the cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do"; Luke alone has the story of the road to Emmaus and only Luke gives us an account of Jesus being ascended into heaven. This is a gospel for the new year which has a lot of things that other gospels do not have.

Luke is tailor-made for us in our cultural diversity. The writer of Luke's gospel is also the writer of the book of Acts – both books begin with "Dear Theophilus". It is one of his great concerns to show that the gospel of Jesus Christ is good news for peoples of all the cultures that he knew about at that time. We might say it is the most multicultural, most cross-cultural gospel there is. And that can be seen in a whole variety of ways.



The genealogy of Jesus in Luke goes back to Adam, the first human being, rather than back to Abraham as it does in Matthew; when the 8 day old Jesus is taken to the temple, the prophet Simeon declares that his birth signifies a light for the revelation to the Gentiles – that's us, that's all of us, in all our different cultures and ethnicities.

In this gospel for the coming year, the gospel of Luke there are a number of pivotal times when someone from another culture somehow recognizes who Jesus and what that might mean for them. At the foot of the cross the Roman centurion rather than the leaders of his own people confesses that Jesus was surely the son of God or a righteous man; in response to the lawyer's question, who is my neighbour, Jesus cites the example of the Samaritan, the good Samaritan, who belonged to a culture which attracted suspicion, dislike, long held animosity. When ten lepers are healed, the only one who comes back to thank Jesus is another Samaritan – he throws himself at Jesus' feet and Jesus says: "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?"

There is another thing about Luke's gospel which is worth noting. Of all the 4 gospels it is only Luke which seems take much interest in timing. The way in which he writes his gospel is a bit like a history: he kind of dates the time of Jesus' birth – in the reign of Augustus and when Quirinius was governor of Syria. That kind of timing is what we call calendar time, linear time, it's the kind of time we think about when we check our watch, our phone, our diaries, our calendars.

There are two types of time in Luke. This calendar time is known in Greek as *chronos* time; the other sort of time is *kairos* time. And Kairos time has to do with the right time for something, the opportune time, the critical time. It is present in Luke whenever something to do with God and God's way of salvation is made known – so we might say it is God's own time. There are a number of occasions in the gospel when Jesus says: "today, salvation has come to this house" – or the equivalent.

One of the rather interesting texts to do with this *Kairos* time is Luke 12: 54-56. It speaks of the people able to read the weather when the clouds gather in the west and when the wind blows from the south; they know how to do these things but what they cannot do is "interpret the signs of the times", the signs of the present time" – and Luke here uses that word, *kairos*.

Maybe it's worth thinking about those signs of the times and the present time being the right time as we make our way through 2016. There is a lot of change going on around us. Maybe we can think about how Luke tells the story of Jesus in order to help us think through what is being asked of us?

For starters why not begin an Advent discipline? Read the whole of the gospel of Luke through before Christmas. (If you are keen, why not add the book of Acts as well!). What are the 5 or 6 verses or stories which speak most to you? Why not make a New Year's promise to live adventurously in the company of Luke?

***Clive Pearson***



***The Annunciation by Fra Angelico, c. 1450.***

## Prayers for Paris

*Laments and prayers were held at Leigh Memorial on Monday 16 November, following the terrorist attacks which struck Paris on Friday 13 November 2015. Those leading the prayers were Rev. Keith Hamilton, Rev. Dr. Manas Ghosh, Rev. Christine Bayliss Kelly, Mario de Réland and Rev. Mary Pearson. Mr. Neil El-Khadomi of the Parramatta Mosque also attended the Lament and brought words of comfort, unity and hope to those gathered. A transcript of the afternoon's program is included below:*



### **Keith: Introduction**

We gather today shocked and numbed by the recent events in Paris, that follow on from events in Beirut and Ankhara. In this gathering, over the next hour, there will be opportunities to sit and meditate, to pray, to write a message or prayer that will be collected and presented to the French consulate. You are invited to move to different parts of the church, as you wish. There will be formal prayers spoken through this time, but they will be unannounced. The Lord's prayer will be said in French.

### **Christine: Lament**

God O God  
We cry and our hearts are in pain  
We do not know  
We cannot understand  
Yet life continues  
Why O Why God do we kill and maim?  
To think that we know more than another person,  
That we understand you  
Or that our faith or religion or belief is purer than another's?  
O Lord forgive us  
For our arrogance as a human race  
Our inhumanity...there are no words  
Only you  
Only you can come to us and meet us in our pain  
Bring us hope O loving God  
Bring us hope

## **Manas: Prayer for Peace**

Loving God,

We gather here as your children – from Paris to Parramatta, Beirut to Baghdad, tied in our grief for what has happened to our brothers and sisters in France, Beirut, Baghdad in the last week, and in our city of Parramatta only a few weeks ago. Carnage that beggars description has numbed us.

We are at a loss, finding it hard to describe our feelings and compose our thoughts into words. But you know everything – our thoughts, our feelings, our grief and our anger for you too have witnessed this carnage with us. And moreover, you have seen it happen to your son Jesus Christ when the world hurled violence upon his sinless body on the cross on the Good Friday. You know and share our pain, our tragedy, our loss. You stand beside us and weep with us, you hold our hands and you lend us your shoulder to rest our weary heads and cry.

So we come to you, joining our hearts and minds with those of the people of France and other parts of the world who are victims of violence and terrorism, and we raise our voice in spoken and unspoken words for your mercy, grace, healing, comfort and peace upon them and us. We pray for the families who have so brutally and suddenly lost their loved ones, and for those who are struggling with serious injury. We pray for those brave men and women who risked their own lives during the carnage in service to others. We pray for the doctors, nurses, paramedics, emergency service providers, other health officials, counsellors, law enforcing officers and the French government.

We pray for the terrorists and their accomplices that they may change their paths of violence to the paths of peace; that they may use their energy and resources not to spread the message of hatred and kill and maim people – but to build bridges between people, and create a tolerant, harmonious and peaceful world.

We pray for leaders of all nations that they may be calm and exercise wise leadership, especially in the face of a possible backlash against the innocent. In their anger and frustration when they think of retaliation with lethal force, turn their eyes to the cross from where Jesus said, “Father, forgive them”; turn their ears to the words of Jesus who said “love your enemies.”

May people everywhere understand that killing cannot be stopped by more killing; violence cannot be overcome by more violence; and evil cannot be defeated by another evil, but only by love, forgiveness, mercy, kindness and non-violent negotiation and work. May we all show forth love, and remember your calling to be lights in a darkened world.

Lord, grant to us all your gentle yet strong Spirit of Peace – peace that passes our understanding but changes lives and changes the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

## **Mario: The Lord's Prayer – in the French language**

### **Notre Père**

*Notre Père, qui es aux cieux,  
Que ton nom soit sanctifié,  
Que ton règne vienne,  
Que ta volonté soit faite sur la terre comme au ciel.*

*Donne-nous aujourd'hui notre pain de ce jour.  
Pardonne-nous nos offenses  
Comme nous pardonnons aussi à ceux qui nous ont offensés.  
Et ne nous soumets pas à la tentation,  
mais délivre-nous du mal,  
car c'est à toi qu'appartiennent le règne,  
la puissance et la gloire, aux siècles des siècles.*

Amen.

### **Keith: Prayer - Lament**

On this day O God, our hearts cry out to you. We watch in horror as violence strikes the innocent and terror again comes so close. Our words fail us.

On this day O God, we are reminded of the vulnerability of life and the seeming power that cruelty can wield. Our thinking fails us.

On this day O God, we are aware of how anger can rise and overwhelm even the ordinary actions of our days. Our reactions fail us.

## Mary: Closing Prayer

Our hearts have been torn O God;  
Torn by violence that has broken upon the innocent and unsuspecting,  
In cafes, at a concert, on streets near homes, on a university campus,  
Our hearts have been torn by the senseless brutality  
That has ripped through the everyday lives of people, just like us.  
It has torn through what we hold dear for ourselves  
And what we hope for in this small world we belong to.  
Even here and now, so far removed in geography,  
We share this explosion that has ripped apart lives  
And threatens to divide person from person,  
Neighbour from neighbour.  
Dear God, into this darkness, we have lifted up our voices in pain  
And have added our cries to the cries of people around the world.  
There is no real answer to our “why?” but there is fear  
At what human can do to human.  
God, forgive us all for what is done in the name of religion.  
We need your help, O God, to draw from the deep wells of kindness and caring  
That flow from the Love that is the true heart of our humanity.  
Here, as we lament and grieve and offer our prayers for healing and peace  
For those devastated by terror  
May we also rediscover courage and hope to hold up our heads  
And walk in the paths of peace and love for our neighbour,  
To take time to be the kind of people who can create a different way,  
Breaking down barriers that would divide -  
And, as we go from here into a world where people again prepare to celebrate Christmas,  
May the message of love incarnate be with you always.

Amen.



## **La Main de Dieu – *The Hand of God***

Technology intrigues me – but I can't say that I love it. I was in my early twenties before I learned to use a computer – a fact which my 'Gen Z' children find incredulous – but now I can't imagine my life without one. Each day I check my emails, write, research and watch news via my screen and feel eternally grateful to Google for the basics – such as weather reports and street directions. Yet if I'm honest – my heart will always belong to pen and paper. I still take time every day to use them and I'm someone who also loves stationery stores, bookshops, libraries, cards, stamps, envelopes, fountain pens and wax seals. Paper and ink are beautiful things. That said, time constraints force me to send more messages and letters via email these days than ever before – so whenever I do have the opportunity to write by hand, there is genuine happiness. Similarly, when I find something true, beautiful and edifying on the internet, it also fills me with joy – and perhaps, a degree of relief. The darker and less-edifying side of the 'net' is so extensive that any real beauty found within it tends to shine out like a diamond.

And so it was recently, among the horrific stories coming out of Paris in the aftermath of the Friday 13 November attacks – that one such diamond caught my eye. It was a message from Guillaume Pitddu, a Pastor at the *Eglise Paris Metropole* (Paris Metropolitan Church) whose congregation had held a prayer vigil in the heart of Paris on the night of the terror attacks. The first song they sang at the vigil was 'In Christ Alone' - which had been sung by our own Music Team at Leigh Memorial the previous Sunday morning. In Guillaume's words, during the singing of the song and despite all of the unfolding tragedy around them, his congregation had strongly felt "the hand of God" over them.

This simple but powerful image, which he shared instantaneously with millions via the internet, testifies to the wide reach of God into the hearts and minds of all those effected – even in the very depths of their confusion and pain.

After reading Guillaume's reflections, I listened to the song again on youtube and cried. I cried for the victims and their families – and for the tangible 'shudder' which had been felt around the world. I also pondered the courageous steps that we must all now take towards trust and openness – instead of the more instinctual ones of closure and suspicion. But most of all for me, there is no going past the image of God's hand reaching out to Paris. It hasn't left me to this day. Bless the internet - I've never loved it more.

***Liz de Réland***

### **In Christ Alone**

by Stuart Townend and Keith Getty.

*No power of hell, no scheme of man,  
Can ever pluck me from Your hand;  
Till You return or call me home,  
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.*

***Ni pouvoir de l'enfer, ni machination de homme  
Ne pourront jamais me retirer de Sa main  
Jusqu'à son retour ou mon rappel à la maison  
Dans le pouvoir de Christ je me tiendrai***

## The Illumination

Christmas in Scotland comes very soon after the shortest day of the year. At its heart lies and image of light breaking in to the darkness.

For me this is encapsulated in my most abiding Christmas memory. My uncle was the minister of a big church that nestled at the foot of Edinburgh Castle. It was a church that seated more than 1,000 people and every Christmas Eve it was packed out. People spilled out of hotels and bars and came from their more sedate homes. The church was dark, lit only by hundreds of small candles. We always sat in the gallery that went around 3 sides of the church. In front of us, behind the communion table, was a marble frieze based on Da Vinci's Last Supper. Again, it was in shadow. The service was closely timed, and at midnight, as Christmas Day was ushered in, we sang 'Silent Night'. As we came to the words "Strikes for us now the hour of grace", the face of Jesus in the frieze would be illuminated by a single light.

It was, for me, the moment of incarnation. I waited for it. I watched for it. It still warms my heart.

One year, as we came out, the doors were opened onto big snowflakes falling. The ground was white, the church bells were pealing and the castle – above - was floodlit. I did not need anything more for Christmas.

*Mary Pearson*



## The Wild Ducks

Here is a little story that happened a few years ago... I was in my car and rushing to shop at Winston Hills. On arriving to turn right at the Old Windsor Road and Oaks Road intersection, I found that all the traffic had come to a complete 'stand-still'.

There, on that very busy corner was a family of about 15 or more wild ducks, whose abode is normally the banks and surrounds of Toongabbie Creek. There, on that busy corner was a great 'waddle' of ducks crossing the road - and at a very slow waddle.

The extended 'family' included mother ducks and father ducks, 'juveniles and toddlers' - all out for a relaxing stroll before returning 'home'. I have never seen so many wild ducks in a 'waddle' before!

The traffic could not move. Delivery truck drivers, workers (including factory workers from Oakes Road), Christmas shoppers and busy Mums and Dads alike - all patiently waited and waited, until the ducks were slowly and safely across the road.

That whole, little corner of the world had stopped - so as drivers, we were able to relax and enjoy the waiting time, before finally moving on with smiles on our faces. It was so different to how we felt when we arrived at that intersection, rushing to our destinations!

Maybe we all need something like those wild ducks to cross our paths again during Advent 2015 - just to put our busy, busy world on hold and give us all time to reflect and enjoy the 'specialness' of Christmas.

*Lorna Porter*



## Advent Hymn

(Tune: Leoni/ Lyrics: Michael Earl).

Now in this middle time,  
expectant and unsure,  
Lord Jesus, shall your love remain  
forevermore?

Will mercy still be shared,  
the kingdom still arrive,  
the broken hearted made anew,  
the dead, alive?

There is a distant light,  
A gently flickering flame,  
A dancing promise of delight  
We long to name,  
Lord Jesus, is it you?  
We strain our eyes to see  
Can humble infant form contain  
God's majesty?

We dance toward the hour  
We see your human face,  
In lively steps of hope  
But with a patient pace.  
Lord Jesus, give us strength  
To watch, to wait, to pray,  
Throughout this Advent length to glimpse  
Your glorious day.

Come quickly infant King,  
The time is drawing near,  
A pregnant expectation swells  
To greet you here.  
Lord Jesus, help us see  
Your gracious stooping down  
And bow our heads with yours to wear  
Your servant crown.

**Michael Earl ©**



## Christmas in Sawana

**No Mistletoe.**

**No Christmas Trees.**

**No Fairy lights.**

**No Presents.**

**No Santa Claus.**

**No Baubles.**

**No Pre-Christmas parties.**

**No Traditional Baked Roast Turkey.**

**No Christmas Fruit cake.**

This will be my Christmas with my husband Siaki and our two daughters in his village in Sawana. Sawana is one of the few villages on the island of Vanua Balavu about 294 kilometres East of Suva, Fiji, accessible by the weekly CHC-6 Twin Otter flight from Suva, or the infrequent 20 hour boat trip from the capital. Despite its remoteness, the village is well sheltered in one of Fiji's beautiful lagoons. Its crystal clear waters, lush greenery and white sandy beaches are breathtaking, making it picture-perfect.

Three weeks before our departure to our paradise, members from Leigh Fijian will join representatives from the UCA and other communities in the *People's Climate March* in the city. The march is to raise awareness of the criticality of issues relating to climate change, as world leaders also gather in Paris for the United Nations Climate Summit.

I was stirred into my involvement by my daughter's comment that "it's always high-tide" on Sawana. Her very short experience from last Christmas doesn't qualify for measurable data, yet she shares an experience that is a reality to many in low-lying areas of Fiji. I remember an early morning walk along the road in Sawana, where I continuously kicked debris, *deni-ua*, remnants from the previous night's spring tide – now reaching new, higher levels. For the people in Sawana and neighbouring villages, the effects of climate change are now a reality.

Leading up to Christmas, families gather during meal times to eat with visiting family and friends. At night the village is dark, with the exception of a few ill-lit homes powered by personal generators, but the echoes of Christmas carols from the distant church reminds us that it is close to Christmas. On Christmas Eve, after the '*lotu*', the local children and the church choir walk the village greens singing carols. Villagers come out to drape singers with fine fabrics, gifts of money and food, such as baked scones and pies, which are gestures of appreciation. There is an amazing sense of celebration, relationships and selfless gifting.

On Christmas morning, the elders, men and children in their best white shirts, *sulus* (sarongs) with a neatly wrapped fine white mats around their waists, make their way to church for the first Christmas service. The ladies and girls are in their best white dresses and *sulus with 'ta'ovala'* (fine mats) around their waists, complete with their signature red scarves.

Some women remain in their kitchens busily cooking a feast. One can find younger men behind the main houses making 'lovo' (an earthen oven) and roasting young suckling pigs on a spit - a specialty of the village.

The makeshift pergola structure in front of the family's main residence is dressed with fine, colourful screen printed fabric, the supporting posts woven with coconut leaves and big red wild tropical flowers. A long piece of screen printed fabric is spread over fine mats and unmatched plates, cutlery and assorted glasses are artistically placed on the fabric – a setting which could 'sit' 30 people. Usually the men are seated on top end of the spread cloth, followed by the children. The ladies and young girls sit at the tail end, closer to the big pots.

Christmas lunch is usually a spread of suckling pigs on a spit, colourfully decorated with hibiscus flowers and watermelon, fried fish garnished with onions and tomatoes, boiled deep-sea fish on a platter dressed with rich coconut milk and herbs, *lovo* baked *palusami* (spinach leaves), with *taro* or *uvi* (root crops). There would also be chicken and salted beef dishes.

Christmas, like Good Friday, is a day of worship in Sawana. Apart from food preparation and feasting, the island basically stands still. After the big lunch, older men usually recline to rest, while women gather under a breezy mango tree to catch a quick nap before they prepare dinner. Festivities, *kava* and the beach are for the next day. Christmas on the island is deeply reserved for the revered Son of God. There is an absence of commercialization. The atmosphere in the village is one of nature and simplicity, humbling one to recognise the majesty of the Lord and remember the first Advent.

It is my Christmas prayer that the people of Sawana and her neighbours continue to enjoy the serenity of the island and her virtues in the *waitui* (ocean).

It is my prayer that our march, the people's march, be heard and made visible to world leaders as they make their critical decisions in the name of climate change.

### ***Inise Foiakau***



## The Christmas of St. Francis of Assisi

I find that every Christmas my mind turns to Francis of Assisi. I wonder if that is because my mother gave me a Ladybird book about him when I must have been about 7 or 8. I liked the story of the first Christmas manger scene. Up until the time of Francis Christmas was not much celebrated. He wanted to present the Christmas story in a way in which ordinary folk could understand. That led to the first nativity scene which Francis created in 1223 for the people of the small town of Greccio.



**St. Bonaventure tells the story in his ‘Life of St Francis of Assisi’:** *It happened in the third year before his death, that in order to excite the inhabitants of Greccio to commemorate the nativity of the Infant Jesus with great devotion, [St. Francis] determined to keep it with all possible solemnity; and lest he should be accused of lightness or novelty, he asked and obtained the permission of the sovereign Pontiff. Then he prepared a manger, and brought hay, and an ox and an ass to the place appointed. The brethren were summoned, the people ran together, the forest resounded with their voices, and that venerable night was made glorious by many and brilliant lights and sonorous psalms of praise. The man of God [St. Francis] stood before the Manger, full of devotion and piety, bathed in tears and radiant with joy; the Holy Gospel was chanted by Francis, the Levite of Christ. Then he preached to the people around the nativity of the poor King; and being unable to utter His name for the tenderness of His love, He called Him the Babe of Bethlehem. A certain valiant and veracious soldier, Master John of Greccio, who, for the love of Christ, had left the warfare of this world, and become a dear friend of this holy man, affirmed that he beheld an Infant marvellously beautiful, sleeping in the manger, Whom the blessed Father Francis embraced with both his arms, as if he would awake Him from sleep. This vision of the devout soldier is credible, not*

*only by reason of the sanctity of him that saw it, but by reason of the miracles which afterwards confirmed its truth. For example of Francis, if it be considered by the world, is doubtless sufficient to excite all hearts which are negligent in the faith of Christ; and the hay of that manger, being preserved by the people, miraculously cured all diseases of cattle, and many other pestilences; God thus in all things glorifying his servant, and witnessing to the great efficacy of his holy prayers by manifest prodigies and miracles.*

It was Francis who began the Christmas tradition of singing carols. Before him, the musical diet was a fare of listening to priests singing solemn Christmas hymns during formal church services. Francis had been taken by the passage in Luke 2:13-14 where a heavenly host of angels bursts forth into song. What he did was set religious lyrics to popular tunes of his time – and so carols were invented. The word ‘carol’ comes from a French word, ‘caroler’, which means dancing around in a circle – *Clive Pearson*

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### ***Angels We Have Heard on High***

*Angels we have on heard high  
Sweetly singing o’r the plains  
And the mountains in reply  
Echo back their joyous strains*

***Gloria in excelsis Deo  
Gloria in excelsis Deo***

*Shepherds why this Jubilee  
Why your joyous strains prolong?  
What that gladsome tidings be  
Which inspire your heavenly son?*

***Gloria in excelsis Deo  
Gloria in excelsis Deo***

*Come to Bethlehem to see  
him whose birth the angels sing  
Come adore on bended knee  
Christ the Lord the newborn King*

***Gloria in excelsis Deo  
Gloria in excelsis Deo***

*See him in a manger laid  
Whom the choirs of angels praise  
Mary, Joseph, lend your aid  
While our hearts in love we raise*

## My Precious Two

*I started thinking about what Christmas meant for me. I thought of perhaps composing a poem, or including my delicious apple pie recipe. But, with every idea I kept coming back to the same thoughts...my beautiful children, the end of the year, time for winding down and also getting ready for a new year. So, here is my poem...*

Christmas time, it is the end of another year,  
We celebrate in different ways,  
With family, friends and loved ones  
We eat, drink, play, talk for a day or days or many days!  
With faith and hope, belief and love  
We come together in community spirit  
For me with the blessing of my two beautiful children  
I love being a part of it.  
So each Christmas since 2003, I thank the greater Being  
For considering me worthy and true  
For since that year I have been blessed so deeply  
With the loves of my life, my precious two!

*Donna Kelly*



## Holly & Melaleucas

We've talked a lot about '1815' in 2015 at Parramatta Mission. It was the year when Rev. Samuel Leigh arrived at Port Sydney, ready to commence his ministry – and the year in which the Parramatta Wesleyan cause was boosted along an enterprising pathway which would bring about the Parramatta Mission that we know today.

King George III was on the throne of Great Britain and Ireland in 1815 – and Europe was embroiled in complex acts of treaty making. It was the year when Lachlan Macquarie was in the middle of his visionary term as Governor of New South Wales and the year when the road over the Blue Mountains was completed and Bathurst founded. It was also the year when the first school opened in Newcastle, free settlers first arrived in Van Diemen's Land – and when the Colony's first Supreme Court opened under controversial circumstances. A small loaf of bread cost a penny farthing and a cup of coffee or a quart of beer cost a penny.

1815 was the year in which Jane Austen's *Emma* was first published under a pseudonym, Napoleon was defeated at the Battle of Waterloo and Sir Walter Scott wrote his famous victory poem, *The Field of Waterloo*: "Now, Island Empress, wave thy crest on high." The 'Father' of Australian Federation, Sir Henry Parkes, was born in Warwickshire, England – and the eruption of Indonesian archipelago volcano *Tambora* killed thousands, caused tsunamis and violently altered the planet's climate for years to come.



Christmas in the Parramatta of 1815 was however, quiet and moderate. Not only was the town still very much in the grip of the convict system and effectively operating as a large penitentiary in permanent 'lock down', but Christmas as we know it did not commence in earnest until the middle of Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901). This came about as German/European traditions (including Christmas trees) were brought to England by her husband – Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg & Gotha – and other immigrants and travellers. By the late 1800s, elaborate Christmases had become both 'fashionable' and 'possible' via the increased capacities of the Industrial age to mass-produce everything from decorations to cards, food, gifts and wrapping paper – and to rapidly communicate them across continents.

That said, in the Sydney of 1815, Christmas was not without its share of celebrations, particularly on the part of the well-to-do. Governor and Mrs. Macquarie hosted elaborate, seasonal gatherings at their Parramatta and Sydney residences and Mrs. Macquarie even had a shaded summer arbour built by the river at Parramatta – so that her guests could enjoy a cup of tea with a pleasant view. The middle classes also held Christmas parties with special foods and dancing and burned traditional ‘Yule Logs’ at night before going to church on Christmas morning. Household servants and well-behaved convicts were sometimes given treats, amnesties and bonuses. Food choices were not extensive, but goose and duck were favoured and a plum pudding made with twelve ingredients (representing the twelve apostles) was also very popular throughout the colonies. In England, holly and mistletoe were used to decorate wreaths, windows, doors and tables, while in the Parramatta of 1815 – it was more likely to have been lilly-pillys, grevilleas or melaleucas – although further detail is scant.

Nonetheless, the first Christmas which Englishman Leigh spent in Parramatta unquestionably came as a shock. The average Christmas temperature in his birthplace of Staffordshire was 4 degrees. In Parramatta it was 28. In some of his correspondence with family at the time, he spoke of the seasons being different in Australia – and no doubt felt the impact of midday heat and evening thunderstorms during his long rides in the bush on ‘Old Traveller’.

His successor, Rev. Walter Lawry, was also not immune to the discomforts of a Parramatta summer. In 1818, he diarized that his December -February travels in Sydney’s West – in full long-coated, high-collared missionary regalia – were fraught with sunstroke, stinging insects and some contentious human company too – including Samuel Leigh. Combined with broader collegial dilemmas and an uncertain love-life, these factors seem to have produced in Lawry a highly melodramatic sense of irritation: “...in the night I was almost devoured alive by fleas and other biters...” while during the day “...the scorching of the sun from without, and the state of society here... makes me feel despair and faintness within...”

Despite both men’s discomfort however, they soldiered-on – and with successive years, gained greater resilience. The Christmases of 1815 and 1818 were just the start.

*Liz de Réland*



*The first Australian Christmas card – released 1843.*

## A Christmas Creed

*On Christmas Day, 1989, a 'Christmas Day Festival of Carols and Readings' was held at the Westmead Church. A Christmas Meditation was given by **Rev. Alan Jackson**, then Superintendent of Parramatta Mission. It was entitled: 'The Everlasting Legacy of Christmas'. Following the Meditation and the singing of carols – a 'Christmas Creed' was read in unison to close the service. It was as follows:*

I believe in the **Spirit of Christmas**, for it is the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ, whose birth it celebrates;

I believe in the **Lights of Christmas**, for they remind me of Him, who is the Light of the World;

I believe in the **Greenery of Christmas**, for it symbolizes the Eternal Life of those in Christ;

I believe in **Giving Gifts at Christmas**, for it is in keeping with the Greatest Gift the world has ever known;

I believe in being **Childlike at Christmas**, for Jesus said, we must become as children to enter the kingdom of heaven; and...

I believe in the **Angel's Song about Peace on Earth** among persons of good will – for when my will is good, as it is at Christmas, I feel a **Peace and Joy** in my heart that is unlike anything else in the world.

It has to be Peace and Joy of God! **Amen.**



## **The First ‘Meals Plus’ Christmas**

**This year, Parramatta Mission celebrated the 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Samuel Leigh’s pioneer ministry in Sydney’s West – and the 22nd year of ‘Meals Plus’ and its important work with vulnerable and marginalized people in the heart of Parramatta’s CBD.**

‘Meals Plus’ - or as it was originally known: ‘Exodus’ and then ‘The Kitchen’ - was the result of a need initially identified by the Leigh Memorial congregation in the period leading up to the 1990s. No Christmas lunch for the lonely or homeless was provided in the Parramatta CBD before that time, despite the fact that the recession was taking full effect in Western Sydney and the level of homelessness in our city was increasing rapidly. As a result, by the early years of the 1990s, the Leigh Memorial congregation had decided to provide a Christmas lunch for the homeless and lonely. NB: Exact details concerning the first lunches - and historical data relating to them - are currently being gathered and substantiated.

With the support of the Parramatta North Rotary Club, arrangements were made to provide the first lunch. Via a range of local networks including the Parramatta Advertiser, the lunch was publicized. We had no idea as to whether anyone would come.

Rotary assisted by providing ‘Red Rooster’ chicken and roast vegetables for the first gathering and we provided the greens and gravy. Rotary Christmas puddings and custard were supplied for dessert. From 10 o'clock people began to arrive, mostly offering to help, including a chef who offered his services free of charge. By about 11.00am, over 100 people were in the hall and we came to realise that most of the volunteers were in fact lonely people just seeking a sense of community on Christmas day. One lady told us that she would normally travel from Penrith to Manly via public transport on Christmas day just to avoid being home alone on what she regarded as a “sad” day. ‘Doing’ something was more important to her than ‘eating’. That same day, we also went out delivering Christmas meals and hampers to people who did not feel comfortable coming to the hall – which was also greatly appreciated.

In all, we served about 150 people on the first Christmas day lunch - working in extreme heat, with no air conditioning, limited expertise and just a lot of goodwill and fun. By about 3.00pm we had cleaned up – feeling tired but very satisfied. That first year, among those in the front line preparing, serving and cleaning up lunch were: Alan and Laurette Jackson, Col and Faye Gray, Fred and Norma Walker, Ian and Margie Gray, Liz de Réland and Warwick Brammall and his wife Leigh (from the Rotary Club).

The tradition of serving Christmas lunch - and in fact serving meals to the homeless at Parramatta Mission - had begun. In the ensuing period, Bernie Whelan (CEO of Crown Equipment) met with Alan Jackson to offer support for Parramatta Mission in establishing a permanent ‘Soup Kitchen’ in the Parramatta CBD. Due the process of developing this program, the second community Christmas lunch was held in a former church hall at 18 Smith Street, Parramatta.

That original “Spark of Grace” to hold that first Christmas Day lunch is now part of the rich heritage of Parramatta Mission.

***Ian and Margie Gray***



## **Christmas in Moree**

A happy Christmas memory for me is from a time when I was about 8 years old. Our large family, including Aunties, Uncles and cousins from out of town, joined together to celebrate Christmas in Moree. The tables were set up outside under the shade of the trees, as it was a very hot climate. There were lots of delicious, home cooked foods and pudding for after – which we all enjoyed, along with watermelon, freshly cut. It had to be wrapped in wet towels to keep it cool. There was lots of laughter, fun and teasing when cold watermelon skins were put down people's backs! Glorious, happy days...

*Jan Robson*



## Memories of Christmas

Christmas is the biggest festival of the year – celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, and the wonderful miracles He performed whilst He lived on Earth.

The Spirit of Christmas is Peace; The Gladness of Christmas is Hope; The Heart of Christmas is Love; Christmas brings much Joy to all.

Christmas is a time of remembering. It's a time of...putting up the decorations and Christmas trees; Carol singing on Christmas Day; The Salvation Army Band playing wonderful Christmas carols in the streets of North Parramatta prior to Christmas Day; searching the shops for presents; Wrapping gifts and hiding them until Christmas Day; The wonder of Santa's visit; The delight and wonderful joy on a child's face on Christmas morning; Our happy childhoods; All who have influenced our lives in some way; The happiness, peace, love and joy experienced throughout our lives; Our loved ones who are no longer with us and the happy memories we've shared together; Our Church Family meeting together on Christmas morning (the Minister often invited the children to bring a gift that they had received. The girls brought their dolls – the boys, a favourite toy. The Minister even 'baptised' the dolls. My son, Mark, had a space toy and when the Minister asked what it did – Mark told him to press the magic button, at which point the Minister got quite a shock when the toy flew up in the air!); Sharing fellowship with friends and family members over the Christmas season; and – Thanking God for the opportunity we have in being able to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

*Betty Evans*



## Christmas in Fiji

*This contribution was written by Adriu for the 'Parramatta Mission Advent Devotional Booklet' of 1993.*

Christmas Day is a time when we all get together as a family to worship, to enjoy each other's fellowship and to celebrate the birth of Christ. The climax of this get together is the worship service – either at dawn or in the morning at around 10 am. This is a kind of Thanksgiving Service in which the whole village is gathered together in praise and thanksgiving. It is also a time of festivity and enjoyment which surpasses all our other festivities! It is a time of giving to friends and relatives; both in food and in other kinds of gifts.

Those who come from the islands, hire boats to take them to the villages so that they may be together for Christmas Day and for the feast that the whole family shared together. For some of the children who were born outside their village, this is an opportunity for them to visit their village and get to know their relatives.

The festivities and enjoyment one gets out of these visits will linger on for the whole year. It makes one begin to plan to go again next Christmas.

Many songs have been written about Christmas that speak about the joy and friendship one derives from this special time. Christmas is indeed a time of family reunions and celebrations.

*Adriu Rogoimuri*



*Me Nomuni na marau ni siga ni sucu kei na tawase ni yabaki vou!*

Have a Merry Christmas & a Happy New Year!

## A Filipino Christmas

*This is an extract from Arabella's contribution to the 'Parramatta Mission Advent Devotional Booklet' of 1993.*

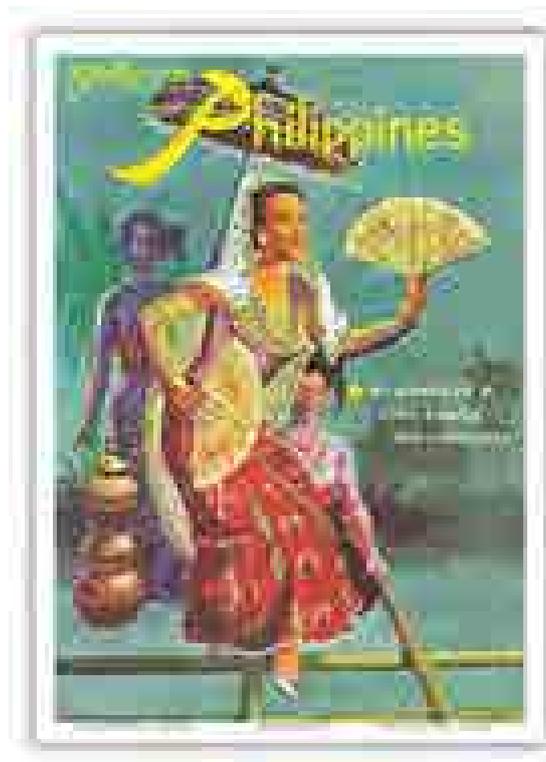
The spirit of Christmas is felt by Filipinos as early as September. Shops are filled with Christmas decorations, and Christmas songs are played on radios between September and the last week of December.

Christmas is the time when lanterns adorn the windows of houses and Christmas trees sit in the corners of lounge rooms. Christmas trees and lanterns best symbolize Christmas in the Philippines.

Christmas foods are also special. Delicacies (mostly made with glutinous rice) are Christmas favourites and examples include *puto bungbong*, *suman*, *ube* and *leche flan*.

One tradition is that families go from one house to another to visit and have a bite to eat. Families have to visit most – if not all – of their nearest relatives and friends so as not to offend them. (Can you imagine your stomach after eating so many times in one day?!).

*Arabella Mateo*



## A Snowy Christmas

*May's heart-warming recollections of Christmas 1938 and those much simpler times - are wonderfully detailed. They include information about her family's preparations for Christmas, the traditional cooking done by her mother, what she and each of her siblings received from Santa, and her memories of living through many a 'White Christmas'. Below is an extract from these very personal and vivid memories.*

**My name is May.** I was born in a coal mining town in St. Helens, Lancashire, England in 1934. Christmas...Oh! It was magical. We had snow every year when I was a little girl. It made everywhere look like Fairyland, with snow hanging from tree branches and on the rooves of all the houses – and on the ground, it would crunch under foot.

On the Christmas morning of 1938, four excited children (my siblings and myself) woke up very early, jumped out of bed and ran down the stairs with gusto to see what Santa had left us. We each had our stockings filled up with three pennies (we thought we were rich), an apple, an orange, some nuts in their shells and a magic painting book and paintbrush.

A couple of days before Christmas, Mum would cover the top of the Christmas cake with marzipan and white icing, and decorate it with holly. The finishing touch was colourful, red and green frilly paper that fitted all around the cake. It looked very festive and she also made mince tarts, jam and lemon curd tarts, shortbreads and apple, blueberry and rhubarb fruit pies. Her pastry melted in your mouth! Oh, the lovely smells from her kitchen...I can smell them now!

It was a very happy Christmas that year and we were a very happy family. Dad read a passage from the bible and we said a special prayer for Jesus' birthday.

A special blessing to you all my dear friends.

**May McDonald**



## **Sing a Carolling, Carolling Song!**

Sing a song of lasting cheer  
Sing a carolling, carolling song  
It's the season to be near  
Sing a carolling, carolling song

Bells ring out, let's all shout  
Christ the Saviour born today  
Trumpets sound, love is found  
Christ the Saviour born to day

Spread the news around  
Christ has come to save the world  
Go tell ev'ryone, look what we have found today

Bells ring out, let's all shout  
Christ the Saviour born today  
Trumpets sound, love is found  
Christ the Saviour born to day.

*Malcolm Dunbar*

(Inspired by Carols at Carrington Park in Young, NSW)



## A Peacekeeper's Message

*This was written by an Australian Peacekeeping soldier stationed overseas. The following is his request: "Would you do me the kind favour of sending this to as many people as you can? Christmas will be coming soon and some credit is due to all of the service men and women for our being able to celebrate these festivities..."*

**T'was the night before Christmas**, he lived all alone, in a one bedroom house, made of plaster and stone. I had come down the chimney, with presents to give, and to see just who, in this home, did live. I looked all about, a strange sight I did see, no tinsel, no presents, not even a tree. No stocking by mantle, just boots filled with sand, on the wall hung pictures, of far distant lands. With medals and badges, awards of all kinds, a sober thought, came through my mind. For this house was different, it was dark and dreary; I found the home of a soldier, once I could see clearly. The soldier lay sleeping, silent, alone, curled up on the floor, in this one bedroom home. The face was so gentle, the room in disorder, not how I pictured an Australian soldier. Was this the hero, of whom I'd just read? Curled up on a poncho, the floor for a bed? I realised the families, that I saw this night, owed their lives to these soldiers, who were willing to fight. Soon round the world, the children would play, and grownups would celebrate a bright Christmas day. They all enjoyed freedom, each month of the year, because of the soldiers, like the one lying here. I couldn't help wonder, how many lay alone, on a cold Christmas Eve, in a land far from home. The very thought brought a tear to my eye, I dropped to my knees, and started to cry. The soldier awakened, and I heard a rough voice, "Santa don't cry, this life is my choice; I fight for freedom; I don't ask for more, my life is my God, my country, my corps." The soldier rolled over and drifted to sleep, I couldn't control it, I continued to weep. I kept watch for hours, so silent and still, and we both shivered, from the cold night's chill. I did not want to leave, on that cold, dark, night, this guardian of honour, so willing to fight. Then the soldier rolled over, with a voice soft and pure, whispered, "Carry on Santa, its Christmas day, all is secure."

One look at my watch, and I knew he was right. **"Merry Christmas my friend - and to all a good night.**

*Contributed by Trish Rooney*



## Jesus is Better than Santa!

Santa lives at the North Pole, **Jesus is everywhere**/ Santa rides in a sleigh, **Jesus rides on the wind and walks on the water**/ Santa comes but once a year, **Jesus is an ever present help**/ Santa comes down your chimney uninvited, **Jesus stands at your door and knocks**/ Santa makes you stand in line to see him, **Jesus is as close as the mention of His name**/ Santa lets you sit in his lap, **Jesus lets you rest in his arms**/ Santa offers “Ho, Ho, Ho”, **Jesus offers Health, Help and Hope**/ Santa’s little helpers make toys, **Jesus makes new lives, mends hearts, repairs broken homes.**

There’s no comparison. Jesus is the reason for the season.

*Contributed by Helen Key*



## The ‘Ten Commandments’ of Christmas

1. Remember to keep Christ in Christmas.
2. Think of the greatness of God in sending Jesus to us as a baby.
3. Make plenty of room for Jesus in your heart at this busy time.
4. Enjoy Santa but don’t let him take the place of Jesus.
5. Tell others that Christmas is Jesus’ birthday.
6. Give love and care to those in need at Christmas time.
7. Look forward to celebrating the true meaning of Christmas, rather than just the gifts that you receive.
8. Share the true love and generosity of Christmas with as many people as possible.
9. Say thanks to God for Christmas get-togethers with family and friends.
10. Remember to show the love and joy of Christmas all year through!

*Contributed by Anne Key/ Adapted*

## The Upward Way

*Written on Christmas Day, 1991:*

Dear Friends,

Joy and I have just returned from an early morning Christmas Day service. As I walked into our lounge room and saw the Christmas cards with messages of encouragement - the idea of saying “thank you” to three groups of people emerged:

There are those of you living interstate and overseas, with whom we’ve had experiences of God’s love in a couple of churches.

There are those of you who do so much to ensure that the Australian Upper Room reaches thousands due to your help.

There are those of you involved as Telephone Counsellors with Lifeline Parramatta for whom I’ve written the ‘Opening Doors’ Lifeline History.

It’s amazing what God can accomplish through our willingness to listen to Him!

As our preacher today heralded the Good News of God’s love being embodied in Jesus, she walked towards a calendar placed on the altar.

She described how after Christmas we dispose of gift wrappings. By celebrating the birth of Christ at the end of the year, many might tend to likewise ‘dispose’ of Him too.

But – she affirmed that the Christian calendar actually commenced four weeks ago: the first Sunday in Advent.

Cutting out the December page from the calendar, she pasted it in front of the January page for 1992. Here now, Christmas was no longer only an ‘end of year’ event. Already, we’ve started a year with Him and so we were challenged to continue in His company as we face the next eleven months ahead.

Thanks to all for your many ways of support and care. May God keep pressing you on the ‘upward way’ as you accept His Grace day by day.

*Rev. Dr. Gloster Udy (1919 – 2003)*



## **My Childhood Country Christmas**

I was born at wars-end and as you can imagine, life in a remote country hamlet with limited family resources and three older siblings meant that we had very little in the way of personal toys. However, we seemed to belong to that era when children were expected to play outdoors - but were also given a special 'indoor' toy which was strictly hands-off and viewed only under parental supervision. For me, this happened to be a miniature plastic record player with its own records. I didn't hear about Santa Claus until I hit school.

As we grew older, dolls appeared, as did 'mecchano' sets, books, box-brownie cameras, bikes etc. that we cherished.

Mum was so forgiving of us one year when we not only discovered her treasured stash of Christmas presents - but also peeked and then blabbed to the neighbours. We were threatened with nothing at Christmas but thankfully she relented. However, to this day, I wish Mum would have given us a 'walloping' just to relieve the guilt that I still feel! Notwithstanding, we didn't always find gifts under the Christmas tree - but I learned about twenty years ago that Dad had bought tickets in toy raffles for many years hoping to win that great big stocking full of goodies for us.

Mum usually baked something extra special for Christmas lunch, including a freshly cooked chicken (I can still taste it today), plum pudding with coins and delicious custard, lemon meringue pie, garden vegetables and other delights. One day Dad brought home a dough-encrusted ham that he had cooked at the bakehouse where he worked. I was sent outside with a small axe to break through the hard crust so that the ham could be carved up for lunch.

Christmas days were usually blazing hot, but that didn't stop me from begging or borrowing someone's – anyone's - bike to career around the dirt roads in our neighbourhood and into the surrounding bush for hours on end. Happy Christmas.

*Darlene McGrath*



## **An Advent Re-dedication**

Advent is the time when we often reminisce about times gone by. We looked up a couple of Advent books prepared by the congregations of Leigh Memorial, one we think was 1986 entitled 'The Coming Christ' and the other was Advent 1992: 'Prepare the way of the Lord'.

We thought of all the changes that have occurred in the intervening years – the changes in the world in general, the advancement of the technological age, the changes in our own country, and particularly the changes that have occurred in the city of Parramatta, including the changes in people who make up the congregation of Leigh Memorial.

We remembered the friends who are no longer with us, and others who have moved from the area. It reminded us of the words of Matthew 6:30 that we are like wild grass – here today and gone tomorrow. God knows our needs but how little faith we have. We can do nothing about the past, the present is with us now, and the future we leave in God's hands. It makes us realise that through all these changes there is one constant, and that is the love of God for each and every one of us.

May this Advent season be a time when we re-dedicate ourselves to the Saviour who was born in Bethlehem over 2000 years ago.

*Nell & Ken Tanswell, 2012*



## No Room at the Inn?

Christmas is so close, so much to prepare, and so little time to reflect on the One whose birthday we celebrate. No room for Jesus at Christmas??

But...there IS room for him...plenty of room!

- Room in the shops to buy decorations for His celebration;
- Room to talk to other shoppers about the reason for the season;
- Room in our bookstalls to buy greeting cards to remind friends of His birth;
- Room to join in Christmas carols to remind others of his birthday;
- Room in our churches to praise God for sending Jesus and His love;
- Room in our homes to invite lonely ones to share our joy as we remember the Baby Jesus – born in a manger because there was no room at the Inn;
- Let's give Him room – and a Happy Birthday.

*Contributed by Beverly Beaman*



## **It's a Summer Salsa Kind of Christmas**

### **Chorus:**

It's a Summer Salsa kind of Christmas,  
Time to reflect on the year.  
It's a Summer Salsa Kind of Christmas,  
Time to spread some cheer.

### **Verse 1:**

Saviour and Lord,  
Son of the Almighty,  
He's the one that we adore,  
Praise His name for evermore.

### **Chorus:**

It's a Summer Salsa kind of Christmas,  
Time to reflect on the year.  
It's a Summer Salsa Kind of Christmas,  
Time to spread some cheer.

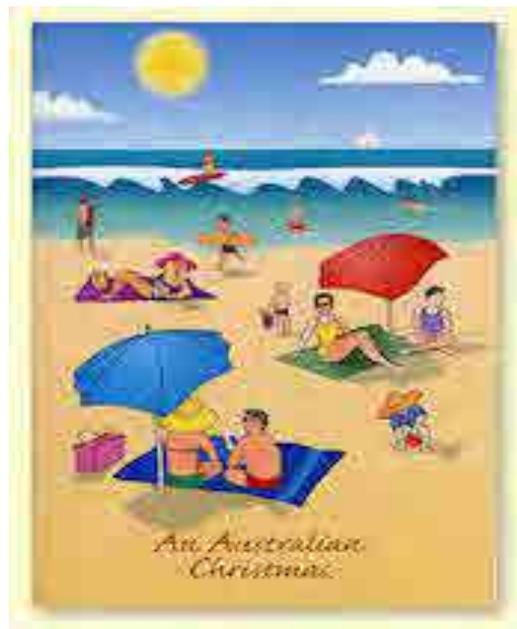
### **Verse 2:**

Saviour and Lord,  
Son of the Almighty.  
Lift your voices to the Son,  
Share His love with everyone.

### **Chorus:...**

***Malcolm Dunbar***

*(As performed at the 'Leigh Goes Latin' concert, 2015)*



## **Sung Tan Chuk Ha! Merry Christmas!**

South Korea is the only country in Asia to celebrate Christmas as a national holiday. Christian Koreans go to church on Christmas Eve and/or Christmas Day, exchange meaningful gifts or the gift of money – and enjoy a special meal with family and friends. Small children participate in Christmas pageants and fancy dress or visit Christmas shows in shopping centres. Non-Christian Koreans also enjoy celebrating the various Christmas traditions, such as Christmas lights, gift-buying, Christmas parties and concerts – and especially Santa Claus – who is known in Korea as ‘Santa Grandfather’.

“Happy Christmas” to all of our Korean Faith Community friends.

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# 새해 복 많이 받으세요

"Best Wishes for a Happy New Year"



## Away in a Manger

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,  
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.

The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay,  
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,  
But little Lord Jesus no crying he makes.

I love you Lord Jesus, look down from the sky  
And stay by my side until morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask you to stay  
Close by me forever, and love me, I pray.

Bless all the dear children in your tender care,  
And fit us for heaven, to live with you there.

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*Away in a Manger* is one of the world's most loved Christmas songs and was first published in America in the late 1800s – having originated in Germany. Despite its popularity, the song has been the subject of intense theological debate due to selected parts of its wording. Composition of it was also falsely attributed to Reformist Martin Luther, born 1483 – but was more likely written in tribute to the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lutheranism, which took place throughout the world in 1883.

**“Happy Christmas” from our Parramatta Mission kids!**



*Sunday School @ Leigh Christmas Play - inc. Shepherds, Angels & Roman soldiers!*



*Leigh Fijian Sunday School performing an action song*

## Little Star

*This is a lyric by **Helen Diana Clyde** (1889 – 1983):*

And did you see him, little star  
Long, long ago?  
And was it you, I wonder, shone  
On manger low?  
And did you see the shepherd men  
When angels sang?  
“Peace on Earth, good will to all”  
The message rang.

And did you guide the three wise kings  
With shining light?  
And bring them to the holy child  
On that great night?  
And will you still shine down on Earth,  
Though from afar  
And lead us back to Bethlehem,  
O little star?

*Contributed by **Flora Briggs***



## Christmas Day Memories as a Child

The waiting has ended,  
Waking excited, eager for the day,  
Scramble out of bed, manic activity happening,  
Children's and parents' laughter, Happiness,  
Paper ripping, phone calls made, new bells ringing,  
Neighbours waving, happy for this one moment.  
Food prepared lovingly. Food eaten and enjoyed.  
Bellies so full, no words need to be spoken, all is good.  
Cricket played late in the day,  
Sun setting, family together, peace and harmony.  
Sleep exhausted.  
The waiting begins again.

*Tracey Taylor*



*Window Shopping: Vintage Christmas Magazine Illustration, 1925*

## Christmas in Australia

*These are some verses from a song entitled 'Christmas in Australia'.*

There was no snow in the Outback,  
When Baby Jesus was born that night.  
Just a mother singing Dreamtime,  
Saw the shining star so bright.  
Now the children in the cities,  
Are hanging lights upon the trees,  
When it's Christmas in Australia,  
Bringing joy to you and me.

The farmer and the city-folk,  
All bow their heads and pray,  
To Little Baby Jesus,  
Born long ago and far away.  
Just an infant in a manger,  
Who'll fill the world with love and joy,  
When it's Christmas in Australia,  
Peace to every girl and boy.

*Anon*



*Summer Wildflowers: Vintage Australian Christmas embroidery*

## The Legend of the Glastonbury Thorn

*This legend speaks to the enduring capabilities of those who do good works in the name of God - and to the capacity of life and hope to endure hardship.*

The legend of the Glastonbury Thorn has its origins in Christ's death, as well as in the celebration of His birth. The legend goes that soon after the death of Christ, Joseph of Arimathea travelled from the Holy Land to Britain in order to spread the message of Christianity. Exhausted by his journey, he lay down to rest – pushing his staff (walking stick) into the ground beside him. When he awoke, he found that the staff had taken root and begun to grow and blossom. It is said that he left it there and that it has flowered every Christmas and every spring since. Legend also has it that a Puritan who was trying to cut the tree down, was blinded by a splinter of wood as he hacked into it. The original thorn did eventually die, but not before many cuttings had been taken. It is one of these very cuttings, they say, which is still found in the grounds of the famous Glastonbury Abbey in England – and which provides the sprigs which are given to Queen Elizabeth each year for her Christmas table.

*Contributed by the de Réland family*



*The Sacred Thorn, stained glass window – St. John's Church, Glastonbury, England.*

## **Parramatta Mission Christmas Events & Services, 2015**



### **Leigh Memorial Congregation**

**Thursday 17 December:** Christmas Carols & Carolling Walk at Centenary Square, 6.00pm

**Sunday 20 December:** Christmas Carols Service, Leigh Memorial, 7.00pm.

**Christmas Eve:** 'Blue Christmas' tarry-time Communion, 6.00 – 7.00pm.

**Christmas Day:** Combined Christmas Service - Leigh Memorial & Leigh Fijian, 8.00am.

### **Westmead Congregation**

**1 December:** Christmas Carols Service with the William Clarke College Singers, 12.30pm, followed by tea, coffee & cake.

**2 December:** Congregation Christmas Party, 12.00 – 3.00pm.

**Christmas Day:** Christmas Service – Westmead, 9.00am (please confirm with leaders).

### **Leigh Fijian Congregation**

**Christmas Day:** Combined Service – Leigh Fijian & Leigh Memorial - 8.00am.

**New Year's Eve:** 'Watch Night' Service @ Leigh Memorial – 7.00pm +

### **Korean Faith Community**

Please consult the newsletter or Rev. Hyung Goo Jun for further information.

***\*\* For further information about any of these events and services,  
please contact Ministers or congregation leaders, or call Reception, 9891-2277.***

## People's Climate Change March

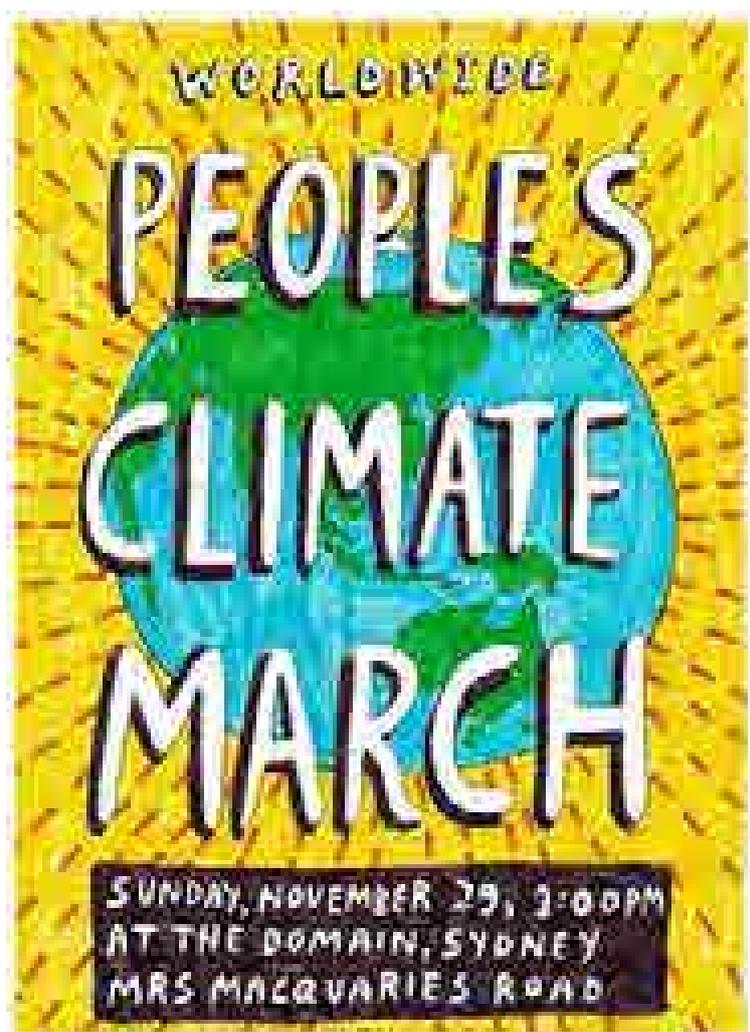
Sunday 29 November, 2015

**Join the congregations of Parramatta Mission & march** in support of our Fijian friends and other island peoples of the Pacific who are already witnessing the serious impacts of climate change. A group from Parramatta Mission will be attending the **12pm Prayer Service at Pitt Street Uniting Church** before joining the other marchers in the Domain at 1pm.

The Uniting Church supports this event and has released the following statement:

*The Uniting Church supports the **People's Climate March** because we believe that we are called to be a part of God's reconciliation and renewal of Creation. God invites and inspires us to participate in a vision of flourishing, abundant life, of peace and reconciliation, justice and transformation, love and inclusion for all Creation. Climate change is a threat to this vision, and is already harming those who are least responsible.*

If you miss the March but would like to participate in further action, please see Fil Kamotu (Fijian congregation) or consult the website - <http://www.peoplesclimate.org.au/volunteer>.



You are invited...

# COMMUNITY PEACE DINNER

“a Celebration of Peace, Unity & Goodwill”

Hosted by the Leigh Memorial Congregation of Parramatta Mission.



**When? Saturday 5 December 2015  
6.30 - 9.30pm.**

**Where? Fellowship Centre, 119 Macquarie Street, Parramatta.**

Attending will be representatives of various civic, religious, community and commercial groups in Parramatta and from throughout the Sydney Metropolitan area, plus congregation members & staff of Parramatta Mission.

The evening will include an uplifting program of reflection and seasonal celebration.

**Tickets for the event cost \$20.00 per person (2 course vegetarian meal)  
\*\* Limited places still available until 30/11/15. Please phone 9891-2277.**

For further information, please contact Rev. Dr. Manas Ghosh via 9891-2277.



Parramatta  
Mission



uniting  
church  
of Australia  
Parramatta District, NSW

## A Christmas Benediction

Let us just for a moment, Lord, hold this special time in our hearts.

It is about great mysteries, a baby's birth, universal love and simple gratitude.

It touches all of us.

With your presence in our hearts and the presence of each other in our lives,

may we be deeply thankful,

and may we pass on the everlasting beauty of gratitude, love, forgiveness and hope

to everyone we meet this Christmas time.

**Amen.**

