

Welshpool Methodist Church, High Street

“Celebrating and Sharing God’s Love”

“IN TOUCH” issue 21, 30th December 2020

News and Updates

1. **Lockdown Update** – unlike during previous lockdowns, the Welsh Government, recognising the importance of spiritual health, is allowing Places of Worship to remain open. Our church will continue to offer weekly Sunday worship at 10.45am and opportunities for Private Prayer each Wednesday, 10 until 12 and 2 until 4, but other midweek activities which had resumed are currently suspended.

2. **Morning Worship for January** – Sunday 3rd is Covenant Sunday, and our service will be led by Revd Marian. On 10th morning worship will be led by Terry Jobling, assisted by Derek; on 17th by John Harbron, and on 24th by Revd Jacquie (and this service will include Holy Communion). On 31st, being the 5th Sunday in the month, we shall join the congregation at St Mary’s church at 11am. Home Worship Sheets will continue to be produced for those unable to worship with us.

3. **Happy Birthday** to John Gordon who will be 92 on 2nd January and to Allan Everard (ex Welshpool, now Borth) who will be 96 on 9th January. We send good wishes to them and to all who will be celebrating birthdays this month.

4. **Thanks** – from Pat J to all who contributed to December’s appeal for Action for Children. Donations received, plus bucket collections and sales on 12th and 19th raised £380.05. A further £253.96 came in from the ‘Count Your Blessings’ Appeal.

5. **New Year Greetings** – wishing you all a happier and healthier year in 2021.

Thanks to **Betty** for suggesting these appropriate words of Minnie Louise Haskins:

And I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year:

‘Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown’.

And he replied:

‘Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the Hand of God.

That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way’.

So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night.

And he led me towards the hills and the breaking of the day in the lone East.

(Spoken by George VI in his Christmas 1939 broadcast to the Empire, these words struck a chord with a country facing the uncertainty of war - as they surely do for us, facing the uncertainty of Covid, its strains and after effects, this coming year. The words were a preamble to an obscure poem, “God Knows”, written in 1908, but nobody was able to identify the poet. Finally at midnight on Boxing Day the BBC announced that the author was Minnie Louise Haskins, a retired London School of Economics academic. Writing poems was just a small part of a career which had encompassed working in India (for the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society), the East End, in industrial welfare, and academia. These “Gate of the Year” words live on, and are inscribed at the entrance to the George VI Memorial Chapel in St George’s Chapel, Windsor, and in a window at the Queen’s Chapel of the Savoy. The poem was read at the funeral of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother in 2002).

From Terry J: “Step Softly”: *Carol Dixon*

Step softly into your weeping world, incarnate God,
Embrace it in your love.
Bring light into broken lives, warmth into frozen hearts,
and hope to those at war.
May your peace pervade in every place.

Help us to approach this New Year
Filled with the joy of your companionship,
As we step out in faith with you,
Ready to face the future, whatever it may hold.

New Year’s Resolutions (www.historyplace.com)

The first New Year’s Resolutions date back over 4,000 years to ancient Babylon. The Babylonians are said to have started the tradition during Akitu, a 12-day New Year celebration, when they would plant crops, crown a new king (or pledge loyalty to the reigning king) and make promises to pay their debts and return borrowed items. They believed that if they kept their word, the gods would look favourably on them for the year ahead. If the Babylonians broke their promises, they would fall on the bad side of their gods.

The history of New Year’s Resolutions continued in ancient Rome. Emperor Julius Caesar introduced a new calendar in 46BC which declared 1st January as the start of the New Year. This new date honoured Janus, a two-faced god who symbolically looked back into the previous year and forwards into the next year. The Romans would offer sacrifices to Janus and make promises of good behaviour for the year ahead.

New Year’s Resolutions were also made in The Middle Ages. Knights would renew their vow to chivalry by placing their hands on a live or roasted peacock. The annual “Peacock Vow” would take place at the end of the year, as a resolution to maintain their knighthood values.

New Year’s Resolutions appeared to be common by the 17th century. In 1671, Scottish writer Anne Halkett wrote a diary entry that contained several pledges such as “I will not offend anymore”. Anne wrote the entry on January 2nd and titled the page “Resolutions”.

A Boston newspaper from 1813 featured the first recorded use of the phrase ‘New Year resolution’.

Modern New Year’s Resolutions are largely a secular practice, with, for most people, the focus being on self-improvement, with people taking time to reflect on their goals. Today’s resolutions are often health-focussed, driven by the over-indulgence of the Christmas period! According to a recent study, at least 40% of people in the United States set New Year’s resolutions, while 22% of people in the UK aim for self-improvement with a resolution. However, research shows that 80% of people break their resolutions by the first week of February and only 8% are successful in achieving their goals. Despite having over 4,000 years of practice, these figures aren’t likely to improve anytime soon. Experts say we’re doomed to fail when making New Year’s resolutions thanks to unrealistic expectations!

(The following contributions can all be related, in some way, to making New Year’s resolutions!)

New Year's Resolution: *Jean Viall*

"I ought to make a resolution" – I've said each year without exception,
And always, faced with indecision, I vacillate: there's such profusion
Of indulgences, sweet temptations too manifold for contemplation -
Should I abjure all sweet confection, of wines and spirits, swear rejection
Savoured by my exhibition of overt actions of contrition?
Should I try for weight reduction? Shall I make a full confession of my faults -
Give the impression that wholly of my own volition I shall thus achieve perfection?
Enough of this prevarication! I just lack determination;
Cannot make a firm decision! Again, I've made NO resolution!

From Gordon: "Whither now, Welshpool?" *a follow-up to previous articles*

The decline of churches and chapels is a familiar sight. Sunday Schools and Youth Clubs no longer ensure a steady flow of younger people and adults into the mainstream church. Congregations become older; numbers able to take on essential roles decline; the roof starts to leak, finances can become stretched – it's all very familiar. Do we have to accept it as inevitable or is there another way? It is easy to be despondent, but our Gospel is one of hope if nothing else. There is no shortage of ideas. The problem is to decide what might work in our situation here in Welshpool. Ideas may range from the radical to just a modest trimming of the sails.

Perhaps you would like to register some interest without wishing to be heavily involved? Maybe you would like to commit a few thoughts to paper, anonymously if you prefer, for others to consider? Alternatively, perhaps you would just like to read what others are thinking, and little more. Whatever your approach, just let one of us know, perhaps in conversation, or a few notes on paper, or by phone or email. Nothing is to be published which will identify anyone. It's all quite low key, but prompted by concern. Gordon 850514, Tony H 559087

From Barbara: "Chocs Away" *by Lynda Mackenzie*

She knew that she should not have gone
Into the box, with its Christmas wrap on.
A little voice inside her said she would regret what lay ahead.
Until Christmas day was just one sleep, but she couldn't wait to have a peep.
And what delights lay before her eyes, like coffee cream and mint surprise.
She thought she'd have just a little taste. Never mind about her waist!
A whisky truffle then almond crunch meant she was too full for lunch.
Nutty fudge and salted toffee went so well with her afternoon coffee.
She knew that there was no excuse for polishing off the strawberry mousse.
Coconut dream then toffee cup, one by one she ate them up.
She bypassed tea. She felt, indeed, that chocolate filled her every need.
With Turkish delight and caramel log she saw the world through a chocolate fog.
By supper time she felt an ache after cherry fondant followed milk chocolate flake.
Now that the chocs were mostly gone, she reached out for the Gaviscon!
She knew she had only herself to blame, and every year it was the same.
She knew that she should not have gone
Into the box, with its Christmas wrap on!

Sing Praises! Julia's choice of hymns for Mondays 4th and 11th January

O Little Town of Bethlehem (StF 213) (*Phillips Brooks 1835-93*)

We've been under challenging conditions this Christmas, so let us wend our way to Bethlehem, to the jostling and noise, the food stalls and crowded inns, animal smells and strangers everywhere. The shepherds, high above the town, probably think they are well out of such a mass of confusing accents and the push and shove. Yet the writer tells us that, 'silently' here (no fanfare, undistinguished and lost in the events of the census) is the birth of the looked-for Messiah. Then we go out above the town to look down, and it is here that there is both fanfare and proclamation. ('Hark how all the welkin rings' wrote Charles Wesley in the original first line of his Angel carol – a reference to the heavens rejoicing and the great wonder of the heavenly host). Our carol was inspired by the writer's actual visit in 1860, and his reading of Micah. Riding down into Bethlehem he could see the town laid before him and the vast expanse of the sky above, filled with stars on a clear night. It is this image of the Welkin/Heavens in which he places the 'Morning Star', the promise of Christmas, the promise of God in his Son, Emmanuel, God with us – the star we still place in our windows and on our tree at Christmas time, the star which brought the Magi. "Star of the East, the horizon adorning; guide where our infant redeemer is laid", words from our Epiphany hymn:

Brightest and Best (StF 227) written by Reginald Heber, who was born in Cheshire, and served as a parish priest at Hodnet, Shropshire, before being appointed Bishop of Calcutta in 1823. Sadly he died just 3 years later in India, in his early 40s, leaving a legacy of hymns and poems. In 1811 when he wrote this carol, England and much of Europe were enmeshed in the Napoleonic Wars. As always war brings hardship with families separated, leading to further poverty and uncertainty. The wonderful gifts of the Magi sounded amazing, but what could poor folk hope to offer a new born king? Heber reminds them, and us, "Richer by far is the heart's adoration; dearer to God are the prayers of the poor." At the heart of our observance of Christmas is the coming of Christ and our response to that great gift in how we behave to one another - giving a true offering of the heart's adoration and making known our prayer for those less fortunate. These prayers we can offer up, not only in this Epiphany season, but always. My best wishes for a New Year filled with the friendship and fellowship of our Christian community, Julia Francis

"Christmas Begins": *Howard Thurman*

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 their flocks
The work of Christmas begins
To find the lost
To feed the hungry
To release the prisoners
To rebuild the nations
To bring peace among people
To make music in the heart

Lost in Translation? (From: "With All the Trimmings" by Alison Fuggle)

Maybe there wasn't a manger. At least
Not a manger as we like to think of it now,
all corners and wood. (Imagine the splinters –
Those vicious great splinters that ravage your fingers!
Even with swaddling and armfuls of hay,
You'd think twice before cradling your new born in that)
So maybe there wasn't a manger. Some say
Translation's distorted and the story suggests
This stable was a store room used by guests now and then
And a stone feeding-trough may have cradled the child.

Maybe this was never a midwinter's tale,
where shepherds watched over the flocks in the dark.
In winter the sheep weren't kept on those hills
But still, there were shepherds and sheep and a night
When heavenly blaze set them shuddering and shaking
And charging like madmen down wildly to town,
Going house-to-house babbling of angels and singing,
Then searching and finding the child, as foretold,
With his family who welcomed them all -
though our midwinter's tale may have happened in spring.

Maybe there were never three magi, three kings,
Just wise folk – no number recorded – all learned
From years and years studying the stars
and the knowledge of previous wise folk. And maybe
The gifts that we hear of, gold, incense and myrrh,
Were simply the foremost of all of the gifts
that were given by strangers who came to the child,
Braving danger and robbers and murderous rulers,
But searching and journeying, always persisting
until they at last found the star-promised child.

And maybe, just maybe this story's not tied up
Between yellowing pages and in well-known phrases,
All parcelled in language we'd never use now.
But maybe, just maybe within it there lingers
The story of searching and seeking and finding
That maybe might be like the search we're all on.
So maybe no splinters or shepherds in winter
Or three kings, or wise men or only three presents –
Just the tale of a coming, a searching and finding
And a glimpse of a gift offered each, for all time.

From Luke 2:1-20, Matthew 2:1-12

Alison Fuggle has been reading, writing and performing poetry since childhood. Associated with CMM (Christian Music Ministries) since 1989, she has written drama and lyrics for nine musicals by Roger Jones, the novel *Encourager*, and a poetry collection *Fishermans' Friend*

Celebrating Epiphany (The Feast of the Three Kings) (www.whychristmas.com/customs)

Epiphany, meaning 'revelation', is the festival when we remember the visit of the Magi (Wise Men, Kings) who visited Jesus, bringing the three significant gifts – gold, a symbol of kingship; frankincense, a symbol of holiness; myrrh (embalming oil) a symbol of death. Epiphany is celebrated 12 days after Christmas on 6th January (and in Orthodox churches, which celebrate Christmas on 7th January, on 19th).

In Spain Epiphany is a major festival, also known as 'The Festival of the Three Magic Kings' and is when Spanish children receive their presents. Spanish bakers sell a special cake/pastry called a 'Roscon' (a ring-shaped roll). These are normally filled with cream or chocolate and decorated with a paper crown. In Catalonia it's known as a 'Tortell' or 'Gâteau des Rois', and is stuffed with marzipan.

In France, you might eat a 'Galette des Rois', a type of flat almond cake. It has a toy crown cooked inside it and is decorated with a gold paper crown.

There are similar traditions in Mexico where Epiphany is known as 'El Día de los Reyes' (the Day of the Three Kings). It's traditional to eat a special cake called 'Rosca de Reyes' (Three Kings Cake). A figure of Baby Jesus is hidden inside the cake, and whoever finds it in their cake is the 'Godparent' of Jesus for that year.

In Portugal, people take part in Epiphany carol singing known as the 'Janeiras' (January songs).

In Italy, some children also get their presents at Epiphany, but they believe that an old lady called 'Befana' brings them. Children put stockings up by the fireplace for Befana to fill.

In Austria, at Epiphany, some people write a special sign in chalk over their front door. It's a reminder of the Wise Men visiting the baby Jesus and it is made up from the year, split in two, with initials of the names that are sometimes given to the three wise men (Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar) in the middle, so for 2021 it will be 20*C*M*B*21. The sign is meant to protect the house for the coming year. Some parts of Germany also have the tradition of marking the doors.

At Epiphany in Belgium, and in Poland, children dress up as the three wise men and go from door to door to sing songs, and people give them money or sweets.

In Ireland, Epiphany is also sometimes called 'Nollaig na Mbean' or Women's Christmas. Traditionally the women get the day off and men do the housework and cooking! (*What a good idea!!*) It is getting more popular and many Irish women now get together on the Sunday nearest Epiphany for tea and cakes!

In New Orleans, Louisiana, in the USA, on Epiphany the Christmas tree is either taken down or the ornaments are replaced with purple, gold and green ones and then it's called a 'Mardi Gras Tree'. People also eat 'King Cake', a cinnamon pastry with sugar on the top, sometimes filled with cream cheese or jam. It will have a little plastic baby Jesus doll inside, and whoever gets that piece, has to supply the next King Cake. Some people have a 'King Cake Party' every Friday before Lent.

Epiphany Eve (Twelfth Night) marks the end of the traditional Christmas celebrations and is the time to take down Christmas decorations - although some people leave them up until Candlemas (2nd February), commemorating the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple.

From Pat P: "Twelve Days of Turkey Dinners" (with apologies to "Twelve Days of Christmas"!)

On the first day of Christmas, my true love said to me,
"I've brought a big fresh turkey and a proper Christmas tree".
On the second day of Christmas much laughter could be heard
as we tucked into our turkey, a most delicious bird.
On the third day of Christmas came the people from next door.
The turkey tasted just as good as it had done before.
On the fourth day of Christmas came relations young and old;
We finished up the Christmas pud and had the turkey cold.
On the fifth day of Christmas outside the snowflakes scurried,
But we were nice and warm inside, and had the turkey curried.
On the sixth day of Christmas the Christmas spirit died,
We had a drink of orange juice and had the turkey fried.
On the seventh day of Christmas, my true love he did wince,
When we sat down at the table and were offered turkey mince.
On the eighth day of Christmas, the dog had run for shelter.
He'd seen our turkey pancakes, and the glass of Alka Seltzer.
On the ninth day of Christmas by lunch time dad was blotto.
The bird was back again, but this time as risotto.
On the tenth day of Christmas, we were drinking home-made brew,
And if that was not bad enough, we were eating turkey stew.
On the eleventh day of Christmas, the Christmas tree was moulting,
With chilli, soy and oyster sauce, the turkey was revolting.
On the twelfth day of Christmas, we had smiles upon our lips.
The guests had gone - the turkey too. We dined on fish and chips!

Puzzle Time: All to do with London (anagrams and crossword style clues)

1. Yen old one - for a great view (6, 3)
2. French lady, with a pair of weapons (6, 8)
3. Angry monarch (5, 5)
4. Monarch's deputy and a road, a green property on Monopoly board (6, 6)
5. 'Plates of meat', 'dog and bone', 'Adam and Eve' are examples (7, 7, 5)
6. Rene T pines - for a meandering lake (10)
7. Dirty monks (11)
8. Sounds like they trade in cold storage cabinets? (10)
9. Kind of artichoke, with house for drama (5, 7)
10. Miss Clinton - or pensioner - or type of bun (7)
11. French currency and one from the Milky Way, for travelling (8)
12. 'North of the border', with three feet? (8, 4)
13. Conceal large public garden? (4, 4)
14. Initially, look into state of Highgate Office (4)
15. Month, for being just, unbiased and equitable (7)
16. A Peruvian lover of marmalade (10)
17. Sounds like little Malcolm is a friend (4, 4)
18. A glass alley with inside of foot? (6, 4)
19. Direction to deposit cash? (5, 4)
20. Shake firm bags 'til ignite - it may be a bit smelly! (12, 4, 6)

Answers to Puzzles in Issue 20: Musicals of Stage and Screen

1 Annie Get your Gun	12 Summer Holiday	22 The Desert Song	33 Showboat
2 The Desert Song	13 Paint Your Wagon	23 Easter Parade	34 Jesus Christ Superstar
3 Kiss Me Kate	14 Hello Dolly	24 Seven Brides for Seven Brothers	
4 Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat	25 Doctor Doolittle	35 Oh Calcutta	
5 Kiss me Kate	15 Guys and Dolls	26 (The) Phantom of the Opera	
6 Carousel	16 Oliver	27 Calamity Jane	36 High Society
7 Fiddler on the Roof	17 White Christmas	28 Thoroughly Modern Millie	37 My Fair Lady
8 Chicago!	18 A Star is Born	29 Singing in the Rain	38 Starlight Express
9 Cats	19 Aspects of Love	30 Godspell	39 The Sound of Music
10 Les Miserables	20 Evita	31 Miss Saigon	40 The Lion King
11 Grease	21 Cabaret	32 Wicked!	41 Chess
			42 Salad Days

Mental Challenge

1-Yes, 2-12, 3-Match, 4-1hour, 5-9, 6-White, 7-70, 8-2, 9-None (it was Noah!), 10-YOUR age!

And finally, to make you smile, from *Graham's* "Australian friend with USA connections":

Alice Grayson was to bake a cake for the Baptist Church Ladies' Group in Tuscaloosa, but forgot to do it until the last minute.

She remembered it the morning of the bake sale and after rummaging through cabinets, found an angel food cake mix and quickly made it while drying her hair, dressing, and helping her son pack up for Scout camp. When she took the cake from the oven, the centre had dropped flat and the cake was horribly disfigured and she exclaimed, "Oh dear, there's not enough time to bake another cake!" This cake was important to Alice because she did so want to fit in at her new church and in her new community of friends so, being inventive, she looked around the house for something to build up the centre of the cake. She found it in the bathroom – a roll of toilet paper! She plunked it in and then covered it with icing. Not only did the product look beautiful, it looked perfect!

Before she left the house to drop off the cake at church and head for work, Alice woke her daughter Amanda and gave her some money with specific instructions to be at the bake sale the moment it opened at 9.30 and to buy the cake and bring it home, but when Amanda arrived at the sale, she found the attractive, perfect cake had been sold! She phoned her mom and Alice was horrified and beside herself! Everyone would know! What would they think? She would be ostracised, talked about, and ridiculed! All night, she lay awake in bed thinking about people pointing fingers at her and talking behind her back.

The next day, Alice promised herself that she would try not to think about the cake and would attend the fancy luncheon and bridal shower she had been invited to at the home of a fellow church member and try to have a good time. (She didn't really want to attend because the hostess was a snob who more than once looked down her nose at the fact that Alice was a single parent and not from the founding families of Tuscaloosa, but having already RSVP's, she couldn't think of a believable excuse to stay at home).

The meal was elegant, the company was definitely upper crust old south, but to Alice's horror, the cake in question was brought in and presented for dessert! Alice felt the blood drain from her body! She started out of her chair to tell the hostess all about it, but before she could get to her feet, the Mayor's wife said, "What a beautiful cake!" Alice, still stunned, sat back in her chair when she heard the hostess (who was a prominent church member) say: "Thank you. I baked it myself!" Alice thought to herself, "Yes! God is good!"

Please send material for issue 22, out on 13th January, to rhodes4144@gmail.com, by phone 01938 850514, or post to "Brynteg", Castle Caereinion, Welshpool, SY21 9AS, by 9th. All contributions are welcome, and are needed! Cake orders: Gwen 555988 or Janice 850514