

**ST. ANDREWS UNITED REFORMED CHURCH**

**Upper Hanover Street, Sheffield, S3 7RQ**

# **MESSENGER**

Price £1.25

December 2020



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*We are grateful to the Reverend Robert Beard for providing...*

## REFLECTION FOR ADVENT

**The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.**  
**John 1.5**

2020 has been a most memorable year: for almost entirely disagreeable reasons, as far as I'm concerned. Perhaps we should be grateful as Christians that the Church is moving into a new year a full month before wider society does.

Rarely if ever has an issue so dominated people's waking hours, not only here but across the world. Already, assessments of the impact of Covid-19 have uncovered in detail the persistence of social, economic and health inequalities in tiny villages and across whole continents. In turn, these details reveal to us situations in which the renewal of divine love and compassionate action are urgently needed. Whether these issues will be addressed in the pandemic's aftermath depends on how willing we prove to reorder our world, locally and globally, rather than seeking simply to return to the "business as usual" that all too often perpetuates inequalities.

For many people in the developed world, the comfort derived from families and friends, safe homes, secure food and energy supplies, and nationalised healthcare, have made the trials – even illness and bereavement – more endurable. For those who lack these blessings, 2020 has been a much more challenging experience, to put it mildly.

I have tried hard to keep counting my own blessings, although my favourite – the company of other people – has been in vanishingly short supply. Nonetheless, I realise I have a lot to be thankful for, not least in those moments when I notice details that would ordinarily pass me by unremarked. You may have experienced something of this yourself.

For example...

#### A coffee pot

I while away some of my time completing online surveys offering rewards in cash or in kind, and not long after I moved into my new flat, I amassed enough points to claim an Italian stove-top coffee pot, and my new-found capacity to make excellent coffee has been a comfort during the weeks when it's been impossible to visit my enchanting local independent café.

#### A tune

I have been watching many of my more neglected DVDs and been reminded again of the extraordinary versatility of Peter Cushing's talent, among others'; in particular, I have become very fond of the jaunty tune that accompanies the protagonists' journey in Hammer Films' 1965 production of *She*, and often find myself cheerfully humming it.

#### A personal touch

While non-essential (who decides?) shops have been closed, I have often turned to eBay for second-hand items, and the feedback I received from one individual seller expressed a real personal appreciation for my purchase, which I have never received from supermarket chains or large corporations.

#### Photographs

Depression has hit me badly in my enforced solitude, and I have hung a group of photographs of my sons on the wall in front of my sofa, above the television, so that Philip's and Joe's faces constantly remind me of the most important reasons I have to "hang on in there", even while they themselves are living on distant countries.

I call it the Wall of Robert's Prides and Joys.

2020 has not been the kind of year we expected as we approached Advent 2019. We have had plans upset and hopes dashed; but in all this, we have also had unplanned and unexpected opportunities to appreciate more fully details of our lives which we might normally have taken for granted.

Perhaps this year we might spend part of the season of preparation for Christ's coming in prayerful and thoughtful reflection, not only on what we hope for, but also on the nature of hope itself. As the calendar year declines towards the time of its greatest darkness, and while the Church prepares to celebrate Christmas, we have a God-given opportunity to rethink our hopes and dreams in the light of 2020's disappointments. In this context, I offer these words for your contemplation:

I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you  
Which shall be the darkness of God... and wait without hope  
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love,  
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith  
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.  
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:  
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.  
T. S. Eliot, from 'East Coker', *Four Quartets*

With love, Robert

## FAMILY NEWS

Some good news: **Alan Sandland** is improving after his brush with Covid-19; he is able to go for walks but still tires easily. **Martha Fall** is improving slowly after physiotherapy. She is still suffering from post-Covid fatigue and a trapped nerve in her neck. **Niall Dunstan** is home from hospital and somewhat better after his digestive trouble.

**Ann Cathels** had been making excellent progress following her discharge from hospital in August, working on her mobility and looking forward to the heart operation which would improve her quality of life. However, throughout November she became extremely breathless, and sometimes felt quite unwell. On Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> November Alison called NHS 111, and they sent an ambulance. The paramedics recommended that she went to A&E. In the cardiology unit she was treated to reduce the strain on her heart caused by fluid retention. A week in hospital improved her condition, and following an angiogram, she's now scheduled to have the TAVI (valve replacement) operation on her heart on 2 December. It's done under a general anaesthetic, and afterwards she'll go to the cardiac intensive care ward, then back to the cardiology ward for a few days.

Unfortunately **Sheila Cooke** also spent three days in the Northern General after a dreadful fall down a flight of 12 stairs at home. She suffered seven cracked ribs and chipped vertebrae in the neck and lower spine. She is home now but is still in considerable pain and has to wear a surgical neck collar for six weeks.

**Fraser McVittie** has also had a fall at home but was not taken to hospital. He too is in much pain from cracked ribs and is very badly bruised. This fall is particularly unfortunate as his mobility had improved to the extent that he could cope with the activities of daily living.

We send our sympathy and all good wishes for a speedy recovery to them all, and remember them in our prayers.

We have received good wishes from former members **David Hill, Sarah Hall and Pat Thomas**. David has had a successful cataract operation and is awaiting the same for the other eye.

This Christmas will be like no other we've ever known, even in WW2, but the spirit and meaning of Christmas can never be cancelled. Those we cannot be with in person will be in our thoughts and prayers as we wait with patience and hope for better things in the new year. We wish everyone, wherever you are, the joys and blessings of this season.

### **OUR CHRISTMAS GREETINGS**

We won't be able to share our greetings by pinning up our cards on the display board in the usual way. So instead, if you would like to send your message to me, we'll send them out to everyone on 20<sup>th</sup> December.

**STARTER PACKS** is our Christmas Charity for 2020. We would normally collect for it through our Christmas card display and the collection on Christmas Day. Since neither of these are possible this year, would you please send your donations direct to the Starter Pack account if you bank online or to Sheila Dunstan.

**Sort code 40-41-18 Account number 01418238**

### **FUTURE ON TAP**

We are aware of the dreadful situation in Ethiopia. Since early November the central government has been at war with the northern province of Tigray, with savage violence on the verge of genocide. Thousands of refugees are fleeing every day across the border into Sudan.

Ethiopia is the focus of Wateraid's Christmas Appeal this year and **until 4<sup>th</sup> February 2021 the UK government will match all public donations.**

To give to Future on Tap, please send your donations to the church bank account if you bank online or to the Treasurer Elizabeth Cousley.

**Sort code 40-41-18 Account no: 11208942**

*The church would not normally have two appeals at the same time but the need in Ethiopia is urgent and the offer of doubling the money donated is too good to miss. We would normally have had collections for good causes at our Communion services but of course have not celebrated one in church since February. There will be an update by Father Tesfa Teferi in the next Messenger.*

### **JOIN THE PARTY !**

No Christmas party or church lunch this year but - thanks to technology - we're having a Zoom party on **Tuesday 22 December at 7pm**. DO JOIN IN. Ian Cooke will send out the link nearer the time. Have a glass and maybe nibbles to hand and if you'd like to contribute to the entertainment, please tell Margaret Fall who is arranging the programme. See you then !

## STUDY GROUP

The Revd Robert Beard led five study sessions on the Epistle of James, which conveniently has five chapters. About 16 members and friends met weekly on Zoom, with Ian Cooke doing the technical side. Robert prepared very interesting background information which stimulated our questions. The book of James has a very straightforward message about the importance of acting out one's faith in good works, and we discussed the ways and difficulties of doing this in today's world. Discussion on Zoom is not quite as free and easy as when we're sitting together but it is a great pleasure to at least see and hear each other.

Calvin



Calvin Klein



*Jokes from Robert*



## Wider church news:

### SHEFFIELD URC TEAM MINISTRY VACANCY

On 8 November the Rev Barry Welch preached with a view on the Zoom service. It was a very good service with an excellent Remembrance ceremony. At the end of worship, each church in the Team met separately in a chatroom and then voted on whether to call Barry to the vacancy. Approval was almost unanimous: there were 112 voting members present, one of whom chose not to vote, but the other 111 were all in favour. St Andrew's does not have a vote, of course, but the usual St Andrew's members were on the Zoom and all agreed with this decision.

The number present and voting remotely was larger than any recent such election when everyone was gathered in church. Barry will not actually join Sheffield until the middle of next year. We at St Andrew's will no doubt meet him in due course.

## BOOK REVIEW

There is a rave review in the latest Reform magazine for Revd Dr Walter Houston's new book: *Justice for the Poor ? Social justice in the Old Testament in concept and practice*. "[He] brings ancient Israel into dialogue with ethical concerns of today like the climate crisis, Drop the Debt campaign, social inequality and capitalism." Walter is a foremost O T scholar and we have heard his concerns about climate change and social deprivation in his sermons with us. Congratulations!

## OH SANTA!

No nativity this year because the Three Wise Men face a travel ban.  
The shepherds have been furloughed.

The innkeeper has shut under Tier 3 regulations and had a slump in bookings.

Santa won't be working as he would break the rule of 6 with Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Donner and Blitzen.

As for Rudolph, with that red nose, he should be isolating and taking a test.

## QUIZ

*The following words are alternative titles for some Christmas carols and songs:*

- 1 Miniscule hamlet in the far east
- 2 Adorn the vestibule
- 3 Exuberance directed to the planet
- 4 Pay attention to aerial spirits harmonizing
- 5 Yonder in a feeding trough
- 6 Fantasies of a colourless 25<sup>th</sup> December
- 7 A dozen 24-hour Yule periods
- 8 Perambulating through a December solstice fantasy
- 9 Arrival time: 2400 hours – weather cloudless
- 10 Jehovah deactivate blithe chevaliers
- 11 Frozen precipitation commence
- 12 Castaneous-coloured seeds vesicated in a conflagration

## MEMORIES OF NORMAL !

The Middleton family last summer



## The 1st CORINTHIANS 13 of CHRISTMAS

If I decorate my house with beautiful twinkling lights and shiny baubles, but don't show love to my family, I am just another decoration.

If I bake dozens of mince pies and roast the perfect turkey, but have no love for my guests, I am just another cook.

If I work at the Soup Kitchen, and give all that I have to charity, but do not have compassion for those in need, I am just another social service.

If I wrap, decorate and attend a myriad of parties, but don't focus on Christ, I have missed the point.

Love stops cooking to hug a child.

Love doesn't envy another's perfectly co-ordinated Christmas décor.

Love puts the present-shopping on hold to run the elderly neighbour to the doctor.

Love is kind, even when harassed and tired.

Love bears all things, even irritating relatives. It believes all things, including a teenager's potential for development. It hopes all things, endures all things, even a spouse who is constantly depressed about job prospects.

Love never fails other people.

Food gets eaten, computer games will crash and even cashmere jumpers wear out, but the gift of love will endure for ever.

## LECTIONARY READINGS for December 2020

6 December Isaiah **40**:1-11; Psalm **85**:1-2,8-13; 2 Peter **3**:8-15a; Mark **1**:1-8

13 December Isaiah **61**:1-4, 8-11; Psalm **126** or Luke **1**:46b-55; 1 Thessalonians **5**:16-24; John **1**:6-8, 19-28

20 December 2 Samuel **7**:1-11, 16; Luke **1**:46b-55 or Psalm **89**:1-4, 19-26; Romans **16**:25-27; Luke **1**:26-38

27 December Isaiah **61**:10-62:3; Psalm **148**; Galatians **4**:4-7; Luke **2**:22-40

January 3 Jeremiah **31**:7-14 or Sirach **24**:1-12; Psalm **147**:12-20 or Wisdom of Solomon **10**:15-21; Ephesians **1**:3-14; John **1**:(1-9), 10-18



## THE CAROLLERS FROM HELL

Ding - dong ringing at the bell,  
Who can it be that's calling?  
It's the carollers from hell,  
The prospect is appalling!  
O save us those halos  
And endless bad solos,  
And Santa with his ho – hosanna in excelsis!

Ding - dong turn off every light,  
It's worse than I remember!  
They're the second lot to-night,  
And we're still in November!  
Some holly, that's very  
Green and bears a berry,  
And Rudolph with his red nose – anna in excelsis!

Ding - dong isn't it a crime,  
How long will they be staying?  
Tortured melody and rhyme,  
And still they will want paying!  
Two verses, no other,  
And what's worse, little brother  
Insists on singing a completely different carol!

Ding- dong there's the dreaded call,  
Let's hide behind the curtain!  
Send the dog into the hall,  
He'll scare them off for certain!  
The sound starts receding,  
Has heaven heard our pleading,  
They've gone! At last - no more Hosanna in excelsis!

*Adapted by Judith Adam from an original by Graham Pratt (and you can view it on Youtube)*



## **OUR CHARITIES**

At the end of a bad year I would like to tell you about some of the charities we have helped. Nine shoe boxes went to the Shoebox Appeal and we will hopefully hear where they have gone. This was not as many as in previous years but it was not a good idea to ask friends to go out shopping in the present circumstances. Nine children will get some gifts they would not normally get, to cheer them up in these bad times.

We have had some generous donations for the Starter Pack scheme. There is enough money to purchase ten packs. Seven will go to St Vincent's and three will stay in St Andrew's in case we are asked for any. I have given out our last two this year. Wilkinson's are in process of making up the packs and I will collect them when they are ready. If we are short of money they will help us from their charity fund. Once they are bought I will put in a bid for funds from the Church Burgesses. They dispense funds four times a year.

We have not been able to support the food bank in the usual way but I know some members have sent monetary donations.

Thank you to everyone for their support for these and other charities we have helped for people less fortunate than ourselves.

*Sheila Dunstan*

## **PACK A CHRISTMAS BOX**

Shipshape Health & Wellbeing Centre are collecting Christmas box donations for the vulnerable in our community. Gifts for children could include fun toys, hygiene items, school supplies, or for adults, toiletries, warm clothes, treats. For more advice on what to include or what NOT to include, please see the advice page on the website: <[shipshape.org.uk](http://shipshape.org.uk)> or tel: 0114 250 0222.

Remember to attach a label indicating who your gift is for - adult or child, male or female or either, and rough age range for young people. Please bring your box to Shipshape Centre, The Stables, Sharrow Lane, S11 8AE, on a Wednesday between 10am and 3pm. If this is not possible, get in touch to arrange an alternative drop-off day.

## **ADDRESSING CHILD POVERTY**

The Revd Dr John Bradbury, General Secretary of the URC, and the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, along with 18 other religious leaders in the UK, sent a letter to the Prime Minister, published on 29 October:

*“More than twenty years ago, the government of the time promised to eliminate UK child poverty within a generation and yet child poverty has remained stubbornly high under the leadership of all political parties. No one can take the moral high ground because this is endemic to our economic structure and seems to fall outside our moral imperatives.*

*“...The pandemic has brought the issue of child hunger and poverty into the light. However, this is not a new problem. The rising use of food banks, most of them run by churches, synagogues, temples, gurdwaras and mosques, is the extreme and visible manifestation of a much broader and deep-seated problem.*

*“According to the official statistics, child poverty has been growing and deepening for years as a large and growing number of low and insecurely paid working families struggle to make ends meet, exacerbated further by the impact of Covid-19.*

*“Instead of politicising this issue and arguing over individual policies, we urgently need to establish a cross-party commission with the mandate and resources to tackle child poverty in England, once and for all.”*

**From the draft Sheffield Plan** published September 2020:

In 5 of our city's wards, over half of children live in poverty, with over a quarter of children and young people in the city in or at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

In Sheffield, 12% of households live in fuel poverty as a result of low incomes, high fuel prices and homes which are expensive to heat; this has a significant effect on health and wellbeing.

Life expectancy in the most deprived areas of the city is 10.1 years lower for men and 7.6 years lower for women than the least deprived areas.

Average wages are around 10% lower than the national average. Economic output per person is significantly below the UK average and is lower than the other Core Cities.

Poor air quality harms people's health, and accounts for up to 500 premature deaths a year in the city.

*The Sheffield Plan can be read at:*

[www.sheffield.gov.uk/home/planning-development/emerging-sheffield-plan-draft](http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/home/planning-development/emerging-sheffield-plan-draft)

*Of course it contains some more positive statistics as well but those above are sobering.*

## PEN PAL SCHEME

*Older people living on their own are also suffering the effects of the pandemic. Vital befriending services are suspended due to social distancing.*

SCCCC (Sheffield Churches Council for Community Care) has set up a Pen Pal Scheme. [Write a letter](#). Simply write Hi or Hello, talk about yourself, your family, your job, your hobby, your hopes for the future. [Send a postcard, drawing or painting](#). Some of our service users are partially sighted and can't read handwritten letters without help. Use bright contrasting colours, tactile materials and thick felt tip pens.

[If you know someone who could benefit from our scheme](#), tell them about it. The only criteria are that they must live in Sheffield and be over 65 years old. Please telephone the Good Neighbour Pen Pal Scheme and speak to Tammy Wilson on 0114 2505292.

[Send your letters and cards to](#): SCCCC, Pen Pal Scheme, Unit 19 President Buildings, Savile Street East, SHEFFIELD, S4 7UQ.

Please don't put any sensitive information on the item (just your name). And please wash your hands before writing your letter to help reduce the risk of contamination. Thank you.

## MORE MEMORIES OF NORMAL!



## A SHEFFIELD CAROL

*We'll miss the annual lunch-time carol sing led by Nigel Russell.  
This rollicking tune was always great fun to sing - Try it !*

### 62 Rolling Downward/ The Angel's Song



### Rolling Downward / The Angel's Song

1. Rolling downward through the midnight,  
Comes a glorious burst of heavenly song;  
'Tis a chorus full of sweetness And the singers are an angel throng.

#### CHORUS

"Glory! glory in the highest!  
On the earth good-will and peace to men!"  
Down the ages send the echo;  
Let the glad earth shout again!

2. Wond'ring shepherds see the glory,  
Hear the word the shining ones declare;  
At the manger fall in worship, While the music fills the quiv'ring air.

#### CHORUS

3. Christ the Saviour, God's Anointed,  
Comes to earth our fearful debt to pay  
Man of sorrows, and rejected, Lamb of God, that takes our sin away.

#### CHORUS

## **ANITA McVITTIE - AN APPRECIATION**

Anita Rosemary Hughes was born in 1930 in Kent and spent her childhood in a village east of London called Abbey Wood. She was very bright at school but her academic education was stalled when she became a carer at the age of 14 for her mother, who later died. Anita went into nursery nursing at 15 (top of the class) and then completed her nurse training as an SRN at the Middlesex Hospital in London then qualified in midwifery in Cambridge, which is where she met Fraser who was studying for his doctorate at Christ College. Anita and Fraser married in 1955 and immediately moved up to Sheffield where Fraser had his first post as a metallurgist at Dunford Hadfields.

They moved into a "dilapidated 6-bedroom villa" in Rupert Road where their love of gardening had great scope as they transformed the huge long garden overgrown and full of rubbish. Fraser developed a sunken Italian garden and Anita covered the place with flowers, in beds and pots, all grown from seed. Every year there were propagators on every horizontal space and then thousands of bedding plants to be pricked on into small pots before transplanting outside. The same beautiful profusion of flowers was seen when they moved to Twentywell Lane where the garden was so overgrown with brambles that a greenhouse was found buried beneath them; and at Bradway Road, although less physically able, Anita was still ordering and planting out little plug plants to the end. She loved her garden.

Anita's love of beauty reflected her artistic ability. She loved painting, especially seascapes and the Derbyshire countryside. Fraser drew cartoons for his children, and both were members of Hallamshire Art Group for many years.

Another passion they both shared was travel. Family holidays with the children were spent first in Teignmouth in Devon, then Spain or Austria. Fraser was often away on long business trips but saw nothing of the country he was in except airports, hotels and factories, so after retirement, travel and real exploration became their main activity. And not on the usual tourist route but to remote, exotic and less developed places - China, India, Mongolia, Ethiopia, North and South America and Europe. Anita particularly loved China. These were active holidays, walking, meeting the people and briefly sharing their lives. In the Galapagos Islands, Anita while swimming just missed an encounter with a shoal of sharks! - but nothing fazed her. Later they enjoyed the sights and the company on Margaret's Holidays where they were very popular. They were always in a group: discussing, examining, and taking an interest in wherever or whatever they were visiting.

They had their own well- worn seat in the coach and Anita could be relied on to be always on time and always have the right money. On one such trip to Cambridge they renewed their marriage vows in a very touching ceremony.

Anita was a church-goer all her life, in a rather ecumenical progression. Whilst she was CofE, she attended a Catholic school, and after meeting Fraser became a Presbyterian as he went to St Columba's in Cambridge. When they arrived at St Andrew's, the Rev McCurdy promptly drafted them into church committees - Fraser onto the Deacons' Court and Anita into the ladies' groups. Latterly they were both on the Network committee, and Anita was a mainstay on the Sunday coffee rota, church lunches and whenever catering was required. St Andrew's will not be the same without her. She was a regular presence, kind, friendly, interested, questioning - loved and respected by everyone.

Anita was unable to have children so the decision was taken to adopt, and Julian, Susan and Alison in turn joined the family. They also took in a foster child for a while. All three are now married and there are three grandchildren and three great- grandchildren. People were really the other great passion of Anita's life; her interest and understanding and care were never-ending. She was a very good listener and had good judgement about when to give advice and when not to; these qualities led her into marriage counselling, including her own independent counselling practice, and a strong support network of close friends. She was also a lifelong member of a women's spiritual group and valued these regular meetings. Her faith was the foundation of her enjoyment of life in all its richness, expressed in her friendship and care for everyone equally.

We offer our profound sympathy to Fraser, Julian, Susan and Alison and all the family.

Julian wrote this poem about his mother:

*Where is mum ?*

*She is in the breeze on your face  
She is in the wind that blows through the trees  
She is in the grass that move  
And the flowers that sway*

*She is all around*

*Just listen – she'll be there*

## ENDPIECE

*From John Betjeman's poem 'Christmas'*

And is it true ? And is it true,  
This most tremendous tale of all,  
Seen in a stained-glass window's hue,  
A Baby in an ox's stall ?  
The Maker of the stars and sea  
Become a Child on earth for me ?

And is it true? For if it is,  
No loving fingers tying strings  
Around those tissue'd fripperies,  
The sweet and silly Christmas things,  
Bath salts and inexpensive scent  
And hideous tie so kindly meant,

No love that in a family dwells,  
No carolling in frosty air,  
Nor all the steeple-shaking bells  
Can with this simple truth compare -  
That God was Man in Palestine  
And lives today in Bread and Wine.



**Christmas Greetings to Everyone**