



## Thoughts about the Shepherds

Even though for at least 80 years I have been watching Nativity Plays, I have never tired of seeing kiddies dressed up as shepherds or angels. It is still a delight to watch as they leave their sheep and enter a make-shift 'stable' to find Mary, Joseph and the 'baby' in a home-made crib. Delightful as these plays are, like the greeting cards with shepherds in the fields and the stable scenes, there's a risk of sentimentalising the biblical account, and so missing some of its special message.

For example, take the words, 'An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear' (Luke 2:9). Often, we find women and men in the pages of Scripture afraid of the supernatural presence. See that rough, impetuous fisherman in his boat, as it began to sink with the weight of the huge catch of fish after Jesus had told him to cast his net again into the water. Peter fell down among the wriggling mass of fish saying, 'Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man!' (Luke 5:8.)

Or when Jesus calmed the raging waves and stilled the howling wind, see the disciples shrinking back from him. Matthew writes, 'They were filled with great fear and said to one another, 'Who is this, that even the wind and sea obey

him?' (Matt. 4:4.) Yes, we neglect the terror that struck those rough, unlearned shepherds!

But we also tend to pass over their obedience in taking up the invitation to discover for themselves a new-born baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger (Luke 2:12). We are left to imagine them searching house after house, saying to each other, 'We have to find a place where there will be a manger.' Research suggests that the manger was below an inn within a cave accessed down a slope to a lower level. But the shepherds evidently did not give up their search until they found it.

A third point we can also miss is their glorifying and praising God as they returned to their sheep. It's a bit fanciful of me to wonder if some of them, now elderly men, sat near the shore where Jesus taught the crowds saying, 'Seek and you will find...'. If so, I can see them nodding as they agreed with his words. They had heard the astonishing message, they had sought for the child in the manger, and they had found him and given glory to God. May that be our experience—maybe all over again—this Christmas time!

David Searle

### Christmas 2021

With covid numbers remaining troublesome, and with new variants causing further concern, there's no end in sight in terms of the day to day measures that are in place to keep us safe. That includes those that apply to churches.

One of the consequences of this is that we will not be able to offer the same range of Christmas services as normally we do. With Christmas Day falling on a Saturday, there simply isn't the time between services to do the cleaning that's required - and we are not asking teams of volunteers to come

out to take on such duties in the midst of family occasions etc.

Please listen out for more details concerning Christmas Eve and Christmas Day but for now, please note that on both Boxing Day (Sunday 26th Dec) and on Sunday 2nd January, there will be joint services across the town - in St. Andrew's Church on Boxing Day and in West Kirk on 2nd January.

This will reduce the pressure but will also provide us with an opportunity to worship with brothers and sisters from neighbouring congregations; never a bad thing!



**Left** - Chris Palmer, who was with us for a year - now inducted as Associate Pastor at First Presbyterian Church, Waco, Texas.

**Right** - Martin and Michael joined the congregation of Torrance Church (north of Glasgow) for the induction of our former associate, Stuart Irvin, as their new minister.



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**ST. ANDREW'S ARBROATH****Member Records****November 2021****Baptisms and Blessings** - None**Weddings** - None**Funerals** - None

Martin and Ian, our pastoral assistant, conducted other funerals though none were of members of our congregation. Nonetheless, we remember the bereaved families in our prayers.

**IMPORTANT DATE**

(Please note that there is  
**NO January edition**)

**FEBRUARY EDITION**

Word Processed files, as attachments, should be  
sent directly to the Editor by

**Tuesday 25th January**

**Guild News**

We are pleased to report Guild is once again enjoying interesting evenings and fellowship. Our Guild notice board is fairly filling up with all our information about future activities and meetings.

On the 8th of November Guild members were delighted to welcome Graeme Simpson from Pioneers UK who have around 500 missionaries in 102 countries. He came to tell us about "Chocolate Heaven" which is one of our projects for the coming year. The talk was interesting and informative. It is encouraging to learn how through teaching local people about the production of chocolate -from growing the beans to the finished article of a bar of chocolate, providing fair

working conditions and a fair wage, these missionaries are teaching Christianity by example. The whereabouts of this project is kept secret to protect all those involved as Christianity is forbidden. We are so blessed to be able to worship openly and without fear so supporting this project is really important.

On the 22nd of November we had our Christmas craft night where we were all able to try our hand at Christmas boxes, Christmas trees and Christmas cards and tags.....while also enjoying a cuppie and chocolate biscuit. It was a chance to chat and craft and it was a most enjoyable evening. We are now looking forward to our Christmas Party on the 6th of December.

**"Whose we are and whom we serve"**

**Friends Club**

Dear Friends,

As most of you know by now our Friends Club has been disbanded.

We have £200.00 funds left and we are going to give this money to Dalitso as it will fund our sponsored child for another year.

I and the committee would like to thank you all for your support over the many years of Friends Club - who knows where things will go from here, someone may come up with another idea for a club.

Wish you all God's blessing.

Noela.

**Dalitso Project Update**

As we near Christmas we wait patiently for the arrival of our container. At the time of writing we expect it to be in Mozambique in the next few days where it will disembark from the ship before beginning its landward journey. Please do pray for this final part of its long journey - that a lorry and driver will be located quickly and that it will make its way safely to Malawi - we are unable to track during this part.

Back again, for Christmas 2021, are the Christmas Cake boxes. The cake boxes are priced at £12 and will include a mixture of 10 different cakes along with a bag of tablet or fudge. This year we will be offering 2 different options for delivery - 11th/12th December or the 22nd/23rd December. This will hopefully help those who are purchasing them as gifts as well as those who are stocking their cake tin for over the festive season. Orders can be taken now by email-

ing [info@dalitso.org](mailto:info@dalitso.org), phoning/texting me (Charis!) on 07877256236 or speaking to Sheila/Doris.

We are also accepting orders from our Alternative Gift Catalogue (please note that although these are most popular at Christmas time they are available throughout the year!). Gifts can be bought from as little as £5 and include Fruit for the Nursery, Graduation Outfits, Fertiliser and Teacher Salaries to name a few. The gifts are presented on a greeting card of your choice from a range of photos of our beautiful children. Please do get in touch if you would like a copy of the catalogue or to order by the methods above.

Thank you so much for your support throughout a challenging year. We hope to welcome you back to face to face fundraisers in 2022. We have missed you all. On behalf of the children of Thyolo and Kambilonjo, thank you for the many ways you have given during 2021.

Charis

# Martin Fair

December 2021

Dear friends,

## The Five Marks of Mission - Presbytery Planning

It's important that we continue to be mindful of the hugely significant exercise that's currently taking place across the whole of the Church of Scotland.

This has come to pass as a result of decisions taken at the General Assembly of May 2021 - decisions which were necessary anyway but which the pandemic brought into much sharper focus.

The issues are several but these are the most important:

1. Many congregations are struggling - some to survive but many more to continue at the same level they were at. Numerical decline has been happening since the mid-1950s but, most recently, it's estimated that attendance at worship has declined in the region of 35% as a result of the pandemic (those figures apply to nearly all denominations.) This has various implications, not least in terms of available volunteers to serve and in finances.
2. The Church of Scotland has a serious shortage of ministers. Before the pandemic, there were around 300 vacant charges, many which had been without a minister for years. Quite a few more have retired in the last six months and there is a significant number of ministers due to retire in before 2025.
3. We have considerably too many buildings. This is largely a historical problem. In 1843 around 40% of Church of Scotland ministers left - taking their people with them but not the buildings which they had no legal right to. Out of that exodus was formed the Free Church of Scotland. In the years that followed, each Free Church of Scotland congregation erected its own building, often very near to their old building. When in the 1920s the Free Church united again with the Church of Scotland \* overnight, the Church of Scotland had almost doubled the number of buildings that it owned - and that it needed. Consequent to that, even today we have too many buildings, often side by side, and not always in the right places.

So here we are today, trying to deal with those issues - and underlying it all, very much aware that unless MISSION becomes central to all that we're doing, this demise will only get worse.

We need to be ready, therefore, for big changes coming.\*\* And we need to see the importance of the Growing Young programme which is about making congregations more accessible to younger people - who largely speaking are conspicuous only by their absence.

Please continue to pray for all those who are involved in this difficult and complex process, locally and nationally.

Footnotes -

\*apart from a small minority who refused to do so and who continue on today as the Free Church and the 'Wee Frees.

\*\* for comparison, towns like Grangemouth (population 16,000) and Bo'ness (population 14,000) will be reduced from three congregations to one. It's unthinkable, therefore, that a town the size of Arbroath - population 24,000 will continue to have the number of churches that it has had until now. The likelihood is two town churches as we go forward.

With love,

Martin

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## Church Life

It's still hard to talk about 'normal' and yet there are some signs of congregational life taking shape again. Havilah is open four days a week; our mental health projects are gearing up for restarting; Carla is taking 'Bubblegum 'n' Fluff' into lots of primary schools and our Guild and Dementia Cafe are running again. And some things - not least our prayer times - continue via Zoom.

But for now, our approach will continue to be a cautious one and the safety and wellbeing of our members - and others who use our buildings - will be paramount. With the

recent news of a dangerous new covid variant - omicron - and with the 'fourth wave' besetting various European countries, it's clear that there's a way to go before we can talk about being out of the woods.

Only, therefore, after careful risk assessment, and with an eye on government regulations, can we consider opening up more congregational activity.

Please be patient in the meantime and observe all necessary protocols when coming to church and, should you have covid symptoms, take a test and (as goes without saying) isolate immediately should you test positive.



## GUILD CHRISTMAS CRAFT NIGHT PHOTOS



**Right** - Carla with the foodstuffs ready to be shipped by Barnabas to support persecuted Christians.

