

Southern CROSS

DEC
EMBER
2014

THE NEWS MAGAZINE FOR SYDNEY ANGLICANS

Santamas?

SHOULD THE MAN IN THE RED SUIT
BE PART OF OUR CHRISTMAS?



+ The old, old story...

& Summer movies

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It's Santa's fun time but should it be? We ask people where Santa fits into their Christmas. P11

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“ This is a moment for great thanksgiving to God. ”

Mark Thompson
Sydney News

Southern CROSS
DECEMBER 2014
volume 20 number 11



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\$44.00 per annum (Australia)



Mission: demolition

Under way: Archbishop Davies takes to the old Moore College building with a sledgehammer. PHOTO: Russell Powell

PROVING HE IS MORE ADEPT WITH A SERMON THAN A SLEDGEHAMMER, ARCHBISHOP GLENN DAVIES has removed the first brick as the Moore College site is prepared for its major rebuilding project. The old red brick building at Number 1 King Street is coming down to make way for a new purpose-built facility including a library, more teaching areas, research and study spaces and a large assembly hall enabling the entire student body to come together in one space.

Dr Davies joined the principal Dr Mark Thompson and ceremonially took a sledgehammer to the steps of the old Master Builders' Association building, purchased for the college in the late 1970s and in constant use since then.

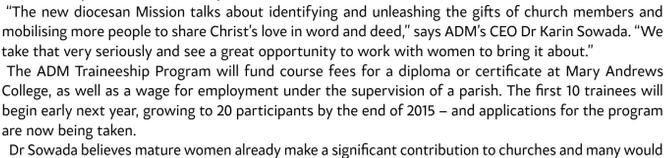
Calling the project "one of the most important in the Diocese today" Dr Davies said, "It is time for us to recognise and address the substantial deficiencies in our facilities so that we can provide up-to-date learning, teaching, research and study facilities that will serve the global Christian community for generations to come".

The Archbishop has also called for donations to the "Being Moore Capital Campaign", which has already raised \$14 million of the \$20 million required. As the project has progressed, the floor plan has been refined to increase the useable floor area, while reducing the overall cost by 22 per cent.

"This is a moment for great thanksgiving to God," Dr Thompson told *Southern Cross*. "These new facilities – including more community space, more learning space and space for the faculty to be all located together – are desperately needed. Under God's good hand we grew out of our existing facilities long ago. Now, through the generosity of his people, we are able to take a giant step forward where it is most needed."

With demolition now underway, it is anticipated the new building will be opened by July 2016.

ADM to "unleash" lay gifts



Lecturer Lisa Champion with a practical pastoral care class at MAC.

ANGLICAN DEACONESS MINISTRIES (ADM) IS BACKING A \$1.8 MILLION PROGRAM TO BOOST women in lay ministries across the Sydney Diocese.

Aimed at women over 40, with a focus on cross-cultural ministry and disadvantaged communities, the scheme will provide 60 traineeships between 2015 and 2019.

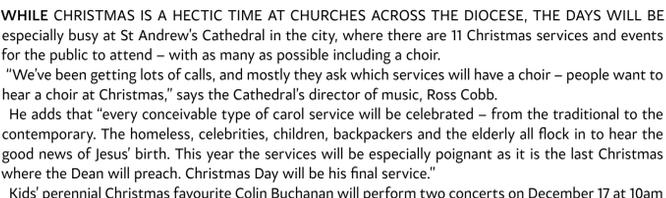
"The new diocesan Mission talks about identifying and unleashing the gifts of church members and mobilising more people to share Christ's love in word and deed," says ADM's CEO Dr Karin Sowada. "We take that very seriously and see a great opportunity to work with women to bring it about."

The ADM Traineeship Program will fund course fees for a diploma or certificate at Mary Andrews College, as well as a wage for employment under the supervision of a parish. The first 10 trainees will begin early next year, growing to 20 participants by the end of 2015 – and applications for the program are now being taken.

Dr Sowada believes mature women already make a significant contribution to churches and many would value the chance to gain qualifications and additional ministry skills.

"These are the cohort of women who come to Mary Andrews College already, so we understand their needs, we understand the stage of life that they are at and – although they are not always in 'upfront' roles – they are the relational glue of ministry that actually grows churches," she says. "We want to engage these women and grow them to reach the 90 per cent unreached in the community."

Full-throttle Christmas



Ready to celebrate: Ross Cobb and the St Andrew's choristers. PHOTO: Roland Slea

WHILE CHRISTMAS IS A HECTIC TIME AT CHURCHES ACROSS THE DIOCESE, THE DAYS WILL BE especially busy at St Andrew's Cathedral in the city, where there are 11 Christmas services and events for the public to attend – with as many as possible including a choir.

"We've been getting lots of calls, and mostly they ask which services will have a choir – people want to hear a choir at Christmas," says the Cathedral's director of music, Ross Cobb.

He adds that "every conceivable type of carol service will be celebrated – from the traditional to the contemporary. The homeless, celebrities, children, backpackers and the elderly all flock in to hear the good news of Jesus' birth. This year the services will be especially poignant as it is the last Christmas where the Dean will preach. Christmas Day will be his final service."

Kids' perennial Christmas favourite Colin Buchanan will perform two concerts on December 17 at 10am and 1pm but the big events begin on Saturday, December 13 at 11am, with a service specifically geared towards welcoming and evangelising seniors. This will be led by former Archbishop Harry Goodhew with the choir from St Swithun's, Pymble.

Archbishop Glenn Davies will speak at two services of lessons and carols – one on December 17 at 6pm and the other on December 18 at 7pm. Both of these will feature brass instruments, while the second will also include the Cathedral choir.

On Christmas Eve visitors can choose from a contemporary family Christmas service at 3pm, more traditional services at 6pm and 8pm with the Cathedral choir, or the late night service at 11pm with brass instruments and a mixed choir.

Finally, Christmas Day will be celebrated at an 8.30am communion service with the Rev Rob Smith, or the 10am service with Dean Jensen and the Cathedral choir.

"It's such an amazing and exciting time of year," Mr Cobb says. "Our choristers love it. They're unbelievably busy with so many services and the boys don't get much sleep but they see thousands of people coming through the Cathedral wanting to learn about Jesus and celebrate Christmas."

"Darlo" markets



An "angel" at last year's market spreads goodwill. PHOTO: Di Jobbins

THE ST JOHN'S CHRISTMAS MARKET WILL RUN AGAIN THIS YEAR IN DARLINGHURST ON DECEMBER 11.

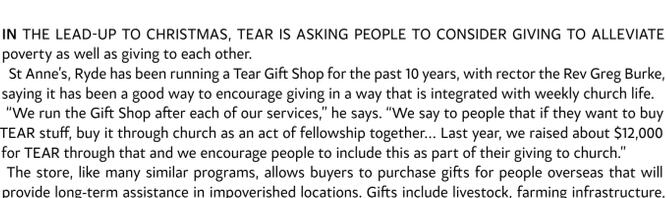
"We came up with [the] idea last year... it was a kind of magic moment where we made contact [with the locals]," says St John's rector the Rev Ed Vaughan. "It's not evangelistic as such, although surprisingly people felt comfortable enough to enter the church building... all decorated with candles and things, while the main markets were going on outside."

Market features include live music, stalls and silent movie projections, plus the surprise drawcard of live camel rides.

Mr Vaughan says people are "kind of interested" until he mentions the camels and they come to life. "Camels in Darlinghurst is a bit of an unusual thing to do!"

The event helps people connect with St John's, its home, Rough Edges, and has also allowed local creatives and business owners to be involved, helping forge links between them and the church.

Christmas giving



Community generosity: St Anne's collecting toys for Anglicare.

NICK GILBERT

IN THE LEAD-UP TO CHRISTMAS, TEAR IS ASKING PEOPLE TO CONSIDER GIVING TO ALLEVIATE poverty as well as giving to each other.

St Anne's, Ryde has been running a Tear Gift Shop for the past 10 years, with rector the Rev Greg Burke, saying it has been a good way to encourage giving in a way that is integrated with weekly church life.

"We run the Gift Shop after each of our services," he says. "We say to people that if they want to buy TEAR stuff, buy it through church as an act of fellowship together... Last year, we raised about \$12,000 for TEAR through that and we encourage people to include this as part of their giving to church."

The store, like many similar programs, allows buyers to purchase gifts for people overseas that will provide long-term assistance in impoverished locations. Gifts include livestock, farming infrastructure, and educational materials.

Involvement by St Anne's with TEAR and other agencies also extends to other ministries. The children's ministries often devote a term to focusing on Christian social issues based on material supplied by the likes of the Bible Society or TEAR. The preschool has run its own gift shop while the older youth programs have operated poverty experience rooms as fundraisers.

St Anne's also is involved with Anglicare's Toys 'n' Tucker Christmas drive and helps run a toy collection point at a local shopping complex.

The church's TEAR store often sees an increase in business over the Christmas period as parishioners take the opportunity to buy special gifts for those overseas. Mr Burke says his own family tries to match their own Christmas giving dollar for dollar with donations to TEAR and other agencies.

"We encourage people to give to TEAR regularly as a partner, just like we do with CMS and organisations like that," he says. "As a funding base, gift shops tend to vary throughout the year and from year to year and I think most organisations would prefer a predictable month-to-month income."

According to numbers from the Australian Retailers Association cited by TEAR, Australians spend \$43 billion on Christmas – nearly half of that on food – compared to the \$2.4 billion annually to tax-deductible causes.

Beach church turns 125

JUDY ADAMSON

FRIENDS AND PARISHIONERS PAST AND PRESENT filled St Matthew's, Bondi in late November to celebrate the 125th anniversary of Anglican ministry in the suburb.

In celebrating the work of the church since the foundation stone was laid on November 23, 1889, new rector the Rev Martin Morgan joked that he was a "newbie" compared to others – with a show of hands highlighting some members had been part of the church for upwards of 50 years.

While remembering and giving thanks for all those who had served, Mr Morgan paid one thing had been clear in his reading about the parish's early days and that was the commitment of rectors. "You might think 'Eastern suburbs, that's a nice place to live' but in those days they were coming out to the boondocks," he said.

"They did it because they loved Jesus and you see that still in the lives of the people here."

Celebrations included video memories from church members plus readings from Psalm 127 ("Unless the Lord builds the house the builders labour in vain") and Ephesians 3:7-21. In a relaxed sermon "chat" with Mr Morgan, Matt Madigan – who leads the Hope Project church that meets in St Matthew's on Sunday afternoons – alluded to Ephesians 3, saying, "I love that God has a plan for Bondi and that he will display his manifold wisdom through the church".

Mr Morgan said the challenge now facing Bondi, as well as other parishes in the Diocese, was to be "biblically faithful at the same time as being culturally appropriate".

In a recent discussion paper for members, Mr Morgan wrote that Bondi culture was multiethnic and multi-layered, with the diversity extending to the way people thought and talked about God. "We want to maintain the essential basis we have in evangelical theology and church practice while sensitively removing cultural barriers... [the apostle] Paul was able to deal with different cultures by being flexible with his own cultural expression. He was more committed to win followers of Jesus than he was to feeling comfortable."

Or, as he put it at the service: "Before the love of Christ shapes the ministry it's got to shape us."



Local history: Martin Morgan at the original entrance door of St Matthew's, Bondi.

Mission head for Moore



Heading to Moore: Simon Gillham (second from right), his wife Margie, and their children Maddie and Noah.

THE NEW HEAD OF THE MISSION DEPARTMENT AT MOORE COLLEGE WILL BE THE REV SIMON GILLHAM, currently a missionary in Namibia.

Mr Gillham, a Moore graduate, is serving with the Church Missionary Society (CMS) as acting principal of the Namibia Evangelical Theological Seminary (NETS). He has been in Namibia for six years and previously worked in the Diocese of Newcastle, during which time he planted Maitland Evangelical Church.

"I am delighted Simon and Margie will be joining us in a little over a year," Moore principal the Rev Dr Mark Thompson said. "It is worth the wait to have someone of Simon's calibre bring on the great work done by Greg Anderson and, before him, Mike Raiter. He brings a special combination of gifts and experience that will be invaluable as we seek to expand our vision and serve the cause of Christ in all the world. This is a very exciting development."

Mr Gillham has experience in pastoral ministry, church planting and theological education in a cross-cultural context. He is currently working on a PhD on theological education and has been involved in a number of important consultations in Angola, Zimbabwe and Malawi.

CMS is confident Mr Gillham will make "a great contribution". The general secretary of CMS NSW & ACT, the Rev Malcolm Richards, says, "CMS and Moore College share a vision to equip church leaders around the world through good biblical teaching. Simon knows first hand the profound importance of faithful Bible teaching. Through his work with CMS at NETS he has witnessed the need for trained Bible teachers in every part of the world."

Training boost for community chaplaincy

NICK GILBERT

A NEW COMMUNITY CHAPLAINCY SCHEME IS LOOKING TO TRAIN AND SUPPORT VOLUNTARY and paid workers in gospel ministries.

Anglicare, Moore College and Evangelism and New Churches will each have a role, providing training and support to better and lay workers wanting to practice, so Bruce and Archie of community contexts.

"We wanted to paired integrate theology and pursue, so Bruce and Archie and I started talking about how we could do that," says the Rev David Pettey, the manager for diocesan chaplaincy at Anglicare. "ENC in particular had a need and desire to better train people for community chaplaincy. So the three of us got together to develop better approaches to community chaplaincy, prisons, hospitals, aged care, mental health – all of it – under the auspices of the Centre for Ministry Development."

The scheme essentially adopts a two-pronged approach to training: theological education, with training largely based on the PTC provided by Moore, paired with on-the-ground pastoral and evangelistic training, supervised by Anglicare and ENC.

"As far as we're concerned, with prisons, hospital and aged care chaplaincy as our focus, we're training volunteers in a five-day course, which is very hands-on, where they go visit and then write up a report on the visit," Mr Pettey says. "In conjunction with Moore external studies, they also do four PTC subjects for an award in chaplaincy. At a professional level, chaplains would work towards a more advanced award while also doing hands-on training."

The Rev Bruce Hall, director of Evangelism and New Churches, sees the venture as a good way to foster new chaplaincy programs in non-traditional contexts and to recognise lay workers in these roles.

"We hope people who have a passion for this and have a reference from the minister of their church would do the Moore College course, do the 40-hour practicum and then be licensed as a lay worker in a community chaplaincy," Mr Hall says. "We can encourage (them) to work in community contexts as chaplains and evangelists, engaging with people's felt needs... then the most important need: knowing Jesus."

The Rev Archie Poulos, director of Moore College's Centre for Ministry Development, has been keen for a long time to create pathways that are acknowledged as legitimate types of ministry – and formalise across the Diocese work that people are already doing. "Whether you are involved as a volunteer, doing a one-year diploma, or a full four-year program with this as part of it, it is extremely important that you are hands-on," he says. "We wanted to help that be a possibility for people."

Training has begun among vocational chaplains, but a series of practical training days open to potential voluntary chaplains will start in March. See newchurches.org.au for details.

CALEBs for Youthworks

TWO YOUTHWORKS MEDIA PUBLICATIONS HAVE BEEN RECOGNISED AT THE ANNUAL CALEB Awards, with one taking out the top prize.

The assistant minister to youth at Shenton Park Anglican in Perth, Edward Surrey, won the non-fiction award as well as the overall CALEB prize last month for his book *The Cross* – which seeks to engage older teens in a plain-speaking, conversational way about the person and work of Jesus, and why the cross is so important.

One of the reviews of *The Cross*, by high school chaplain Josh Apieczek, sums up the style and content of the book this way:

"If you ever tried reading the Bible and thought, 'I'll wait till the movie comes out'; if your first instinct with problems is to go to Google or Facebook for help; if you struggle to understand the need for faith, church or the Trinity; if you think Christianity is really only useful after you die – read this book."

The other Youthworks publication recognised was *A Life Already Started* by Dr Megan Best, which won the Reviewers' Choice Award. *A Life Already Started* looks at how to approach unplanned pregnancy – and love those affected by it – from a Christian perspective, as well as considering the different ways forward.

The CALEB awards are presented by Omega Writers, which seeks to support the work of published and unpublished Christian writers in Australasia.

Go west for the gospel



Nathan Lovell teaching in Mozambique.

A KEY CMS MISSIONARY INVOLVED IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION ABROAD HAS URGED MORE people to consider training ministries in Africa.

“There’s a huge need in Africa for theological education,” says Dr Nathan Lovell, who lectures in Old Testament, Hebrew and Mission and Culture at George Whitefield College in South Africa. “The church has been growing at an enormous rate and the question is always ‘Who will pastor the new churches that are cropping up all over the place?’ I think Sydney is comparatively well resourced and educated, and so we are in a good position to partner with our brothers and sisters to develop the church.”

Dr Lovell speaks from experience, having put aside his qualifications in robotics and artificial intelligence to work in Cape Town as a missionary with CMS. His work at GWC puts him in a unique position. “We have students from all over Africa and so you get a feel for what is going on across the continent,” he says. “I think of the churches in the Zulu communities, or some of the township churches. Each has their own strengths and weaknesses but the thing they have in common is many more people than they can actively minister to. So the need isn’t for people to go across and be ministers of churches, the need is for people to go across and train people to be ministers or, even better, to train people to work in theological education themselves.”

Dr Lovell’s call is not just aimed at the super-academic. “For this kind of ministry you obviously need a desire to teach but you don’t always need to be working at the highest academic levels,” he says. “There are colleges all over the continent serving God’s people in the way that is most appropriate for their context. I have many friends teaching at post-graduate level but others who teach agriculture alongside Biblical Theology.

“It’s all about what the local church needs. So if you have a desire to teach the Bible and train people for ministry, then probably there’s a college somewhere in Africa that will be working at a level where you will fit right in. And they’d probably love you to come and join them.”

Dr Lovell’s students know first hand the life-changing benefits of theological education.

“A lot of our students come from Zimbabwe,” he says. “One of the things that draws them is the difference they see in their communities between people who are Christian and those who are not. So if you ask, ‘Why did you decide to come to college?’ I’d expect them to say, ‘God was calling me to ministry’ or something like that. Instead they say, ‘My family became Christian... our whole lives changed and everything we did changed. But we didn’t always know what that meant, so I felt the need to train more people’. It’s hard to find a better reason than that.”

A century up for Armidale



CELEBRATIONS TO MARK THE CENTENARY OF THE ARMIDALE DIOCESE IN NORTHERN NSW culminated in a special service in November and the release of a history of the diocese.

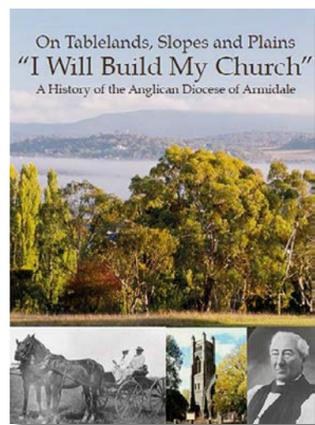
Archbishop Glenn Davies, who gave the keynote address at the service, noted that Armidale had been part of three other dioceses – Australia, Newcastle and Grafton-Armidale – before it became a diocese in its own right in 1914.

More than 700 people, including a number of past clergy and members of the diocese, gathered at Lazenby Hall in the University of New England for the centenary celebration, led by Bishop Rick Lewers and also featuring singer Colin Buchanan.

Bishop Lewers said Armidale was part of the Diocese of Newcastle from 1847. "In 1850 there was but one church building in Armidale," he said. "From those small beginnings 34 parishes with their own church buildings have emerged, as well as three schools – NEGS and TAS in Armidale, and Calrossy in Tamworth."

The Anglican Diocese of Armidale now covers the entire New England region in north-western NSW. The official diocesan history has been chronicled in a book (right) titled *On Tablelands, Slopes and Plains: "I Will Build My Church"*.

Earlier, in his Synod address, Bishop Lewers had urged members to think about the years to come: "As one diocesan century ends and a new one begins, I call us as a diocese to prayerful reform and action, 'conforming no longer to the pattern of this world but being transformed by the renewing of our minds'".



Old Melbourne church damaged by fire

NICK GILBERT

ST JUDE'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN CARLTON, MELBOURNE HAS BEEN DELIBERATELY SET ALIGHT, causing hundreds of thousands of dollars of damage and the temporary relocation of some church ministries.

The heritage-listed north Melbourne building, renovated only five years ago in a \$1 million upgrade, was set on fire in the early hours of October 18, causing an estimated \$500,000 worth of damage. Police have treated the fire as suspicious and have interviewed two men about the incident. Both were released and no charges have been laid. Police are still investigating.

Despite the loss of the building for the time being the church has continued on, meeting for a celebration service at St Paul's Cathedral the following Sunday.

"All of our congregations came together at St Paul's Cathedral, with a few guests, but it was mainly our folk," says the vicar of St Jude's, the Ven Dr Richard Condie. "We had about 700 of us there and it was really lovely. We rarely get to do that together. Everyone felt a little guilty, I think, about enjoying it so much but in the situation, it was a great event and a great opportunity to worship together."

The sermon at the Cathedral was focused on Luke 12:22-34 and the Lord's care for his people. Prayers were also offered for those who had set fire to the building.

"What I've been hearing is people praying for the guys who lit it, praying that they will be converted and that they would join us here at St Jude's," Dr Condie says. "The desire is that they'd be won for Christ and be incorporated into the life of this church. I haven't heard anyone be angry at all. Disappointed that this could be done deliberately, yes, but not really any anger."

For the time being, the church's regular Sunday meetings that met at St Jude's will continue in other locations. One congregation will meet in the local primary school, while St Jude's Unichurch congregation has been offered free use of a lecture theatre by the University of Melbourne for the next 12 months. Support and hospitality have also been offered by nearby churches in the Diocese of Melbourne. Demountable offices have since been placed on site for church staff.

The fire was mostly contained to the front of the church, with the basic structure of the building remaining intact. Staff members were told by fire brigade officers that if firefighters had been called even minutes later, the whole building may have been lost.

Despite the task of reorganisation and repair, Dr Condie is keen for his church to keep ministering to the people of Carlton, and to respond to those who have assisted them.

"We're assembling our project team to get on with the fixing up of the building and to look at opportunities for improvement that we can make that this situation gives us," Dr Condie says.

Refugees moved for winter



Rahma (dressed in orange), one of the children in the Baharka Camp. PHOTO FRRME

AS IRAQI CHRISTIANS FROM THE NINEVEH PLAIN PREPARE TO SPEND THEIR FIRST CHRISTMAS away from their homes, relief organisations are moving thousands out of camps into rented accommodation.

In Mosul, one of the towns they left behind, conditions have grown desperate. One British newspaper says it has been told there have been sharp price rises for basic goods and widespread shortages, as well as public beheadings of people that the new Islamic State occupiers consider to be a threat – including doctors, lawyers and MPs.

In Irbil, to where thousands of Christians fled, a church collective has been formed to provide food and clean water. There are plans to rent houses and assign several families to each and there is a possibility prefabricated homes will be provided by aid organisations. The Archbishop of Sydney's Anglican Aid is supporting the collective as well as Canon Andrew White's Foundation for Relief and Reconciliation in the Middle East (FRRME).

FRRME partner Mart Shmoni Church runs one of the biggest camps in Ankawa, where most Christian refugees are based. The camp initially had 2500 people but this halved as people were moved to rented accommodation for the winter. Families also moved to the incomplete Ankawa Mall, where they are living in plastic containers to shelter from the cold. Some left for Baghdad.

Canon White has been prevented from returning to Baghdad because of security concerns. He travels around Baghdad with a detachment of 35 Iraqi soldiers but, after a specific threat was uncovered, there were concerns other lives may be in danger if he stayed.

"I've been shot at and bombed and they've tried to blow me up," Canon White told Britain's *Sunday Times*. "People say, 'Aren't you afraid?... Never. Not one day. I love it. I feel really sad that I'm not there now."

Canon White's PA, Dr Sarah Ahmed, has taken over co-ordinating relief work in his absence. Her latest report spoke of a visit to Baharka Camp. "The situation was bad... it was raining and all the tents fell down; one poor woman died leaving her kids alone in this mess of a time," Dr Ahmed said. "I met a young girl called Rahma (which means mercy). When I was about to leave she asked me, 'Are you coming tomorrow?'" I said yes. 'Don't forget us,' she said."

Battle continues for Chibok

THE NIGERIAN ARMY AND MUSLIM REBELS FROM the Boko Haram group have staged a seesaw battle over the town from where 300 girls were kidnapped earlier this year.

Chibok, in Borno state in northern Nigeria, is an enclave of mainly Christian families – some involved in Bible translation in what is a mainly Muslim area.

Early in November Boko Haram claimed to have taken the town, which prompted a major operation by the Nigerian army to retake it just 48 hours later.

Chibok is reported to be still unstable but it is symbolically important, especially to the Nigerian army, which has been criticised for not finding the schoolgirls abducted in April. Although there were reports a truce was being negotiated, Boko Haram's leader Abubakar Shekau, in a video released in October, denied the reports and said the girls were "an old story" because they all had converted to Islam and been married off to Muslim fighters.

A harrowing report from Human Rights Watch told the story of escapees from Boko Haram's clutches who had been tortured and raped because they were Christian. "I was dragged to the camp leader who told me the reason I was brought to the camp was because we Christians worship three gods," one woman told the investigators. "When I objected to his claim, he tied a rope around my neck and beat me with a plastic cable until I almost passed out."



WORLD BRIEFS

Belfast/Yorkshire

A Christian bakery owner being sued for refusing to bake a cake supporting gay marriage has been backed up by a new opinion poll. About two-thirds of those polled across the UK believe the family-owned Ashers Baking Company should be free, on the grounds of conscience, to refuse to make a cake bearing the slogan "Support gay marriage". Several MPs are also petitioning for the action, launched by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, to be dropped. Meanwhile, in Yorkshire, there have been 50,000 messages of support for a Red Cross volunteer sacked for opposing

gay marriage. Bryan Barkley, 71, from West Yorkshire, was photographed holding up a placard during a demonstration on the day same-sex marriage laws were introduced. Despite working for 18 years helping the Red Cross trace missing persons, Mr Barkley was told his views went against the values of the Red Cross. Colin Hart, spokesman for the Coalition For Marriage, said there was no suggestion Mr Barkley pushed his views while volunteering yet he was still sacked. "It is clear the Red Cross is facing a substantial backlash from its own supporters," Mr Hart said.

Pyongyang

A Christian held in North Korea for "proselytising" has been released. Korean-American missionary Kenneth Bae, 46, had been held for two years. He was originally sentenced to 15 years hard labour for allegedly plotting against the government through "religious activities". In October a 56-year-old American tourist, Jeffrey Fowle,

was released after six months' prison for leaving a Bible in a sailors' club in the North Korean city of Chongjin. In both cases there was high-level intervention by the US government. The Open Doors organisation has declared, for the twelfth straight year, that Christian persecution is at its most extreme in North Korea.

Lahore



Pakistan's High Court has upheld a death sentence for Asia Bibi (left), a Christian woman charged with blaspheming Islam. Mrs Bibi has been in prison since 2009 charged over an argument at a well.

A Muslim woman refused water from the mother of five, claiming it would be unclean.

She then claimed Mrs Bibi made derogatory comments about the Prophet Mohammed and said the Qur'an was a "man-made book". The only witnesses called were the Muslim woman and her sister. The appeals court says blasphemy cases, which automatically attract the death sentence, should have a higher standard of evidence and has called for a change in the law in future. But it found it could not overturn the ruling in Mrs Bibi's case.

Washington

There has been an outcry from Christian groups in the US after the National Cathedral in Washington DC was handed over by the Episcopal Church to be a mosque for a day. The idea came to the cathedral's director of religious liturgy, the Rev Gina Campbell, who arranged for prayer mats to be set diagonally in the transept so that Muslims could face towards Mecca without seeing crosses or Christian symbols. "Let us stretch our hearts and let us seek to deepen mercy

for we worship the same God," she told the Friday gathering. The Rev Franklin Graham, son of evangelist Billy Graham, said, "It's sad to see a church open its doors to the worship of anything other than the one true God of the Bible". A lone protester interrupted the televised event to shout, "Jesus Christ is our Lord and Saviour. He is the reason why we are to worship only him". She was removed by security.

London

The General Synod of the Church of England has officially confirmed July's decision to allow women to become bishops. The British parliament had already approved the measure. "Today we can begin to embrace a new way of being the church and moving forward together," said the Archbishop of

Canterbury, Justin Welby. "We will also continue to seek the flourishing of the church of those who disagree." Women bishops have been authorised in some Western countries, including parts of Australia, but the majority of the Anglican Communion is still opposed.

Tell me the old, old story

DAVID MANSFIELD

FOR MANY DECADES FRIENDS OF MINE, CHIPPY AND CYNTHIA, HAVE BEEN CAREFULLY HELPING Cynthia's mother, Sheila, to place her trust in the Lord Jesus.

They have explained the gospel to her countless times. They have taken her to church with them almost every week to hear their local minister and many guest speakers preach and teach the gospel of God's grace.

They have patiently pointed out that no-one is accepted by God on the strength of their own performance, be it religious or moral, but only by grace through faith in Jesus' death on the cross. They have lovingly urged Sheila to abandon any thought of trusting in her good life, her religious acts or her moral performance and embrace the forgiveness that Jesus' death has won.

But it had been to no avail. Sheila stubbornly refused to shift from self-reliance to a simple trust in Jesus and his death for her.

I can remember on at least two occasions, separated by several years, when I was a guest preacher at their local church. Sheila was flanked by her daughter and her son-in-law in the second row, with Chippy repeating to Sheila anything that I said that he thought she hadn't heard or understood.

Their love, honour, prayers and commitment to helping their frail aged parent to a saving faith in Jesus was gentle – and relentless. But Sheila, now in her ninety-ninth year, was unmoved in her insistence that she must contribute to her salvation. Chippy and Cynthia were beside themselves.

Then, about a month ago, Chippy had an idea. There was another member of their church who was also well into her nineties. He rang Philippa who was Sheila's junior by four years. Would she be willing to have lunch with Sheila and be a fresh voice in explaining that it is by faith in Jesus alone and not our life of good deeds that makes us right with God? Philippa agreed to try and help.

Chippy picked her up at the appointed time and on the way to Sheila's, Philippa began to question why the Lord had kept her on this earth so long, especially when her beloved husband of 68 years had gone to glory several years earlier. What purpose could God have in keeping her from the joy of heaven at such an age?

They arrived at Sheila's residence where, as a 98-year-old, she lives with limited independence and assistance by her family and professional carers. Chippy sent Philippa in on her own and said he would be back in two hours. He left to attend to other business and pray for the encounter. The 94-year-old and the 98-year-old sat down for lunch together.

Chippy returned and entered his mother-in-law's home to be greeted with a broad smile and the words, "Chippy, I have something to tell you. There is nothing in my hand I can bring. It's simply to the cross I cling".

Speechless, Chippy took a few seconds to comprehend her greeting. After a further session of hugs, tears, prayers and words of reassurance, Chippy and Philippa bade farewell, floated out to the car and drove off.

On the way back to Philippa's place, among the many things Chippy asked Philippa about the conversation she had had over the previous two hours, he also asked, "Philippa, do you now understand why God hasn't taken you to heaven yet and what your purpose still is, here on earth, even as a 94-year-old widow?"

With a warm smile and a spark in her eyes, Philippa nodded to express her understanding.

Chippy and Cynthia have hardly missed a day since, reading parts of the Bible, encouraging and rejoicing with Sheila in her newborn faith in the finished work of Jesus for her forgiveness and acceptance into God's family. Nor have they passed an opportunity sharing with anyone, Christian or not, God's work of grace in their esteemed, frail, almost 99-year-old mother.

I can't help smiling with a deep sense of joy every time I reflect on this wonderful story of two nonagenarians having lunch together for two hours with the 94-year-old youngster clarifying the gospel to her 98-year-old elder.

And I can't stop praising God who, by his sovereign grace, has rescued her (at 98) and me (when I was 16) from the kingdom of darkness and bringing us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins (Colossians 1:13).

And I can't stop this old, old hymn drifting through my mind:

*Tell me the old, old story,
of unseen things above;
of Jesus and his glory,
of Jesus and his love.*

*Tell me the story simply,
as to a little child,
for I am weak and weary
and helpless and defiled.*

Everybody sing...

Well-considered essays in response to issues raised by SC (700-word maximum) can be emailed to newspaper@anglicanmedia.com.au

MOVES



BAY WATCH

The Rev Brad Kemister becomes the new rector of St Peter's, Watsons Bay on December 9. He has been assistant minister at Darlinghurst since early 2009, and became familiar to the parishioners at St Peter's through occasional fill-in preaching at the church last year. Yet he was still surprised to get the call from the nominators.

"They initially contacted us earlier this year, came out to hear me preach a couple of services (at Darlinghurst) and came out and saw us, but we took our family to England on long service leave and we thought they'd moved on, which is fair enough," he says. "Then they came back to hear me preach at St John's again and chatted with the rector and a week or so later I got an email, which was just amazing."

Mr Kemister says he and his wife Mary feel a "really strong sense of call" to the parish, which has been underscored for them by the way they feel God has acted in the process.

"I'm so privileged to be able to take the gospel to Watsons Bay, and I really want my family to soak into the community there," he says. "The kids all have various gifts... and my wife works excellently with women and young women, so we're looking forward to being part of it."

"I've been nearly six years here at Darlinghurst and it's really been a time of preparation... waiting on God, crying out to him for wisdom and discernment in many situations, and seeing that he already started his work of the gospel in many people's lives."



CBS TO BERALA

After five years as an assistant minister to Unichurch at the University of NSW, the Rev Michael Doyle becomes rector of Berala on February 1.

"We've been at Campus Bible Study for five years now... and basically we were approached by David Tyndall, the locum [at Berala] who's an old family friend of ours," Mr Doyle says. "He said, 'This is an opportunity I think you should check out: I think you'd be good for the church'. It's a multicultural church that needs someone who's experienced in multicultural ministry but who's also very keen to evangelise. He knows that about me so he approached me."

When Mr Doyle met the wardens he discovered that both were ex-Campus Bible Study members – one of them a member when he started work there, and another who had been part of the group 20 years ago. He has also met parish council and found even more former CBS members from his own student days.

"It sounds like there's a great bunch of people in the church who are keen to proclaim Christ in Berala and the surrounding suburbs and work out how to do that," he says. "They've got a great multicultural ministry... and they've got a kids club on Friday afternoons with 430 kids – just one of whom is Christian."

"Lots of people have told us it's going to be hard and we know it's going to be hard. We're no longer first-year-out-of-college Alpha Christians who think we can do everything... but we do need to be reminded of God's graciousness and he works through weak people such as us to do his will."

RIVERWOOD DUO

The new rector of Riverwood-Punchbowl, the Rev Jarrod Booker, took up his role last month with his predecessor, the Rev Neil Mayhew, by his side as the parish's new senior assistant minister.

"We were looking to lead a parish and we ended up talking to Peter Tasker about going to a place that was multiethnic that wanted someone with a heart for evangelism and church planting," Mr Booker says. "Among the options we started talking about was Riverwood-Punchbowl."

While Mr Booker acknowledges it's "not a typical situation" to become rector with the previous incumbent still ministering in the parish, he says that he and Mr Mayhew are "both keen to be working together to lead God's people in reaching our diverse community".

Mr Mayhew agrees, saying it is a "very multicultural parish and it's looking for that new leadership... Jarrod's fitting in as a member of the team and we're doing things similar to what we were doing before he arrived, but we'll be looking to him to exercise ongoing leadership for the benefit of the parish. God's sovereign and working out his purposes here."

It's a two-year arrangement as part of a transition to retirement for Mr Mayhew, who says his gifts will be used to complement Mr Booker's in that time. He will focus more time on the church at Beverly Hills North, with Mr Booker mainly looking after St Andrew's, Riverwood.

It is Mr Booker's first time as rector, and he says he's excited about the challenge.

"We're looking forward to the work ahead of reaching a multiethnic place, evangelising and loving God and serving each other and their community," he says. "We really felt led to this place. A lot of prayer went into it. So we're very thankful."



NEXT STOP NOWRA



The Rev Geoff Thompson, the assistant minister at Figtree, will become the new rector of Nowra next year.

After what he describes as a "late career move" into full-time ministry – which saw him and his wife Anne work under David O'Mara in Broome for four years before going to college – the Thompsons have spent five happy years at Figtree and are now ready to be "stretched further and differently" in ministry service by taking on their first parish.

"We love and adore Figtree and the people of Figtree and it's always an exciting ride here," Mr Thompson says. "There are lots of great ways and opportunities to think strategically, be adventurous and think outside the square... but we didn't want to leave Figtree and go to another Figtree!"

He says the prospect of Nowra came up in conversation "from several directions" earlier this year and jokes that "we were probably a little slow in cottoning on".

"We've got a daughter about to sit her HSC and so it's a tricky time with a lot happening, but a few months ago we went down and visited Nowra, had a meal with the nominators and we felt very compelled," he says. "As we thought about it, there really wasn't any reason why we shouldn't go, and we fell in love with the idea."

"It'll be a different set of challenges, but we're really looking forward to the opportunity of serving the people there."

Mr Thompson will take up his new position in March.

COASTAL SERVICE

Following a four-year stint as assistant minister to the South Coast parish of Culburra Beach, the Rev Paul McPhail became rector last month.

He says that the former acting rector, the Rev Sean Heslehurst from Bomaderry, had "gradually given me more responsibility and allowed me more freedom" over that time. After fulfilling all the training requirements and checks, and receiving a positive report from a parish that was happy to have him lead them, the Diocese made Mr McPhail a presbyter at his induction service on November 13.

"We're all pretty excited," he says. "When I first came to the parish in 2011 they saw it in terms of a new beginning – I was the first young minister for some time – so as I've become rector it's a new beginning again. I have a different role but the tasks stay the same."

Mr McPhail says the plan for church members in the immediate future is to continue to do what they have been doing for the past few years.

"Our mission statement is 'We glorify God by making disciples of Jesus in our community and beyond'," he says. "So that's what we're going to continue to do. A big part of how we're going to do that is to build a good gospel community – a group of people who love each other but are reaching out with the gospel into the wider community."

"There are two schools we're involved in that are great opportunities for us. We've been engaging with families and it's been great seeing younger families get involved in church here."



PALLIATIVE PASTOR

After nine years as rector of the parish of Darling Street in Balmain, the Rev Barry McGrath began working last month as pastoral care co-ordinator to a HammondCare palliative care unit in Mona Vale.

He says he and his wife Susan had been praying about their ministry future for some months, and at the Oxygen conference in August both felt the clear call to move on from Darling Street.

"In the weeks that followed the horizon cleared and I felt that pastoral ministry was the direction," he says. "I put out some feelers, kept praying and one day it hit me: palliative care."

"I have always loved the ministry to the dying and I felt that perhaps this was it. Hours later, I saw the job online."

Mr McGrath says he and Susan found leaving Darling Street difficult, but are "rejoicing in this new direction".

"Parish clergy do this type of work all the time, so it's just refining and choosing just one aspect of a rector's job by focusing on people who are dying," he says.

"I specifically chose palliative care over general hospital chaplaincy because I wanted that very clarified role of helping and assisting right at the end of life."

"It might sound weird but I've been very excited about this job... when you talk to people about end-of-life stuff their needs – and the conversation – are very immediate, very real and very authentic."

"We're talking about real issues and I appreciate that."

IN BRIEF

The Rev Tim Cocks has become rector of St Philip's, Auburn, after working for the past year as assistant minister in day-to-day charge of the parish.

After 10 years as rector of St Alban's, Leura, the Rev Greg Olliffe has officially retired from the position but will stay on as acting rector until the parish appoints a replacement next year.

VALE

The Rev Keith Grisdale died on November 3. Keith Noel Grisdale was born on December 27, 1924 and studied at Moore College in the late 1940s before taking on curacies at Summer Hill and Ryde.

He spent a little over a year working at the Mission to Seamen then became curate-in-charge of South Granville (1953-58), Toongabbie, Seven Hills and Girraween (1958-60) and Seven Hills & Lalor Park (1960).

Mr Grisdale served as rector of Corrimal in the first half of the 1960s before 12 years at Kensington (1965-79) and a further decade at Bexley.

Although he officially retired in 1989, Mr Grisdale was a part-time assistant minister at Blacktown in 1993, acting rector of Regents Park with Birrong two years later, and acting senior chaplain at ARV in 1998.

The Grisdales eventually moved into Donald Robinson Village in Kirrawee, where they spent many years as active participants in its faith life and ministry.

ALLOWABLE AFFAIRS

Thanks for your article on recovery from infidelity and marriage breakdown in November's *Southern Cross*.

I have long wondered how the church manages other non-sexual affairs. In the story you describe "common factors that led to an affair"... the unfaithful partner also seems unaware of, or to justify, their behaviour. Workaholism looks very similar to this picture but the straying partner – and perhaps even the church community – fails to see the behaviour for what it is, ie seeking outside the marriage for fulfilment at the cost of love and working on the marriage. It is somehow an allowable affair.

Spouses who question the long hours and lack of equivalent energy for the relationship are seen as hard to please, for surely earning a living and supporting the family are important. But when these are used as excuses to avoid self-examination of motives or accountability, surely sin is involved. Refusal to consider oneself with sober judgement or to be wise in seeking others' advice and instead dismissing it are warning signs of a heart divided or even misled.

Yet what is the next step for the betrayed spouse? I am speaking for many wives and a few husbands in requesting that all types of affairs be spoken about, warned of and confronted. The world has many "wayward women" in various disguises to lead us astray – even good things when the heart focuses on these instead of the marriage.

Name withheld

Infidelity is always tragic but, as someone who has survived it, I nearly always find analysis of infidelity of little use to 50 per cent of those experiencing it.

My experience was of an unfaithful wife. I understand that this psychology of recovery is often different to the "wronged wife" scenario. There is a paucity of support for husbands who find themselves in this situation.

Some of the sources I used in my recovery path suggest, anecdotally, that the unfaithful wife may in fact represent a larger group than errant husbands. This may be a consequence of the sexual freedom now seen in the two generations since Lionel Murphy's changes to divorce made a carousel of "parents" in the household a norm.

Consequently, Christian discussions on infidelity may be more effective if they discussed the problem proactively, from the perspective of precursors to infidelity risk in each spouse's upbringing and how to mitigate those influences.

I concur with the path to healing listed in your article. In my case, I did not want our beautiful and innocent children to be scarred by their mother's sinful self-indulgence and took that path to privately remonstrate and to forgive.

Husband and father

REFORMATION LEGACY

I write to commend the letter "English Masters" by Paul Barnett in November's *Southern Cross*. His exhortation to hold fast to the "great legacy" of our Reformation forebears is very timely, given some features in many of our churches. On the one hand, there is the commendable desire to be socio-culturally relevant in our mission. On the other, this great legacy (succinctly outlined in Barnett's letter) is often viewed as "antiquarian" or "high church" and therefore minimised or, worse, ignored. There is, in practice, a tension between these features; the fine balance between mission and doxology (1 Peter 2:9) is often awry.

We are exhorted to remember our great heritage. An English poet, Evangeline Paterson, wrote "Ashes" based on the words of the reformer Latimer to his fellow martyr Ridley before they were burnt alive: "Be of good cheer, Master Ridley... for we shall this day light such a candle in England as I trust by God's grace shall never be put out".

Her poem concludes:

*Sleep well, Master Ridley,
Your soul with God,
And with us, your ashes*

The letter and poem remind us to preserve our "great legacy" as we proclaim that Christ is Lord.

Ian Keast
Riverstone

Paul Barnett's comments on our Anglican liturgy are very welcome. As he implies, there are sometimes statements made by Anglican evangelicals to the effect that the wearing of plain robes and use of a prayer book are somehow "high church". While robes might mistakenly be given that description, it is hard to fathom how the use of a biblical Reformed liturgy could be so described – especially when the Thirty-Nine Articles are usually included as a supplement.

Until a few decades ago almost all Anglican services in the Sydney Diocese included ordained or lay leaders in robes, with prayer books in everyone's hands. The Sydney Diocese was, as now, called many things, but I never heard anyone accuse it of being "high church". We ignore Cranmer's liturgy and its modern English forms at our great loss and perhaps even at our peril.

David Morrison
Springwood

The Innkeeper

If I'd a known that it was 'im
a-standin' in the gloam
I'd a done a lot of things
to make 'im feel at 'ome;
I'd a swept the 'ole place out
and made 'er spick and span
if I'd a known me little Guest
'e was the Son of Man.

I'd a-kept the top top suite
with everything put square
but orl I saw was shabby folk
and a little donkey there.
So when 'e came to visit us
we couldn't find a room
(they say that when they done 'im in
some bloke lent 'im 'is tomb).

I guess that that's the way it is
we never give 'im space
or if we do it's small and mean
a really dingy place.
And yet 'e comes for that's 'is way
and how 'e makes a start.

So if today 'e comes to you
all risen from the dead
Don't make the blue that we all made
and put 'im in the shed
Open up the door with love
and just to give 'im proof
give 'im all the keys you've got
from the doorway to the roof.

David Hewetson



Mission impossible



DR GLENN DAVIES

ALWAYS LOVED WATCHING THE OLD TV SERIES *MISSION IMPOSSIBLE*, WHICH OF COURSE was successfully translated into a film franchise with the athletic Tom Cruise in death-defying scenarios seeking to achieve an objective that, for all practical purposes, was impossible. But of course, in Hollywood the impossible is achievable with a few special effects and millions of dollars to provide the viewers with the illusion that this is akin to real life.

Yet when it comes to the story of Christmas, this truly is a real-life “mission impossible”. How will God save humanity? That was God’s problem – once he had decided to save a people for his own. Of course, there was no necessity for God to save humans at all. He could have left them to their own devices and accordingly let them sow the seeds of their own destruction. But God, who is rich in mercy, chose to save humans from the misery of their own making. Yet the question still hung there: how would he do it?

Why couldn’t he, for example, just decide by divine decree that he would save humanity and forget all their misdeeds? Isn’t God big enough to forgive and forget? Well, if he were like that he wouldn’t be the all-wise, all-righteous God that he is. God cannot, like the proverbial Lord Nelson, turn a blind eye to transgressions. God must, by his very nature, deal justly with all manner of wrongdoing. For human sin is not merely an independent action of its own, it is essentially an affront against God, against his person and against his majesty. As Creator and Ruler of all humans, there is a fundamental allegiance everyone owes to God, whether they realise it or not. It matters little whether a person expresses it in outright rebellion against God’s rule, or whether they merely ignore God’s right to rule their lives. Both active and passive disobedience have consequences in the courtroom of the King of Kings.

The Bible teaches us there was only one way in which God could save those humans whom he had made in his own image. The answer was for him to become one just like them. God needed to become human. This is nothing less than breathtaking for us to comprehend. Why would God, the eternal ruler of all that exists, deign to enter into our puny, finite world and experience our tragic human condition with all its mortality and decay? Why? Because he loves us. There is in fact no other answer than that – God’s love demonstrated itself in sending his beloved Son into our world to become like us, to live the life we could not live and to die the death that we deserve.

Here the very nature of the Trinity comes into its own. For while there is but one God who created all things, in the pages of Scripture he is revealed as a God of three persons. Our God is at the same time a sending God and a God who is sent. God the Father sent God the Son and the agency of his sending the Son into the world was God the Holy Spirit. One God, unified in purpose and decree, from before the foundation of the world, set his love upon us so that he might save us from our sins and restore the broken relationship between God and humanity, and every dysfunctional relationship that thwarts the human condition.

God’s mission, a mission impossible for humans became a reality when Jesus entered our world. Born of the Virgin Mary in the power of the Holy Spirit so that a human embryo was conceived not by the ordinary means of human procreation, but by divine intervention in Mary’s womb. Through this miracle of the Holy Spirit, God became man. Jesus did not appear like Superman from the sky – in which case he would not have been like us nor could he have identified with us in our humanity; neither was Jesus born of Joseph and Mary, the child of two human parents, for then he would not have been God. Rather, Jesus, the name given by the angel, belonged to the child conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

“You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

This child, whose birth we celebrate this Christmas, grew to be a man, lived a sinless life, died a cruel death and rose victorious from the grave – all for us, to demonstrate God’s wondrous love and amazing grace.

Mission impossible. Mission accomplished. Hallelujah!

SC

a PRAYER FOR MISSION 2020

Our heavenly Father, fill our lives with the fruit of your Spirit, so that we may walk in joyful obedience, share your love by word and deed, and see Christ honoured in every community as Lord and Saviour,

Amen.



He's ba-ack...

As hordes of Santas settle into the nation's shopping centres and imagination, **DAVID MCINTYRE** asks a range of Sydney Anglicans how they deal with an increasingly red and white Christmas.

IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR. THE SHOPPING CENTRES HAVE PINE TREES, STARS AND TINSEL

intermingled with fake snow. The music has changed to carols and cheesy Christmas songs and there is a greater than usual urgency at every shop to sell: toys, clothes, perfume, gismos, doodahs, food and drink... it all has to go!

As you walk along, suddenly you realise you're approaching *him*. Surrounded by a workshop or European winter scene, with photographer and young smiling attendants in tow, Santa Claus sits in a large chair smiling at the young children who want their photo taken with him.

For some, it's a lovely reminder of the season and possibly happy memories of time spent with parents or grandparents. For others, it sends a chill down the spine.

It creates dilemmas for Christian parents – and if it doesn't, maybe it should. Christmas, the Christ Mass, is now dominated by a secular character (see breakout) – who may embody some of the attitudes we want encouraged at Christmas but certainly not all. He is now a central part of the interaction between adults and children at Christmas time, with the standard question to kids being, "What did Santa bring you?"

And he is everywhere, used for marketing all manner of products, end-of-year work events and charity drives. He is unavoidable...

DISTRACTION

So what might the approach be for Christian parents – and all those in the broader church family who interact with children – on the question of Santa Claus, as we all seek to teach children the much more important and true Christmas story that God himself came to live with us as a human being?

Some Christian parents, like Bronwyn and Philip Edney, take the view that no Santa at home is the best policy.

"Santa is a massive distraction from Jesus," Bronwyn Edney says. "I think we ought to avoid Santa and have nothing to do with him. Our world is shouting 'Santa' so loudly – Jesus needs some air play."

The main reason for the Edneys' decision is that Santa and the secular aspects of Christmas have ballooned in size over the years, while Jesus and the Christian message at Christmas have shrunk.

Edney says that when she was at school, Christmas was still mostly about Jesus with a little bit of Santa. When her first child, now 16, went to preschool, it was mostly Santa with a little bit of Jesus. By the time her youngest child went to preschool a decade later, it was all Santa with no Jesus.

The Rev Dr Bill Salier, the outgoing vice-principal at Moore College, describes Santa as part of the furniture of Christmas. He even worked as a Santa Claus at a department store in his younger days, which he admits may not have been the most discerning choice.

However, he says, "The unhelpfulness is the distraction. It misses the whole point of focusing on the incarnation" – a particular problem for smaller children, who can get fiction and reality mixed up.

Salier points out there is plenty of wonder in the story of the incarnation and, ironically, the secular world realises this because nativity scenes are still featured in the shops. "We shouldn't criticise or begrudge that because it is an opportunity for conversation," he says.

SANTA – a HISTORY

The modern Santa Claus is the invention of the Coca-Cola Company, even if the maker of the ubiquitous brown liquid claims some credit for popularising the bearded character. Santa was established sometime in the mid- to late 19th century in the US as the most recent combination of various gift-giving figures that have been popular down the ages.

While Santa might seem to draw attention away from Jesus at Christmas he is an unambiguously non-religious figure, whereas St Nicholas is venerated as an intercessor in Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches.

Little is known of the original St Nicholas except that he was born in Lycia, in modern-day Turkey, in about 280AD and lost his parents at an early age. He reportedly used his inheritance to help the poor and sick, became bishop of Myra (now Demre) and may also have been present at the Council of Nicea.

He was a very popular saint throughout Europe, becoming as ubiquitous in the Middle Ages as Santa Claus is today.

He came to be known as St Nicholas the Wonderworker because of the many miracles attributed to him and is thought to have died on December 6 – now his feast day in the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches. Among the groups for whom he is the patron saint are sailors, children, repentant thieves and pawnbrokers. And while we may complain of Santa Claus's association with marketing, that is nothing new. St Nicholas is also the patron saint of merchants!

The sailing connection meant he was very popular in Holland, where he came to be known as Sinterklaas. Despite being frowned upon by the Reformed Church and government in the north he continued to be celebrated and so, even now, up to a third of Dutch people give gifts on December 6.

Yet Sinterklaas was already changing in Holland before he travelled to the US. Prior to the Christianisation of northern Europe there were Germanic tales of the Norse god Odin, who was said to have a long white beard and would ride his horse through the night sky in mid-winter. This got wound up in the popular tales of St Nicholas so that the figure who came to ride through the streets in Holland is a man in bishop's red garb with a long white beard on a horse.



In England, Father Christmas was a longstanding figure representing merriment and good cheer. During the Reformation the popular St Nicholas' Day was discarded but Father Christmas still remained, appearing as the Ghost of Christmas Present in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (left) and in C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

Dutch immigrants probably took Sinterklaas with them to New York while English immigrants took Father Christmas. At some stage these two – and perhaps other Christmas figures – merged to become Santa Claus, a name used in a New York newspaper as early as 1773.

But it's likely the poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas" (now known as "The Night Before Christmas"), that appeared in a US paper in 1823, established much of the current mythology – including the sleigh pulled by a bagful of toys and coming down through the chimney with a bagful of toys.

Later in the 19th century, cartoonist Thomas Nast drew a series of pictures depicting Santa Claus with much of the costume we now associate with him – and with an address at the North Pole.

By the start of the 20th century Santa was appearing on magazine covers in the form we are still familiar with more than 100 years later: a rotund elderly man with a long white beard dressed in a red fur-lined cap, coat and boots.

Coca-Cola first used Santa in its advertising campaigns in the 1920s.



THE EDNEYS' decision is not the only way for Christians to deal with Santa – something which Bronwyn Edney happily acknowledges.

Beth Braga, married to the rector at Summer Hill the Rev Chris Braga, says their family does play the Santa game and they have not actively told the kids that he's not real.

"But the way we talk about Jesus is not the same as the way we talk about Santa," she says. "Whenever we talk about Jesus, he's someone in dress-ups."

"When ever they seek out nativity displays in shopping centres, whereas they won't go out of their way to find Santa. At home, Santa gives the children socks and undies and a book, whereas mum and dad give them the main presents.

"Santa is very practical," Braga says. "We try to say, 'I can't be Santa until you go to bed' or 'Dad can't be Santa until he comes home'." The main thing, however, is to focus on Jesus. "At the end of the day, we talk about it being Jesus' birthday."

The Rev Rick Smith, rector at Naremburn-Cammeray Anglican Churches, points out that kids will make much of the things their parents make much of.

"My thoughts have always been that in the context of a parent's responsibility to raise their children to know and love the Lord, Santa is just an insignificant nothing really," he says.

Smith and his wife Michelle never felt they needed to dispel the myth about Santa. "Christmas was just a great time to celebrate and, while we kept Jesus central, we were happy to leave it at that," he says. The more important question for him is whether parents are disciplining their children to love Jesus – something that doesn't seem to happen enough.

Bill Salier agrees that the broader question of discipleship is more important. "It's the idea from Deuteronomy that you should speak to your children as you're walking through the field (Deut 6:7)," he says. "Focusing on Santa misses the point. Everything should be a topic of conversation to point kids to God."

For Bronwyn and Philip Edney, the desire to teach the children the way they wanted them to go led them to avoid Santa at home, as they felt they had to counter Santa's cultural dominance.

Instead, the Edneys have sought to establish an alternate family tradition to enjoy a Christmas which does focus on Christ. They have an advent calendar each year, set up a Christmas tree together on December 1 and read the Bible each night leading up to Christmas. They also try to get to the street parties in the neighbourhood and give presents to neighbours, including Christmas tracts published by Matthias Media. And they put one of the children's presents at the end of their beds. "Not from Santa, from us," Bronwyn Edney says.

Salier points out that there is something very personal about the nature of gift giving, including the thought that goes into the decision, and the relationship of the giver and receiver, that is not really reflected if Santa is the gift giver.

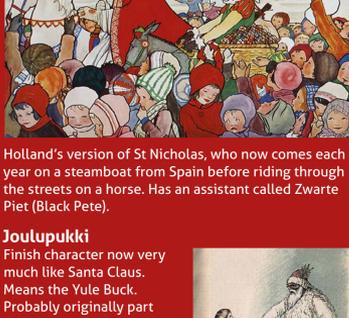
He says this became important as he spoke to his own non-Christian parents, who wanted to give his children presents from Santa. "If you do that, please give one from you," Salier said to his parents.

CHRISTMAS CHARACTERS

St Nicholas

Bishop in the Greek-speaking early church; now a popular saint in many European countries.

Sinterklass



Holland's version of St Nicholas, who now comes each year on a steamboat from Spain before riding through the streets on a horse. Has an assistant called Zwarte Piet (Black Pete).

Joulupukki

Finish character now very much like Santa Claus. Means the Yule Buck.

Probably originally part of the pagan tradition associated with Odin or Thor and the winter hunt. Instead of coming down the chimney, he knocks on the door on Christmas Eve, then comes in asking "Are there well-behaved children here?"



Krampus



An assistant or companion to St Nicholas in many parts of central Europe. A mean elf or demon figure, he is the one who punishes bad children. He has made a bit of a comeback in recent times.

Christindl/Christkind

As Martin Luther sought to focus people's attention on Jesus at Christmas rather than St Nicholas, he promulgated the Christkind as the gift giver.

A young sprite-like child, he brings presents at night and the children never see him. In some parts of Europe and the US, the character changed into a female angel.

The Americanised pronunciation, Kris Kringle, has ended up becoming another name for Santa Claus or, in Australia, the name of the tradition of one person bringing one present for someone else in a group.



Father Christmas

English personification of Christmas. Was associated with merriment, drinking and feasting. Appeared in several tracts for and against Christmas during and after Cromwell's rule in the 17th century.



Mikulás

A version of St Nicholas in Hungary and some Slavic countries. Leaves sweets for good children.

La Befana

Italian tradition of an old woman who gives children presents on Epiphany Eve (January 5).



Three Wise Men (Los Reyes Magos)

In many parts of the Spanish-speaking world it is Epiphany (sometimes called Three Kings Day) that's the traditional day for gift-giving. Gifts are brought by the Magi mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew.

Children leave their shoes at the door (and sometimes some treats for the Magi's camels and Balthasar's donkey) for the Three Wise Men to fill with presents.

Jólásveinar (The Yule Lads)



Originally scary winter visitors, now a welcome part of Icelandic tradition. The 13 Jólásveinar arrive one by one to the populated parts of Iceland from the island's interior. Children leave their shoes by the door every night. A different "lad" places small gifts inside them over the 13 days before Christmas.

WHITE NOISE

As parents discipline their children there is, of course, much more than Santa that the world associates with Christmas that may get in the way.

The Rev Neil Atwood, the executive assistant to Bishop Ivan Lee, says Santa is just another thing that muddies the message of Christmas, especially for children.

"Why are you making it harder for them to get their heads around what Christmas is about?" he asks. "We make it making it harder with the overeating and overspending."

Santa Claus is associated with the consumerism of our era, having featured prominently in advertising for well over a century (even bringing about the myth that Coca-Cola invented the modern Santa Claus).

"In order to have a secular holiday, you need a story," reasons the rector of Penrith, the Rev Tom Harricks.

Thus, Santa Claus is seen in department stores and shopping centres. He is even an arbiter of good and evil according to the song "Santa Claus is Coming to Town", because he "knows if you've been bad or good".

Annemarie Rivers, the children's worker at St Matthew's, Ashbury, doesn't like the fact that such a popular Christmas figure is works-based when Jesus, the real Christmas focus, is about grace. She and her husband Joel encourage their kids to focus on the coming of Jesus rather than refuting other stories that are part of the secular Christmas tradition.

And this is another sticking point. In addition to what we focus on as Christian families at Christmas comes the question of whether we are modelling truth-telling to our children. Edney says her husband Philip remembers "being quite shocked when he realised that his parents had been lying to him".

If we know Santa is not real, then should we tell our children that he is? This can be especially hard when grandparents and other family members who feel differently about Christmas – as some of Bronwyn Edney's family members did. However, she says they eventually came round when they saw that her kids were enjoying Christmas anyway. "We did point out that the joy of Christmas had more to do with Jesus than Santa," she says.

At the same time, however, she and her husband Philip needed to teach their kids how to interact with others about Santa.

"We've explained that Santa is a game that other people play and take it very seriously," she says. "Other parents will be very upset if you tell other kids that Santa doesn't exist."

Here, too, is an opportunity to disciple and model Christian living, according to Annemarie Rivers. "Christmas provides a good opportunity to talk with other non-Christian parents about what kids are told about Christmas," she says. "It is a good opportunity to model to our kids how a gentle and kind conversation about differing beliefs might look."

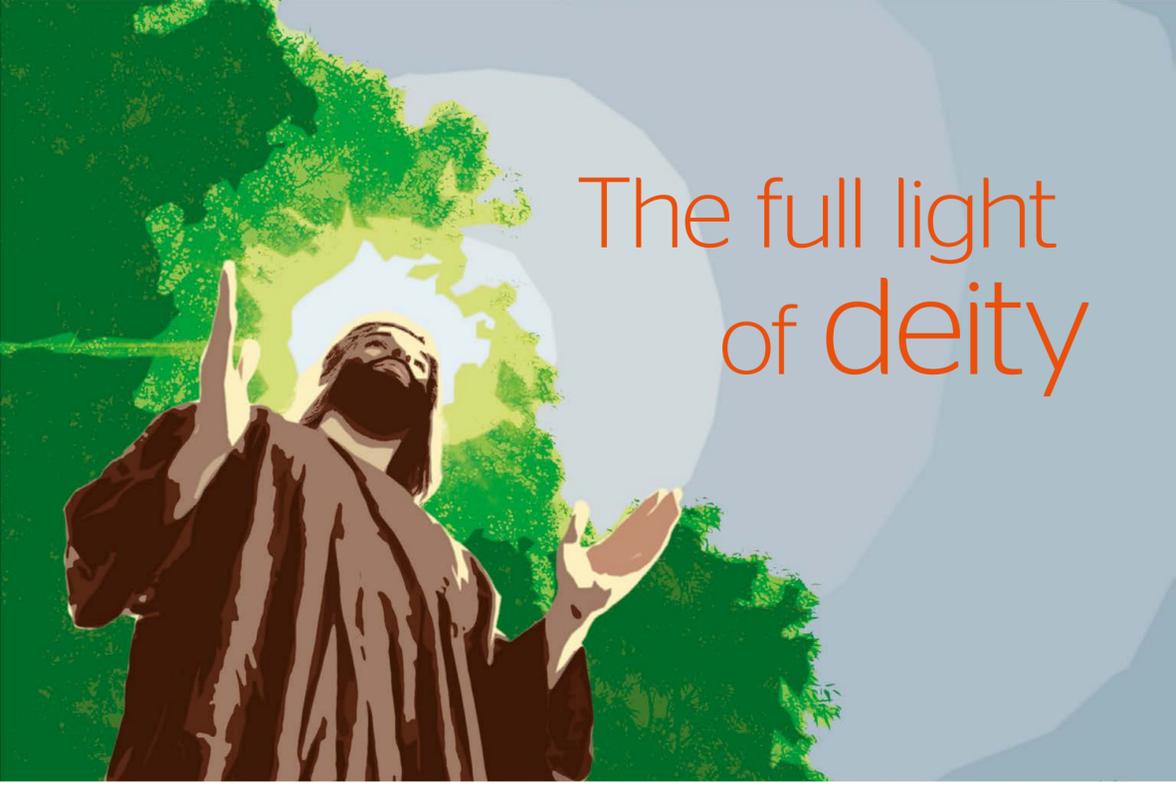
It is also a good opportunity to share with other parents what we believe about Jesus, she says. "We encourage the kids to tell others what they think Christmas is about, rather than the wrong things other people believe."

Bill Salier agrees that Christmas is a great opportunity to speak of the Jesus who is celebrated. "It's a focused opportunity to give an account for the hope we have," he says. "Let's talk about what we see as the foreground."

Adds Bronwyn Edney: "God, who is rich, became poor for our sake. That's what Christmas is all about."



Have yourself a woolly little Christmas: the Salier backyard in 2011. Bill Salier's daughter Talitha decided to pretty up a dying tree for an art project. Salier then saw wooden reindeer and star decorations at a market raising money for sustainability projects overseas – and decided to buy them to turn the art project into an "interesting" Christmas tree. "It was a colourful Christmas at our place that year," he says.



The full light of deity

We talk – and sing – all the time in Christian circles about deity of Jesus, but what do scholars say about it, asks **PHILIP H. KERN**.

THE DEITY OF CHRIST IS AFFIRMED IN THE CREEDS, DISTORTED BY CULTS, DENIED BY much of scholarship, mocked by society at large, opposed by other religions and increasingly questioned in the church. But what does the Bible say? In what follows I'll attempt to answer two questions. The first is, why doesn't the Bible just come out and say, "Jesus is God"? The second is to ask, in the absence of such an affirmation, whether we can mount a credible argument for the deity of Jesus.

It is frequently asserted that the Bible doesn't say – in so many words – that Jesus is God. For some it then follows that the Bible doesn't *affirm* that Jesus is God. So why doesn't it just state this, with a single argument-settling sentence? At a glance, that sentence seems straightforward enough to be coherent and not particularly dangerous. But once we acknowledge what people throughout history have done with the words of the Bible, we might begin to see some of the challenges of the statement "Jesus is God".

Consider the sentence "Tony Abbott is the Prime Minister". That could also be expressed as "The Prime Minister is Tony Abbott". They are interchangeable because "Tony Abbott" is a singularity which is completely and totally represented by the words "Tony Abbott". Furthermore, "Prime Minister" is a singularity, a category that is – at present and in Australia – fulfilled by Tony Abbott.

The sentence "A book is paper" is true because the thing being talked about (a book) consists of paper. But it is not true to say "paper is a book". Some things represent simple, undifferentiated categories and others are more complex. I can have paper that is in no way associated with books. In that sense book and paper are not convertible, and the verb "is" becomes more complicated. In the sentence about the Prime Minister, "is" functions like an equals sign. In the second, it cannot function this way because paper does not equal a book.

This distinction needs to be applied to the person of Jesus. While it is mostly proper to say Jesus is God, it is problematic to say God is Jesus. We know God does not equal Jesus since the former consists of three persons. To say God is Jesus fails to account for the Father and the Spirit.

This language problem was faced by New Testament writers. How could they, in a strictly and even dangerously monotheistic environment, speak of the deity of Christ without conflating him with the other members of the Trinity? Some writers go to great lengths to define the relationship between Jesus and the Father. For example, John 5 shows Jesus affirming his deity: he is the source of life and will in the end be the judge of life – two activities which get to the essence of what the eternal God does. But this chapter is also careful to insist Jesus is not a separate deity; he acts in obedient submission to his Father, who has granted to him the prerogatives of life and judgment. Thus when Jesus was confronted with the charge of making himself out to be God, he replied by saying yes, but not as a separate and second deity. He is united with the Father in his person and actions.

So, like Jesus himself, the New Testament writers had good reason to be cautious and, in their caution, they avoided the simplistic formula "Jesus is God", even as they endorsed his deity. Because this assumes an answer to our second question, the best option is to turn to the New Testament to ask what it says in support of the deity of Jesus Christ. But since the New Testament has rather a lot to say about Jesus, it might be most efficient to consider four scholars who have attempted to work through the issues and concluded in favour of Jesus' deity.

In recent years Christology has become a hot topic in academic circles, not least because of the contribution of evangelicals in the UK. This isn't intended to be a review of books, or even an invitation to read them – some of the material is quite technical. It is offered as an affirmation of the firm basis upon which rests our shared faith in Jesus, the Son of God and Saviour of the world.

Larry Hurtado, Emeritus Professor at the University of Edinburgh, has approached the question from a historical rather than doctrinal angle in the hope that historical discussion can generate dialogue where doctrine sometimes cuts it off. In this he has succeeded: a subsequent volume represents lectures that he delivered at Ben-Gurion University in Israel.

His position is that some things are historically verifiable, including what he refers to as 'early Christian devotional practices'. His argument is, first, that despite all its diversity, the strands of first-century Judaism from which earliest Christianity emerged were monotheistic. Second, it is historically indisputable that these early Christians worshipped Jesus, prayed to him and sang songs to him. Such devotional activities are found throughout the New Testament and are also mentioned in several significant non-biblical sources from Jewish and Roman authors.

In addition to being dispersed across geographical and cultural lines, they are also remarkably early. Hurtado observes that by the Pauline epistles – some written barely more than a decade after the resurrection – Paul can assume without defence or explanation that Jesus ought to be worshipped. Indeed Hurtado suggests that this activity was current within months of the passion of Christ and was probably the reason Paul persecuted the church before his conversion.

In the end, Hurtado's historical argument cannot prove Jesus' deity but it provides firm evidence that the earliest church, arising from those who knew him, affirmed it.

Richard Bauckham, former Professor of New Testament at St Andrew's University in Scotland and now scholar-in-residence at Cambridge, continues to work on the New Testament's view of Jesus. His main argument overlaps at points with Hurtado's but ultimately moves in a different direction. He observes that an ancient Jew doesn't ask *What* is God? This is a later, more philosophical question that doesn't receive much attention in the Scriptures. The biblical question is instead about identity: *Who* is God? The answer comes back, God is the one who created the world, exercises sovereign rule, will judge humanity in the end etc. All cultures had their own god or gods. The Bible claims that there is only one, that his name is YHWH (often rendered as "the Lord") and that he is present and active on behalf of his people.

So how can we accept Jesus is God? Bauckham demonstrates that the New Testament answers the question of divine identity with the person of Jesus. It is Jesus who creates, rules, redeems and will judge in the end. It is he who bears the name "the Lord". And it is he who receives the worship of the people of God. If the question is asked, *Who* is God?, the New Testament answer is that Jesus participates in the divine identity.

Simon Gathercole teaches New Testament at Cambridge University. In *The Pre-Existent Son* he discusses the view of Jesus presented by Matthew, Mark and Luke. While he offers a number of useful insights into, for example, the titles used of Jesus, his greater contribution is an exploration of the "I have come" statements in the gospels. He argues that "I have come", coupled with an expression of purpose – such as "to seek and to save the lost" – provides a window into the overall agenda of Jesus' first advent. The value of this line of thought is that "I have come", plus purpose, implies coming *from* somewhere. Some reduce this to the idea that Jesus has come from Nazareth. But this overlooks the cosmic scope of his statements – e.g. "I have come to cast fire onto the earth" (Luke 12:49); "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). Gathercole argues that Jesus' "coming" is from heaven itself, and is an expression of his heavenly identity. This, in short, suggests pre-existence and deity.

The most recent of our scholars is Christopher Tilling, who in 2012 published his PhD thesis under the title *Paul's Divine Christology*. This volume, like Gathercole's, focuses on only part of the New Testament, in this case the writings of Paul. Like Bauckham, Tilling argues that the Bible generates categories that are filled by the person of Jesus. The unique contribution of Tilling is to develop Paul's talk of Jesus as a relational category. That is to say, one can explore how the Old Testament speaks of Israel's relationship with God and then find similar statements in the New Testament concerning Jesus. For example, one can discuss all of life as regulated by the relational words "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind". When Paul speaks of his own apostolic motivations he casts them in the same terms of love and loyalty to the Lord. This Lord in context repeatedly turns out to be Jesus.

Tilling's discussion of 1 Cor 16:22 can serve as a useful illustration. Most Christological discussions of this verse tease out the meaning of the Aramaic *maranatha*. Tilling, however, explores the context, which allows him to develop what it means to address Jesus as Lord and as the object of the mini-prayer, to invoke his name this way in Corinth (given that Jesus lived and died in Palestine), to invite believers to communicate with the risen Lord Jesus, to speak of his coming etc.

Paul has assigned language and concepts from one who, as God of the Old Testament, is expected to "arrive" and who will act as judge and vindicator of his people on the day of the Lord (which in 1 Cor 1:8 has become the "day of our Lord Jesus Christ!"), to the person of Jesus, who is to be loved – so that a lack of love for him is grounds for "anathema". That is, the Old Testament says to love the Lord with all your heart, soul and mind, and Paul pronounces a curse on those who don't love the Lord – now seen to be Jesus. And this he says as Paul appeals to him to come: *maranatha*. This Lord, this Jesus, is – for Paul – to be loved. And he is the one who determines eternity based on one's response to him. Jesus is none other than the Lord whose return Paul eagerly awaits.

From here the conclusion is simple: Jesus is more than an exalted human being. The Christian relates to him as one capable of hearing prayers from around the globe, as judge whose coming is "the day of the Lord", as the one who holds eternal destinies in his hand, and as one concerning whom words like "love" have fundamental significance. Who can this be other than the God disclosed in Scripture?

These four scholars can contribute to our understanding of Jesus as divine. They offer insightful arguments that overlap at various points – inevitably, perhaps, since they are exploring much of the same biblical material and reading with similar emphases. But they aren't presented here as four links in a chain. Instead, they are four braids in a strong cable and can help us affirm the gospel we proclaim. So even though the New Testament doesn't use the words "Jesus is God", we can be confident it asserts his deity throughout. This matters, not because we are saved by assent to the notion but because we are saved by Jesus the divine Son.

☪

For those who would like to read further

Bauckham, Richard.

Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity.

Gathercole, Simon J.

The Pre-existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Hurtado, Larry W.

Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity.

Tilling, Chris.

Paul's Divine Christology.

Joy reborn

Reflecting on the spiritual insights of carols with a new Christian has restored the joy of Christmas, writes **ROBYN POWELL**.

ABOUT FOUR YEARS AGO CHRISTMAS AND I HAD A NASTY BREAK-UP. AFTER A lifetime of devotion, I'd had enough. It was all too much, so I walked away. Like most break-ups, I (more-or-less) know what caused it. The death of a friend close to Christmas, leaving the church which had been home for 30 years, changing jobs and losing my identity as "The Church Christmas Person", yada, yada, yada... you don't want to know. It was complicated.

I tried not to let anyone know the break-up had occurred. I pretended everything was okay. I bought a bigger tree and new strings of fairy lights. I made extra puddings, and garlanded everything with green plastic pine, but it was no use. The feeling, the comfort, the joy disappeared, and I thought those things had gone forever.

But God has had the last laugh and the Christmas ice that encased my heart (I know, I know... we're in Australia and we don't have Christmas ice, but I'm trying to be poetic here, so *give me a break!*) has started to melt. You see I made a new friend recently... let's call him Neville the Newbie. Though he is now in his late twenties, this year will be the first Christmas he has ever celebrated.

He has never popped a Christmas cracker. He has never woken up at 3am to unpack a Christmas stocking. He has never fought his way through the crowds at the shops. He has never eaten Christmas pudding with custard and cream and ice-cream.

I can almost cope with all of those things but there is one thing I just can't wrap my head around: he has never sung a Christmas carol.

So when someone asked me to explain Christmas to him, I knew that the very best way (aside from insisting that he read the opening chapters of Matthew and Luke, of course) was to tell him about Christmas carols.

The trouble with Christmas carols is that they are so familiar to those of us who have been singing them for years that we completely forget what deep spiritual insight many of the great ones provide.

But where to start? I don't want to overwhelm Nev, so maybe we can just talk about three things Christmas carols teach us:

1. GOD BECAME MAN

We are so used to the image of the baby in the manger that we quickly forget that baby was God himself. The beautiful (and criminally under-used!) carol "Thou Who Wast Rich" tells us so well what this actually means.

*Thou who wast rich beyond all splendour,
All for love's sake becamest poor;
Thrones for a manger didst surrender,
Sapphire-paved courts for stable floor.
Thou who wast rich beyond all splendour,
All for love's sake becamest poor.*

When the writer of this hymn said Jesus became poor, I don't think he was speaking in monetary terms. Jesus gave up his perfect relationship with his Father in a perfect place to spend time on earth – a child with a tummy ache, a teenager with skin problems, a hard-working adult, a man whose muscles must have become tired from walking, surrounded by those who would not heed what he said or notice what he did. And why did he do it?

God became man because...

2. IT WAS THE ONLY WAY TO REALLY DEAL WITH SIN.

Jesus' birth was just a beginning... we know that. But did you know that Christmas carols tell us all about how it ended as well?

I know, Nev, that you have been told the Bible doesn't tell us to celebrate the birth of Jesus. But a birth is always a reason for celebration because it marks a beginning and, in the case of Jesus, it was the beginning of his dealing with our sin, for us. It really is a reason to celebrate. In fact, it is joy... to the world!

*No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make his blessings flow
Far as the curse is found.*

That carol takes us all the way back to Adam and Eve in the garden, and the entrance of sin into the world. And here's the weird thing, Nev. Even then, God had Jesus' birth, death and resurrection all planned, just to sort sin out once and for all.

So, Nev, Jesus dealt with sin so that...

3. WE COULD BE SAVED.

It's a funny word, "saved". Saved from what? Whenever I hear that word, I remember a terrifying moment some years ago when one of my children was caught in a rip. One moment, she was playing in knee-deep water. Just seconds later, she was being carried out to sea. A total stranger, who was walking along the beach, swiftly, silently and without any fuss, raced into the water, swam to her and carried her out. She didn't have to do anything.

Jesus is a bit like that, Nev. We stand on the brink of a precipice, not knowing that we could be about to step into oblivion, when Jesus steps in and scoops us up.

The Rev Phillips Brooks knew all about that, and he wrote it into a carol in 1868 after a visit to Palestine, when he saw the little town of Bethlehem:

*No ear may hear his coming
But in this world of sin
Where meek souls will receive him still
The dear Christ enters in*

You notice, Nev, that we don't have to do anything to earn this dealing with sin – just let Jesus in, to carry us to safety, just as that unknown saviour of my daughter did all those years ago. And as the unknown writer of "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen" tells us:

*Remember Christ our Saviour
Was born on Christmas day
To save us all from Satan's power
When we were gone astray...*

We can be happy now, says the hymn writer, now that Satan's power to deceive us and accuse us of our unworthiness is gone for good. We can be happy now that we are saved from the consequences of our sin, our rebellion against God. That's a great thing to be saved from! And that's a great reason to celebrate, isn't it?

And there's just one other *tiny* little thing I want to mention, Nev. Do you notice how often the word "love" turns up in carols?

*... all for love's sake becamest poor...
Thou who art love, beyond all telling...
... the angels keep their watch of wondering love...
... and wonders of his love...*

And of course, perhaps the greatest lines about love were born that Christmas Eve when the organ was broken in the little Austrian church, when Franz Gruber and Joseph Mohr had to improvise a carol for guitar only:

*Silent night, holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light.
Radiant beams from thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus Lord, at thy birth
Jesus Lord, at thy birth*

God did it all because he loves you, Nev. He loves you so much he sent his Son to die for you. And this Christmas, for the first time ever, you can celebrate the great physical expression of that love...the sign that the shepherds were told to look for... the baby in the manger, in the little town of Bethlehem so long ago.

I hope that Neville the Newbie will spend Christmas with us this year.

I hope he loves my Christmas pudding. I hope I can think of a suitable present to put into a red felt stocking for him. I hope he is happy to sit with us, as we weep our way through *It's A Wonderful Life* for the 127th time.

But more than anything, I hope he is with us on Christmas morning at St Andrew's Cathedral in Sydney as the organ roars, and the brass swells, and hundreds of voices join together to remind us all:

*Hail the heav'n born Prince of Peace
Hail the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings
Ris'n with healing in his wings.
Mild, he lays his glory by
Born than man no more may die
Born to raise the sons of earth
Born to give them second birth
Hark! The herald angels sing
"Glory to the newborn King!"*

And then, I hope I am not such a blubbing mess that I can't turn to him and say, "Well, that's it Nev. That's what Christmas is all about".

MILITARY FUNERAL FOR "ELDER STATESMAN"

With the coffin borne on a gun carriage, a packed St Andrew's Cathedral farewelled Bishop Ken Short in late October.

Bishop Short, described by Archbishop Davies as an "elder statesman" of the Sydney Diocese, died on October 19 after suffering a stroke.

Family as well as friends and colleagues from his varied ministry as CMS missionary in Africa, through parish ministry at Vaucluse and as Dean of Sydney, as well as his roles as Bishop of Wollongong and Parramatta, gathered in St Andrew's Cathedral. But it was his service as a soldier during the occupation of Japan and as first Bishop of the Defence Force which meant the service proceeded with full military honours.

An honour guard lined the Bathurst Street steps as the coffin was taken into the Cathedral. The procession was watched by his widow Gloria and family as well as Archbishop Davies, former Archbishop Harry Goodhew and Canon David Short, Bishop Short's son. His son-in-law the Rev Simon Manchester delivered the eulogy and his daughters Kathy and Marion read Bible passages.

Mr Manchester spoke of the late bishop's varied roles.

"He had a gift for teaching the Bible simply and strongly," he said. "In his official capacities he travelled all over the world. In Christ's service he was able to visit about 30 countries. He would faithfully explain and apply Scripture with wonderful illustrations and he was invited to speak for his skill and ability. Only heaven will reveal how many people were transformed from that wonderful ministry."

Canon David Short preached the sermon on the picture Revelation 21 paints of heaven, at times using his father's notes on the same passage.

"Heaven is not just a very long church service, no matter how good it is," Canon Short said. "All that's best in creation gravitates there. It's a place of art and culture; nothing of value will be lost. All the threads of goodness that God has woven into our world – not one thread will be missing."



CONFIRMATION CELEBRATION AT WEST RYDE

West Ryde Anglican Church recently held a confirmation for three youth at the church, the first such service in seven years.

The rector at West Ryde, the Rev Mal York, says this confirmation represents a new phase in the youth and children's ministry of the church.

"I've been here now for five years as minister and when I arrived there was really no one in that age group, or only a handful, who've mostly moved on to other youth groups or are no longer in church at all," he says. "Now we have about 60-80 kids on a Sunday and there are more involved in our other ministries. We're hoping this is just the beginning of a tsunami of confirmations."

The confirmation service saw church members from other services attend, which Mr York says created an "all-together feel" at the event. The confirmation was also the first visit of the new Bishop of the Northern Region, the Rt Rev Chris Edwards, to the church.

The event showed young people at the church some of what it means to publicly profess faith in Christ.

"I think they were a little apprehensive about confirmation," Mr York says. "Initially, they didn't really know what it meant or what it was, but now we've had all the youth group kids see it in action, they've seen these guys get up with the support of the whole church and say they want to follow Jesus and make promises about what they're going to do. I'm hoping that will be a good thing for the rest of the youth to see and experience."

Mr York says many of the changes in youth ministry at West Ryde have come about because of increasing connections with the local community, and particularly the local schools, much of which has been led by the church's assistant minister, the Rev Donny Kwan. Mr Kwan has run weekly pancake breakfasts at the local Marsden High School, which has created ongoing connections with school students.

"I think having that kind of presence in the wider community has seen a lot of those kids flow into our ministries here," Mr York says. "The youth group itself is pretty standard, with a focus on teaching the Bible on a Friday evening. I think we've had about three or four kids become believers in the last year or so."



The Bishop of the Northern Region, Chris Edwards (centre left) with the three confirmees after the service.



Bishop Edwards, assistant minister Donny Kwan (second from right), with the confirmees and other youth group members who came in support.

Moses the hero

JUDY ADAMSON

Exodus: Gods and Kings

Rated M

MINING THE BIBLE FOR STORIES HAS ALWAYS BEEN A FRUITFUL EXERCISE for filmmakers, although in more recent times the results haven't been so encouraging for Christians.

With the core stories of our faith reimagined and reinvented to the extent that some are almost unrecognisable (look what happened to Noah!), it's easy to be sceptical when a new Bible-inspired Hollywood blockbuster appears – especially when it's riding on the coat-tails of one of the most important stories of all: the saving of God's people from slavery and their departure from Egypt.

However, director Ridley Scott was so keen to get his film just right that only 40 minutes of the completed work (a little less than a third) was available to watch before *Southern Cross* went to press. So while it's not possible to be sure how accurate the entire film is in its representation of the Exodus story, a number of things are abundantly clear.

First, Scott and his writers have created a visually stunning representation of Egypt at the height of its power. It is detailed and sumptuous, with outdoor scenes on a massive scale. Visual effects are pretty impressive, and the makers have really gone to town on sequences such as the plagues and the clash at the Red Sea.

From the scenes viewed it also seems to stay fairly solidly with the biblical story. Unlike the sparse tale of Noah there is – from a filmmaker's perspective – an awful lot of dramatic material in the Bible about Moses' upbringing, banishment, return and Israel's exodus, so that no doubt helps.

We see Moses drawn from the river and brought up in Pharaoh's household, and his sister Miriam does help in this. His true heritage is eventually revealed, he does go into exile to the house of Jethro and marry his daughter, and there is certainly a burning bush, plagues and the salvation of the Israelites.

What isn't entirely clear is how much of this is attributed to God and how much is simply the charismatic efforts of Moses or the vague fulfilment of a prophecy about one born to lead.

At one tantalising point Moses (a strong and poised performance from Christian Bale) explains to young pharaoh Rameses (Joel Edgerton) that he has been told by God to rescue the Israelites. Unsurprisingly the response is, "Which God?" Sadly Moses does seem to be reasoning with Rameses using a pre-united workplace argument – asking Pharaoh to pay and treat the Israelites properly or let them go. Forget God, dude, this is social justice!

We all know what the answer to that will be: the boys who were brought up as brothers are now enemies and we know (more or less) how things pan out from there. I think there may be some surprises at the Red Sea, but all will be revealed once the completed film is in cinemas.

There is certainly an epic air about *Exodus: Gods and Kings* and the cast is packed with big names – although some, from what I saw, won't have that much to do.

It'd be a miracle if the film didn't ignore most of what makes the story crucial for a Christian audience, namely, the central role of God in all that happens. It's not clear whether there will be a Passover or how it will be explained, and given that Ridley Scott has described Moses' encounter with the Lord through the burning bush as "an experience" in the desert, we should be prepared for the Almighty to be more or less absent.

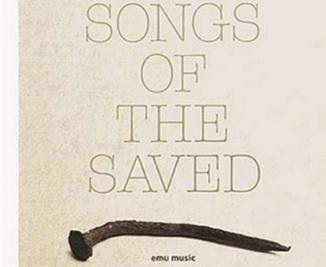
Yet I think *Exodus: Gods and Kings* will still have much to recommend it. It's not seeking to reinvent the biblical tale – although don't expect Christian Bale to raise his staff over the Red Sea like Charlton Heston in *The Ten Commandments* and exclaim, "Behold his mighty hand!"

It appears the makers are taking the story seriously, with strong performances and production values amid a big budget, big-deal epic. So that's a bonus. We may not be happy with all that we see but if the rest of the film follows in the same vein as the pieces I saw it will essentially be a pivotal story of our Bible told well by actors whose names alone are drawcards for the public.

So get your non-Christian friends and family in there and watch it alongside them. A quick conversation can direct the focus away from Christian Bale the charismatic hero and back where it belongs.

Come now and listen

SONGS OF THE SAVED, THE LATEST IN-HOUSE ALBUM FROM EMU, IS ONE OF THEIR stronger offerings in recent memory. This album hits a nice balance between God-honouring craft and creativity in production, and provides a good feel of the composition for the listener possibly considering using the songs in their own church.



While mostly middle-of-the-road pop-rock and with an acoustic sound, the album mixes things up sonically in a couple of places, most notably on the Mike Begbie and Greg Cooper track "Christ is Victor", which previously appeared on this year's Emu-distributed album *We Have Freedom*. The addition of some upbeat dance-synth stylings and Coldplay-esque guitar helps it stand out from the rest of the album. It won't be to everyone's taste but in my opinion this version is superior to the earlier one.

A couple of updated hymns ("All I Am" and "More of You and Less of Me") are also included, with the latter having an interesting lyrical theme and development worth singing and pondering as a lesson in both sanctification and lyrical craft.

However, the standout track on the album is the closer, penned by Nicky Chiswell and Greg Cooper. "Come Now and Pray" is itself a couple of years old and has been played at one or two conferences but frankly it deserves to be heard and played more widely. It is stunningly simple musically and structurally, and the soaring harmony of Cooper and Chiswell is the icing on the cake, making this a truly worthwhile commendation that's well within the resources and capabilities of virtually any church music team.

The main criticism of the album is a relatively minor one: the weakest parts of the album are still adequate, but may not prove enticing or distinctive enough to incorporate into existing church set lists or the mix of potential new songs music leaders are eternally having to consider. However, there are a few songs that push the envelope a little, musically or lyrically, and at least half the album is well worth considering for use in your local church. A strong album that compares well to their other more recent releases.

Nick Gilbert

Holiday Flicks

Paddington

Based on the much-loved Paddington Bear children's books.

A cute bear, voiced by Ben Whishaw (think Q in the latest Bond film), travels to England from the Peruvian jungle and is taken in by a London family after they find him at Paddington station. The usual chaos ensues but in a charmingly English way. Your younger kids will love it. (Dec 11)



Annie



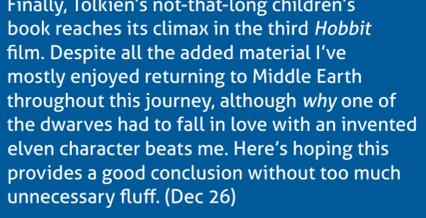
Just when orphan Annie was enshrined as a curly-topped redhead from the Great Depression we get this modern-day take on the musical, starring Quvenzhané Wallis as Annie and Jamie Foxx as billionaire Will Stacks (aka Daddy Warbucks), who's looking for an edge to give him a boost in his run for mayor. Cameron Diaz also does a white trash turn as Miss Hannigan – now a turn-a-buck foster mum. Not all the songs are in this 2014 New York reboot but the faves are still there. (Dec 18)

The Hobbit – Battle of the Five Armies



Finally, Tolkien's not-that-long children's book reaches its climax in the third *Hobbit* film. Despite all the added material I've mostly enjoyed returning to Middle Earth throughout this journey, although *why* one of the dwarves had to fall in love with an invented elven character beats me. Here's hoping this provides a good conclusion without too much unnecessary fluff. (Dec 26)

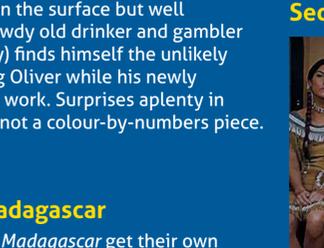
St Vincent



A bit of an oddity on the surface but well reviewed so far. Bawdy old drinker and gambler Vincent (Bill Murray) finds himself the unlikely babysitter of young Oliver while his newly divorced mum is at work. Surprises aplenty in what is apparently not a colour-by-numbers piece. (Dec 26)

Penguins of Madagascar

The penguins from *Madagascar* get their own movie as an unlikely team of secret agents out to stop a baddie by the name of Octavian Brine from creating something especially nasty from all the penguins in captivity. This could be a lot of fun for the younger kids, but the jokes and originality don't sound quite up to scratch so it may not be such a thrill for parents. (Jan 1)



Big Hero 6

Disney's animated 3D offering for the holidays.

Set in the future in "San Fransokyo", it's a superhero action adventure in which our main character, Hiro, is a young robotics genius who is thrown into a depression by the death of his brother. He then teams up with his brother's inflatable robot and a group of friends to save his (Hiro's) stolen inventions from being misused. (Dec 26)

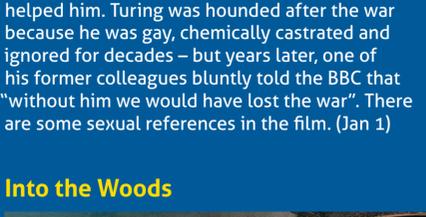


The Imitation Game



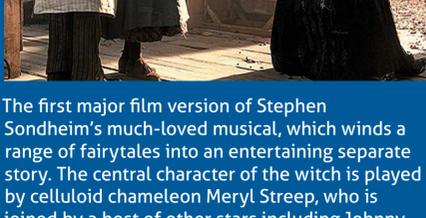
Tipped to provide Benedict Cumberbatch with his first Oscar nomination for an extraordinary portrayal of English mathematician Alan Turing, this World War II drama is causing a lot of pre-release chatter. Some elements will look familiar from the 2001 film *Enigma* but this is the real story of the real man who broke the "unbreakable" German code, and the team who helped him. Turing was hounded after the war because he was gay, chemically castrated and ignored for decades – but years later, one of his former colleagues bluntly told the BBC that "without him we would have lost the war". There are some sexual references in the film. (Jan 1)

Into the Woods



The first major film version of Stephen Sondheim's much-loved musical, which winds a range of fairytales into an entertaining separate story. The central character of the witch is played by celluloid chameleon Meryl Streep, who is joined by a host of other stars including Johnny Depp, Emily Blunt and Anna Kendrick. (Jan 8)

Night at the Museum: Secret of the Tomb



Now regarded as the last of a "trilogy", this isn't likely to be as funny the third time around. However, you will get to see Robin Williams in one of his final films, Ben Stiller and Owen Wilson reprising their roles, plus a host of other big names jumping in for the fun of it such as Ben Kingsley, Steve Coogan and Ricky Gervais. Aussie Rebel Wilson also appears as a (no doubt) sassy-mouthed security guard. (Dec 26)