Quest



Advent/Christmas 2026

Mount Maunganui

Anglican Parish

ANGLICAN PARISH OF
MT MAUNGANUI

Priestly Ponderings

Christmas in the Gospels - four gospels, three stories.

In our Bibles we have four gospels - the books which are ancient theological biographies of Jesus. In our church services we follow a three-yearly cycle of readings; these are contained in the Lectionary. The Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) is used by several other denominations including: Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Methodists as well as we Anglicans and our close cousins the Episcopalians. The RCL is heavily based on the Roman Catholic church so there are a lot of overlaps there also. The Eastern Orthodox church have their own lectionary and many if not most non-conformist churches don't use a lectionary at all. I like the lectionary and I think it's a good discipline - it means we read and preach from a wide range of Scripture and not just our favourite passages. Sometimes it means we have to wrestle together with difficult passages in Scripture.
For Sunday morning Eucharistic services there is a First reading which is almost always from the Old Testament, a Second reading from one of the epistles (letters) in the New Testament and a Gospel reading. There is a Psalm assigned for every Sunday also. The RCL also contains readings for morning prayer, evening prayer, and a daily Eucharistic service. It's available for download each year from our Anglican Provincial website www.anglican.org.nz in the "worship resources" section - feel free to try it one year and read through the Scriptures at home along with the RCL.

We have four Gospels and three years. The first three Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are very similar to each other and are referred to collectively as the Synoptic Gospels. John's gospel is very different in both style and content. In our RCL we emphasise a different Synoptic Gospel each year; as our church year begins on Advent Sunday, we will be finished with the year of Matthew and enter Year B, the year of Mark. John's Gospel is scattered

across all three years - we find it in Lent and Easter, on Christmas and the Major Feasts and chunk in the middle of Year B. (Saints days and special celebrations have their own readings and are not linked in to the three-yearly cycle.) The readings chosen may be linked with themes related to the church season within which they occur. During “Ordinary Time” we have a more consecutive reading of large chunks of the gospels.

I subtitled this four gospels, three stories because there are big differences in our Gospels. One major point of difference is that Mark has no account of the birth of Jesus, his Gospel begins at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. Neither does John have a “birth story” of Jesus. Instead John’s gospel begins with a prologue which is a meditation on the divine nature of Christ and his pre-existence before the birth. He skips the birth and childhood of Jesus and he too continues with the adult Jesus and his ministry. All four Gospels include something of John the Baptist’s prophetic ministry which preceded that of Jesus.

Matthew and Luke both have “infancy narratives” but they are both quite different - with different elements and from different viewpoints. Matthew focuses more on Joseph’s perspective and includes the visit of the Magi (likely a couple of years after Jesus’ birth) and the reaction of King Herod. Luke includes the birth of Jesus’ cousin, John the Baptist, and is told from Mary’s perspective. The visitors are not exotic foreigners but local shepherds and we have more detail about the birth and the circumstances around it. We also get a glimpse of Jesus’ childhood in Luke’s Gospel, with the stories of his presentation in the Temple and his childhood visit there at the age of twelve. The typical nativity scene in a Christmas card is not seen in Scripture, there is no account in the gospels of the Magi visiting at the same time as the shepherds. In our minds as well as in Christmas cards the stories get smooshed together and we can fail to appreciate the beauty and meaning of these different accounts.

Advent means coming and it's a season of waiting. It's not just a simple countdown to Christmas and retelling the birth of Christ, we also remember Jesus' promise to return and the readings in our Gospels through Advent and Christmas contain a mix of stories from all four Gospels as we relive again (along with Mary, Joseph, the prophets and the people of God) the waiting for the birth of Jesus while acknowledging that our anticipation is filled with longing for the return of Jesus.

Blessings

Sue+
Priest in-charge



Christmas Greetings from St Mary's Op Shop 🎄

What a wonderful year it has been at St Mary's Op Shop! Our little store continues to be a place full of laughter, teamwork, community spirit and, of course, plenty of treasures waiting to be discovered.

One of the highlights has been seeing how much everyone loves our new display and the bright, colourful touches around the shop. It's lovely to see people smile when they walk through the door, stop to admire the displays, find a special bargain or simply have a friendly chat. Sometimes, it's the smallest things that brighten someone's day, and I think that is one of the things that makes our Op Shop so special.

We have been incredibly grateful for the generous donations and ongoing support from our wonderful community throughout the year. Every donation, every purchase and every visit helps keep our little shop going. A huge thank-you must also go to our amazing volunteers, who give so generously of their time, energy, knowledge and good humour. They are the heart of our shop, and I feel very lucky to work alongside such a wonderful group of people. There is always plenty happening, and even on our busiest days, there is usually a laugh to be had!

As we head towards Christmas, it is also a time to remember that this season does not look the same for everyone. While many of us look forward to celebrations, presents, family gatherings and happy memories, Christmas can be a particularly difficult time for others. For some, it brings the sadness of missing loved ones who are no longer here. For others, the rising cost of living, loneliness, family struggles or simply trying to make ends meet can make what is often called the happiest time of the year feel overwhelming.

It is important to remember that behind every smile, there may be a story we know nothing about. A friendly greeting, a little patience, a listening ear or a simple act of kindness can mean more than we realise. We may not be able to solve every problem, but we can all do something to make life a little brighter for someone else.

This is one of the things I love most about our Op Shop. It is about so much more than second-hand goods and finding a bargain. It is about giving pre-loved items another chance, making things more affordable for families, reducing waste and creating a welcoming place where people feel comfortable popping in. Every item donated and every purchase made helps support that spirit of community and care.

One of the lovely things about working in an Op Shop is that you never quite know what each day will bring. Every donation has a story, and every item has the chance to become someone else's special find. It might be a book that brings hours of enjoyment, a warm jacket that someone really needs, a toy that brings a child happiness or a piece of vintage treasure that someone has been searching for. There is something special about knowing that items once loved by one person can find a new home and be loved all over again. It is a wonderful reminder that something old can still bring so much joy.

I also love seeing the connections that grow within our little shop. Our volunteers bring their own personalities, skills and experiences, and together we create a place where people can feel welcome. The conversations at the counter, the sharing of stories, the excitement over an unexpected bargain and the laughter on a busy day are all part of what makes this place so special. These little moments might seem ordinary, but they are what build a strong and caring community. I hope everyone who walks through our doors leaves feeling just a little happier than when they arrived.

As we look ahead, we hope to continue making our shop an even brighter, more welcoming place for everyone. Whether you come in regularly, donate your pre-loved treasures, volunteer your time or simply stop by for a chat, please know how much your support means to us.

From all of us at St Mary's Op Shop, thank you for being part of our year. May we all carry a little extra kindness into the Christmas season, look out for those who may be struggling, and remember that sometimes the greatest gift we can give is making someone feel seen, welcomed and valued.

Wishing you and your families a very Merry Christmas and a happy, safe and peaceful New Year. May your holidays be filled with love, laughter, kindness and a few special treasures along the way!

Warm Christmas wishes from Lana and the team at St Mary's Op Shop.

Lana Pearson
Op Shop Manager

St Mary's Family Centre

A Year of Growth, Learning, and Connection

As we enter the Advent season and reflect on another wonderful year at St Mary's Family Centre, we are filled with gratitude for the many blessings, connections, and learning opportunities we have shared.

Our values of **Aroha (love), Rongo (peace), and Hari (joy)** continue to guide everything we do. These values are evident in the caring relationships between tamariki, whānau, and kaiako, and in the sense of belonging that makes our centre such a special place.

Throughout the year, we have enjoyed strengthening our connection with the Kauri Centre and creating opportunities for children to build relationships across our wider community. These experiences have supported children to develop confidence, empathy, and a deeper understanding of the importance of connection and friendship.

As spring approached, tamariki enthusiastically helped prepare our gardens by planting herbs, spreading bark mulch, and adding colourful flowers to attract bees and other pollinators. The children took great pride in caring for our outdoor environment while learning about nature, growth, and sustainability.

A significant highlight this year was our Education Review Office (ERO) review. We were delighted to receive very positive feedback about the warm, responsive relationships between kaiako and tamariki, our intentional teaching practices, and the way we support children's individual needs, routines, language development, and social competence.

ERO also acknowledged our team's strong understanding of assessment, planning, and continuous improvement.

As part of our ongoing journey of growth, we will be focusing on being even more intentional in reflecting each child's identity, culture, language, and whānau aspirations within our learning plans and curriculum. We are committed to working closely alongside families to ensure every child's unique story is visible, valued, and celebrated throughout their learning journey.

We have also continued our commitment to fostering a culturally responsive environment that celebrates Te Ao Māori. Through waiata, storytelling, te reo Māori, tikanga, and special events, tamariki have been supported to develop a sense of belonging and understanding of the rich cultural heritage of Aotearoa.

We are incredibly grateful for the support of St Mary's Anglican Church and our parish community. Your encouragement, prayers, and ongoing connection help us create a place where children feel safe, loved, and empowered to thrive.

During Advent, we are reminded of the gifts of hope, peace, joy, and love. These values resonate deeply with our own commitment to Aroha, Rongo, and Hari and are reflected daily in the kindness, curiosity, and wonder we see in our tamariki.

On behalf of our children, whānau, and teaching team, we wish everyone a blessed Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

Ngā mihi

Ani de Koster
Centre Manager

It all comes down to food and whanau….

We have had some wonderful whanau gatherings in the last few months.



For Matariki we had a lunchtime feast where we had huawhenua soup, fry bread and ice-cream.

For Fathers Day we had our ‘Famous in Papamoa’ ‘Fathers Day Café’. Dads came in for a light breakfast and a chance to spend time with their children.



We have also celebrated Samoan and South Africa Day with our whanau from both cultures bringing in traditional food for us all to try. We took the opportunity to learn more about life in these countries.



Then we had ‘Grandparents Day’ – we tied this in with Spring and had a ‘Famous in Papamoa’ tea-party.

What an amazing turnout for all these events, with Christmas just around the corner, I wonder what we will come up with!

Ngā mihi

Trish Parkes
Centre Manager



Here at Growing Through Grief we are enjoying the seasonal changes Spring is offering and starting to move into warmer weather, more sunshine, and so many cherry blossoms for our scenic pleasure.

Since I wrote last, I have been busy working on some new growth work in our community. The idea of running a Grief Café came up with our organisation, and a few of the Coordinators from other areas of the Diocese have started running them in their own communities. Now I know that in both Tauranga and Papamoa we have a Death Café which is run, so I decided to take a slightly different approach. I have been talking to a few retirement care villages to see whether the idea of the Grief Café could be something beneficial to be run in their villages.

What I know is that for some, moving into retirement care can bring freedom, connection and security, however it can also involve letting go of a long-term family home, adapting to new routines or navigating life after the loss of a long term partner or close friend. Grief and loneliness often occur when navigating these life changes and many have disclosed that more support is needed for their emotional wellbeing.

So my idea was to start up a Grief Café on a fortnightly or monthly basis where we have a safe and welcoming space for residents in these villages to talk about their life changes and the grief that walks alongside that change. My hope is to create a space where grief can be spoken about openly, to connect people, normalise grief, and to provide a space where people can be seen, heard and supported.

That's all from me – If you are interested in learning more about this, please get in touch: **tracey.maris@acw.org.nz**

To Whom it May Concern
Review

Dearest Gentle Reader,
I am pleased to inform you that I have attended the most marvellous entertainment last Saturday evening. This fabulous event was hosted by and at St Peter's Anglican Church, Mount Maunganui.

Let me tell you all about it. Several upstanding members of the community, that is - we, came in from the deluge to the cosy stone parish church where we were warmly welcomed and greeted with a tipple and tasty tidbit. We were few in number. However, I'm certain that there would have been more of us had the weather been less inclement. Soon we were in gales of laughter or touched to our hearts by the correspondence read to us by four very talented Friends. These were *real* letters from *real* people from here and abroad, over the ages, and about their real concerns! Such a variety there was! Letters of complaint, or explanation, or advice, or encouragement, or description or demand. It was very absorbing. There was a much-appreciated break during which to circulate and chat with old friends and new acquaintances, whilst imbibing further the alcoholic (or not) libations and fortifying ourselves on further sustenance. Mr Chalium Poppy, Esq., provided charming background cool jazz pianoforte during this interval. (Between you and me, I had no idea he could play anything other than antique sacred organ pieces, who knew?).

Of course, this was not solely for our entertainment alone, oh no. Koha yielded $630 cash and an overflowing hamper of food for the local Food Bank. Needless to say, we are also indebted to corporate sponsors for the wine and cheese reception – Mane Menswear ($100) and Mount Insulation & Sheetmetal ($350) as well as red wine surplus from the Midwinter Christmas celebration.

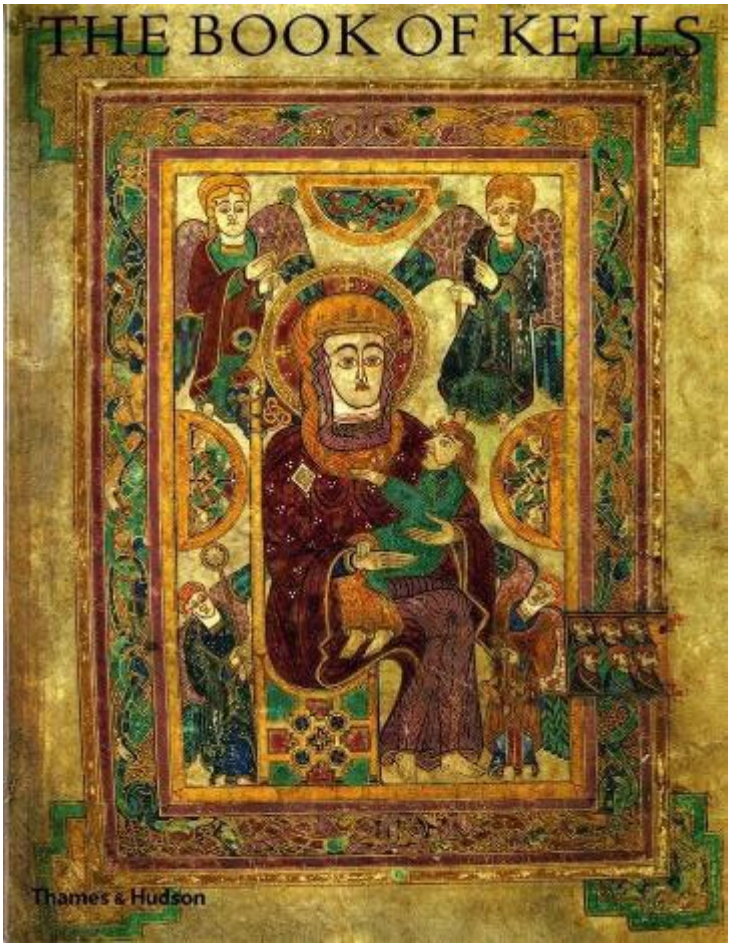
Scientific enquiry by way of solicited written feedback informed the organisers that the enjoyment of the evening was universal, and by unanimous acclaim more such events were desired. It was suggested that perhaps the next could be held at an earlier hour? Whereupon it has been agreed that “To Whom It May Concern” be scheduled accordingly:-

Saturday 13 March 2027 at 4 pm. Mark your diary and save the date!

Faithfully yours,
Mrs Tracy Dixon Shum



The modern-day printing press has been a wonder, but some of those ancient ways of reproducing texts were pretty amazing. For years copies of scriptures were made laboriously by hand to be distributed around the churches and later to universities. The manuscripts were so valued that sometimes monks would spend years decorating them and creating exquisite works of art. I had the opportunity to go to Dublin in 2015 and at the Old Library in Trinity College in the centre of Dublin you will find the “Book of Kells.” It is an exquisitely illustrated 9th century copy of the four gospels which was housed for centuries at the Abbey of Kells. If you’re ever in Dublin the exhibition is fascinating and well worth a visit.



MESSIAH 2026 IS CANCELLED!!

Well, not really - but now that I have your attention……

This May, it was my great honour and privilege to guest conduct the Tauranga Civic Choir in a performance of this much-loved oratorio as part of their 65th anniversary programme. This was not my first time conducting the Tauranga Civic Choir, but I was acutely aware that, as this was in celebration of their milestone anniversary, the pressure was on to do things well.

Those of you who follow the comings and goings of our resident chamber choir, Scholars Baroque Aotearoa, will probably know that each November they perform Messiah with their good friends and colleagues at NZBarok, New Zealand's only baroque orchestra. Two performances of Messiah in the 2026 season felt excessive and, perhaps more importantly, one does not wish to "compete" in any way by forcing audiences to choose between two performances of the same work presented just months apart. So, for one year only, Scholars Baroque Aotearoa will take a different path. Rather than revisiting a familiar favourite, we have the opportunity to present something rather special.

The challenge for me was to select a programme that remains seasonal while still anticipating the coming Christmas season. Eventually, I decided upon combining the observance of two distinct events at this time of year into one glorious baroque concert.

Because of its close proximity to the Christmas season, St Cecilia's Day (22 November) is often overlooked. St Cecilia is the patron saint of music and on this day it was traditional for orchestras and choirs to perform concerts in her honour. A multitude of poems invoking St Cecilia have beenwritten over the centuries, but perhaps none more famous than that of the English poet John Dryden. Many composers have set Dryden's text to

music, including Henry Purcell. In 1739, Handel too was inspired to set Dryden's famous text to music and premiered his own Ode for St Cecilia's Day on 22 November of that same year.

Handel's musical setting is rich, clever and colourful. Indeed, it is one of his most inventive and dazzling creations. Trumpets blare, strings dance, and Handel uses every musical resource at his disposal to celebrate the power of music itself. The result is a work of extraordinary drama, brilliance and joy. The main theme of the text itself is the Pythagorean theory of harmonia mundi, that music was a central force in the Earth's creation. Far from being a dry philosophical idea, Handel transforms it into something thrilling and deeply human.

The second half of this concert will look forward to Christmas and will feature two works by Italian baroque composers, Arcangelo Corelli and Antonio Vivaldi. I'll lead Opus Orchestra, who join us for this concert, in a performance of Corelli's Concerto Grosso in G Minor, Op. 6 No. 8. The concerto bears the inscription Fatto per la notte di Natale ("made for the night of Christmas"). This has earned it the nickname "the Christmas Concerto", and it remains one of the most cherished works in the festive repertoire. Its gentle pastoral conclusion has delighted Christmas audiences for centuries. And finally, the choir will perform Vivaldi's Magnificat, Mary's song of praise recorded in Luke's Gospel in which she praises God for choosing her to bear Jesus. Filled with energy, beauty and devotion, the work provides a radiant conclusion to the programme.

So, why is this newsworthy of the parish newsletter, The Quest?

On 22 November, St Cecilia's Day, this concert will take place at St Peter's. This is a rather large concert for such a humble venue, complete with a 24-voice chamber choir, Opus Orchestra and a

line-up of national soloists. Opportunities to hear works of this scale and quality in such an intimate setting are rare. For those who regularly support the musical life of St Peter's, this concert offers something a little different with a programme that is both festive and uplifting.

Audience space will be at a premium that afternoon, and those parishioners who follow the Scholars season would be advised to buy their tickets well in advance of the performance date in order to secure a seat in the audience. Whether you are a devoted lover of baroque music or simply curious to discover something beyond the familiar Christmas repertoire, this promises to be memorable afternoon of glorious music-making.

Scholars Baroque Aotearoa and Opus Orchestra present:
Handel's Ode for St Cecilia's Day
22 November 2026, 2.30pm
St Peter's Anglican Church

By Chalium Poppy
St. Peter’s Director of Music


scholars • baroque
aotearoa
OPUS ORCHESTRA
Handel
Ode For
St.Cecilia's
Day
Vivaldi
Magnificat
Corelli
Concerto Grosso
in G minor
22 November
2.30pm
St.Peter's Anglican Church
Mount Maunganui
WWW.SCHOLARSBAROQUE.COM

Bird of Hope



BRIGHT yellow sun
Don't look!
Keep it at the edge
Intense bright blue sky
Contrasting with the tallness of dull green trees
Moving, moving, moving
repeating patterns
complex in simplicity
simple intricacy

A hint of gold in the air

Beauty warming my face

A sudden movement
Black and white
Large bird flies through
The tree-barrier
Into the blue beyond
The blue of possibility.

I have a large eclectic collection of Christmas carol recordings. They range from the sublime to the ridiculous, from traditional to modern, from sacred to secular and are from Northern and Southern hemispheres.

This carol was written by Shirley Murray who was a prolific hymn writer from Aotearoa New Zealand until her death in 2020.
In today's world this carol is a prayer we can all pray.

Peace Child,
in the sleep of the night
in the dark before light
you come,
in the silence of stars
in the violence of wars—
Savior, your name.

Peace Child,
to the road and the storm
to the gun and the bomb
you come,
through the hate and the hurt,
through the hunger and dirt—
bearing a dream.

Peace Child,
to our dark and our sleep
to the conflict we reap
now come—
be your dream born alive,
held in hope, wrapped in love:
God's true shalom.

“Hervey” – pronounced “Harvey”…….



A butcher birds joins me for morning tea !

Its now over 6 months since Laurie and I left the Bay of Plenty and moved to another “Bay” – Hervey Bay in Queensland, known locally as the ‘Wide Bay.’

So why did we move? Firstly, we knew we had to downsize. Maintaining a 4 bedroom home, where we had raised the three kids, was becoming a burden. And now that we were both retired, it seemed to be the time to look for new pastures. Two of our kids were in Wellington – seen only twice a year - and one recently moved to Perth WA. Laurie’s nearest family was her sister, Rae, in Queensland, and mine was near Melbourne, with other siblings still in UK.

So we put the house on the market last November and finally got an acceptable offer in April. Four weeks to settle, shed some possessions, pack up a 20 ft container and move across the ditch.

We decided to buy into the same lifestyle village as sister Rae. The village is a gated community, aimed at the over 50s. It has facilities including two clubhouses, two pools, bowls green and BBQ areas. But there is no hospital wing or dementia unit – for those you need a retirement village.

Like many parishioners that I have spoken to over the years, I was reluctant to give up the family home and to move into a more structured setting. Some people are against this type of community living, and some love it. And some people I know left it until they were in their 70s, and then said they wished they had done it years earlier.

So we bought a three bedroom villa, 130sqm, with double garage. It is compact but homely. Built 6 years ago, and with two previous owners, we decided to repaint the inside but otherwise it is in excellent condition. We re-landscaped the small front garden, installed colonial shutters, and had the garage floor epoxy sealed. All the windows are screened, there is an aircon in the main room, fans in all the bedrooms, and tiled floors throughout. All of this fits well with the Queensland weather and lifestyle. We even get the odd gecko in the house from time to time.

Unlike NZ, where most villages are on a 'licence to occupy' basis, the villas here are owned, but the land is leased. There is a weekly fee for services with water and power on a metered basis. And when you leave, you can sell either through the village or through a licenced real estate agent. And any profit is your own.

One thing you quickly notice in the village is the bird life. We have some farmland around us, although the paddock behind is currently being built into a new subdivision. Numerous species of

parrots, parakeets, cockatoos, mynahs and butcher birds, with herons on the small waterway. There are even a few kangaroos, the odd echidna, a hare or two, and sometimes a snake.

The town of Hervey Bay is much like the Mount probably was about 50 years ago. Houses and shops spread out along a long esplanade. No highrises yet, although there are some six story buildings. Some sandy beaches, and, just offshore, Fraser Island – known now as K'Gari, its original name. But also, like Tauranga, the town is expending at a rapid rate. During and after COVID, many people left the big cities and moved to more rural areas like the Bay. So, new subdivisions, new schools, hospitals, and shops are all being built.

During the season from May to October, Hervey Bay is the place where whales come to frolic and breed. Half day boat trips take you out, and you spend time watching the numerous pods of whales frolicking in the shallower, warmer waters. When they leave, the whales head to Antarctica for the rich supply of krill during the southern summer.

Along with whales, the Bay is home to turtles, pelicans and numerous other sea creatures. You can go reef walking in the shallows, to find sting rays, and even octopus. And you can travel over to K'gari for day or longer trips. Four wheel drive coaches with ranger guides show you the only tropical rainforest located on a sandbar island. There are more turtles, as well as dingoes – which, unlike the claims of the news reporters, do not attack humans, so long as you keep a respectable distance.

Within reach of Hervey Bay are towns like Maryborough and Childers, with historic buildings. Bundaberg, an hour north, is the home of the famous rum distillery, as well as the ginger beer. On the way to Brisbane, you pass the Sunshine Coast, with all its resorts. Steve Irwin's Australia Zoo is also on the way, as well as a ginger factory, where you can buy ginger jam, as well as ginger

scones – delicious! You can also fly from Hervey Bay with connections to Brisbane, and all the major cities, plus to Lady Elliot Island, an offshore resort

Being pensioners, we get all sorts of advantages. The train to Brisbane, from nearby Maryborough, is only $25 for a 3 hr journey.

So how do we feel, 6 months down the track? Well, it was a great upheaval – as stressful as getting divorced or suffering a bereavement. We knew, before we did it, that it would break all our social connections, and force us to start anew. We also knew that the villa of 130sm was much smaller than the 225sqm home we were used to.

But one thing, of course, was coming to a new church, and new parish. St John's, Hervey Bay, is an active and friendly community. The church itself is a light bright modern building, with plenty of windows and ceiling fans for the hot weather, but no air conditioning. Three services on a Sunday with about 80 attending the 9 am family service. The church sits on a large corner section, backing onto some bush, with the odd kangaroo lounging around when we have morning tea on the deck. The services are livestreamed, and also available on You Tube for later in the week.

We have the parish priest, Greg Loumeau, as well as a deacon curate, Eleanor Whereat. Add in two retired priests, and you have a good team for preaching sermons, along with about 6 Liturgical Assistants. The parish offices are in the centre of town, where they own a small arcade of shops. There is a well run op shop, as well as a small chapel for midweek services.

After such a busy time running the Mount parish, during the vacancy, as well as dealing with the childcare's building problems, I am glad to be having a rest and enjoying my own church time. However, they have a singing and music group, in which I play guitar.

Up to 10 singers, with organist, drummer, and one other guitarist. Its just like St Mary's used to be – lots of enthusiasm, if not the best of skill !

Laurie has continued her line dancing, which seems to be very big here. There is a group in the village, as well as about 6 local groups. And every weekend there seems to be a big hoedown somewhere in the district. Of course "nearby" in Australia can be up to 2 hrs drive away !!!!

And lastly – yes it IS quite warm. We first arrived in May – winter – and the nights were cool. But now we have days over 25C, and some nights stay at 21C. Plenty of excuses for a cold beer during the day !

By James Tubbs



An interesting bird is the pelican
His bill can hold more than his belly can
He can fit in its beak enough food for a week
I really don't know how the hell he can!

WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?

Approaching Advent Theology Through Music

We've all heard the standard complaints about the neglect of Advent in contemporary society: Advent squeezed out by Christmas; waiting eliminated by impatience; spiritual depth eclipsed by consumerist sentimentalism. But what interests me about these sermons, which some of us have preached and all of us have certainty had to listen to, is that the blame for the undermining of Advent is laid at the door of the godless world. 'If only they would pay attention to the Church's beautiful Advent liturgy,' we cry, "it would all be so much better.' I've never quite understood why plunging the Church into darkness and swooning over a tea light is supposed to be an antidote to sentimentalism, but, be that as it may, a look at the way in which the Church's celebration of Advent has developed over the last few decades reveals that the blame for the watering down of this season might lie closer to home.

The clearest way to see this is in the rapid development of a liturgical tradition around the 'themes' of the four Advent Sundays, marked in many places by the lighting of the Advent wreath. These themes that accord best with the Lectionary is one of Patriarchs (Advent I), Prophets (Advent II), John the Baptist (Advent III), and the Virgin Mary (Advent IV). For many of us, these simply are the four themes of Advent, and the heady mixture of choirs, candles and collects preaches this doctrine. This tradition developed within the Anglican Communion during the 1980s.

Yet, by theming the Sundays in this way, the Church has colluded in the very abolition of Advent that its clergy so often criticise. For by focusing solely on historical characters from the time before the Incarnation, presented in chronological order, the four Advent Sundays have become little more than the first half of a Christmas carol service, building up to the first coming of Christ in the stable

at Bethlehem. There is precious little eschatology here, merely a bit of historical background. Yet, fear not: there is an alternative, as a closer look at some Advent Gospel readings reveals.

The Advent Gospels about John the Baptist do, admittedly, mention his role as the forerunner of Christ: 'one who is more powerful than I is coming after me' (Matthew 3: 11). However, even here, the adjective 'powerful' reminds us that what is in view is not the coming of a vulnerable baby at Christmas, but rather the mighty deeds of Jesus' ministry - 'the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised' (Matthew 11: 5) - and the majesty of his Second Coming and final Judgement, 'His winnowing-fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with an unquenchable fire' (Matthew 3: 12).

This emphasis on the divine identity of Christ and the cosmic significance of his two comings resonates with a much more ancient set of themes for Advent still remembered by older clergy and laity, in which the Sundays reflected on the four last things: heaven, hell, death and judgement. At first, these may seem like rather bleak topics to concern ourselves with at this time of year. Yet what they represent is the notion that to celebrate Christmas fully, we must prepare ourselves by understanding the fullness of its significance. The coming of Jesus at Christmas is not simply a moment of rejoicing in the gift of new life, but rather effects a revolution in which the whole of reality is transformed, and its glorious end is foreshadowed. Advent is a season for zooming out from the tiny baby, to see that coming in the mind-blowing larger context of God's eternal plan, and the depths of longing of all humanity to be reconciled with our creator.

How are we to incorporate these grander themes into our Advent worship? Fortunately, our musical inheritance provides us with a wide range of material that helps explore the real meaning of Advent. In the rest of this article I'd like to share with you four examples of how the music of Advent can expose us to a spirituality and theology that is more profound and compelling than that found in many of our modern liturgical books and, dare I say it, even in some of our preaching.

VIGILATE - William Byrd

I have a powerful memory of first singing Vigilate right in the middle of an Advent carols service. In the middle of so much quiet, slow-moving, slightly soupy Advent music, if felt like a scoop of zesty lemon sorbet amid a banquet of clotted cream. With an energetic 'v' consonant to start, and opening motif of imitative ascending scales, and a driving sense of movement, the piece jolted the service from an atmosphere of meditative reflection into one of urgency, intensity, and even anxiety. In this, the breathless music matches the text: 'Stay awake! For you know not when the Lord of the house shall come.' Indeed, so effective is Byrd's work at summoning up this kind of nervous energy that critics have suggested that Vigilate draws on his experience as a recusant Catholic writing music for those worshiping in secret, who did not know whether this day might be the day the authorities would burst in and lead them away, perhaps to their deaths. If this is true, then Byrd's piece is the 16th-century equivalent of an African-American spiritual, where the emotions of faith and oppression run into one another to create a vigorous evocation of the force of a community's belief.

This sense of the pressing expectation of Advent gives precision to the commonplace contemporary notion that Advent is a season of waiting. Often, when we talk about Advent as the season of waiting, we see that as a rather passive attitude, contrasting with contemporary culture's impatient desire to want it all right now. Yet Byrd reminds us that the expectation commended to us in Advent

is not a relaxing into God's time, but rather a vigorous and active effort, a longing, a desiring, an insistent prayer of "Come, Lord Jesus!', a burning ache for the coming of Christ and his Kingdom.

ADAM LAY YBOUNDEN - Boris Ord

The wreath scheme, from Patriarchs to Jesus, certainly gives us the sense that Jesus' birth is part of God's good news story reaching back through the centuries. Yet the 15th-century song Adam Lay Ybounden is a more challenging representation of this idea that the incarnation is part of God's eternal plan. While the wreath scheme cherry-picks those parts of the Bible where God seems to be doing nice, encouraging things that point to Jesus, this song suggests more provocatively that God's providence is to be sought in more difficult moments of the biblical narrative as well. The lyrics relish the incongruity of Adam's sin somehow being a good thing to be celebrated. What's more, the song goes out of its way to emphasise the downright weirdness, and some might say the questionable justice, of God's way of working. Four thousand years in hell, all for taking an apple - the kind of crime a child might commit - is that really fair?

This apparent disproportion of crime and punishment is highlighted in Ord's setting by his simple, almost nursery rhyme-like theme, which paradoxically evokes an aura of innocence around this description of original sin. Through this work we are invited to focus for a moment not on the Christmas story as a familiar and safe annual fable, but rather as the long-planned act of a transcendent God whose actions we can at best only partly understand.

THE ADVENT PROSE - Plainsong

If Advent is about coming to a deeper understanding of the God who comes among us at Christmas, then it is also about coming to a deeper understanding of the world that he came to save. The four verses of the beautiful advent Prose (the text is from Isaiah) present four stages of God's coming salvation, from lament

through confession to forgiveness. The plangent melody of the plainsong emphasises the moving depiction of human dereliction that the first verse presents: ‘thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation’. Here, again, we are encouraged to embrace a more challenging Advent. Rather than preparing for Christmas by making ready for a celebration of the good things we enjoy, such as the gift of children, grandchildren, or family life, the piece encourages us to use Advent to consider especially those parts of the world that most long for salvation because of the pain of present sufferings.

LO! HE COMES WITH CLOUDS DESCENDING - Charles Wesley

As we contemplate Christ’s coming as our saviour and judge, we are led to what is perhaps the finest piece of musical theology in the entire Advent repertoire, not a choral work this time, but a hymn that Charles Wesley reworked from an earlier one by John Cennick. The words and the stirring tune evoke a powerful and poetic theological vision of the second coming of Christ. I only have space for one detail - the way in which the final judgement is described in verses 2 and 3. Rather than being seen as a question of Jesus busily doling out punishments and rewards to people, here judgement is presented as a glorious moment of revelation. The difference is not in the appearance or behaviour of Christ, who looks the same in both verses, but rather in how the two different groups of people respond. “Those who set at naughty and sold him, pierced and nailed him to the Tree’ and ‘his ransomed worshippers’ both see the same vision of the triumphant Christ, displaying his ‘glorious scars’. However, the thrice-repeated penultimate line of the two verses hammers home the different effect this vision has on the two groups, who respond “deeply wailing’ and ‘with what rapture’ respectively. For Wesley, judgement is the moment when we look upon Christ and, in that vision, see truth about his identity and the truth about ourselves and our actions. The hymn reminds us to spend serious time in Advent earnestly anticipating that moment, bringing ourselves

face to face with Christ in our hearts, and asking ourselves honesty whether our response to him leaves us wailing or enraptured. So what conclusions are we to draw from all this as we make our ecclesiastical preparations for Advent? I have a bold - if potentially dangerous - suggestion. I wonder if this Advent, rather than choosing the music to serve the liturgy, as of course is our normal custom, we might for once let the liturgy serve and be fashioned by the Advent music we have inherited, that we may more profoundly enter into the theological depths, provocations and challenges of this holy season.

By Chalium Poppy
St. Peter's Director of Music

When Great Trees Fall
Maya Angelou

When great trees fall,
rocks on distant hills shudder,
Our memory suddenly sharpened,
examines,
gnaws on kind words
unsaid,
promised walks
never taken.

Great souls die and
our reality bound to
them, takes leave of us
Our souls,
dependent upon their
nurture,
now shrink, wizened.
Our minds formed
and informed by their
radiance, fall away.
We are not so much maddened
as reduced to the unutterable
ignorance of
dark, cold
caves.

And when great souls die,
after a period peace blooms,
slowly and always
irregularly. Spaces fill
with a kind of
soothing electric vibration.
Our senses, restored, never
To be the same, whisper to us.
They existed. They existed.
We can be. Be and be
Better. For they existed.



In honour of my brother Richard

Sue Wotton

Christmas Nativity Scene by Andy Marks



Called "Christ is born".



ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS SERVICES

at Mount Maunganui Anglican Parish

Sunday 29 November	7.30pm	Advent Lessons and Carols with the Chancel Choir	St Peter's
Wednesday 9 December *(Last Wednesday Service for 2026)*	10am	Holy Eucharist	St Peter's
Sunday 20 December	7.30pm	9 Lessons and Carols with Scholars Baroque	St Peter's
Christmas Eve	4pm	Interactive All-age Christmas Eve Service	St Mary's
Christmas Eve	9pm	Christmas Eve Eucharist	St Peter's
Christmas Day	9.30am	Christmas Day Eucharist	St Peter's

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