



# THE new vine

UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA  
Blackall Range Uniting Churches

(Kenilworth, Maleny, Montville, and Palmwoods)

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## EDITORIAL COMMENT

How time flies when you're having fun!

I can see some readers grimacing at this thought, but it arose when I realised that, at this time last year, we were bemoaning the fact that we were going to be without a minister for some time. And here we are now, celebrating the appointment of a new minister to lead and guide us. How fortunate we are!

While I appreciate that the past 12 months haven't always been fun, especially for those of our number tasked with the responsibility of seeking a new minister, I think we have done remarkably well in that interim period – thanks to a great many people, but especially to members of the Joint Nominating Committee, Bruce Johnson who undertook Supply Ministry, members of various church councils/committees, those who maintained worship and all the other activities and to everyone else who exhibited patience, understanding and resilience during the year.

In hindsight, there were, from time to time, things that just seemed to fall into place or occasions when someone unexpectedly provided a solution to a problem. We may have been led, on these occasions, to comment on such a happy coincidence.

I recall once when explaining my call to ministry, I said – “There were simply too many coincidences for me to ignore them any longer”. One dear, old wise lady [every congregation seems to have at least one], took me to task and responded “There is no such thing as coincidence. It is all God's continuing providence”. I can still hear her saying this. That phrase has come to my mind on a number of occasions over the past twelve months.

“There is no such thing as coincidence. It is all God's continuing providence”.

As we each look back over our lives, can we see this? Do we agree with it? Does our life journey make it clear, in retrospect, that God has always been there with us? It is an interesting exercise to sit quietly and review our lives through such a lens. We may well, at the time, have wondered why some things happened as they did, but now it is quite clear that it was God at work. So, why would things change now? Enough of looking back!

And so, we are now tasked to look forward, thankfully, joyfully and expectantly. We welcome Liena to ministry among us and with us, as we move into God's future together. And I sense we are going to have more fun!

May this season bring you the blessings of hope, peace, joy and love in abundance.

GRAHAM

Editorial Comment.....	Page 1
Who's Who in the Blackall Range Churches.....	2
Liena's Lines .....	3
Update Blackall Range Church Council.....	4
Letter to the Editor – Suffering Loss.....	5
Your Roving Reporter (Christmas Tree Festival).....	6-7
Karl's Korner (The little Pub in our street?) .....	7
Christmas Stories .....	8-10
Our Computer Problems .....	10
The Real Story of Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer.....	11
Thoughts of Advent.....	12
Christmas in Other Cultures .....	13-17
Stop the World – I want to get off.....	18
Kids' Rids .....	19
A Little Light Relief from the Change of the Season .....	19
Blackall Range Churches – Congregational Activities.....	20



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**One Church Council:** Peter Callaghan (Chair); Marilyn Milton (Secretary); Peter Uhlmann (Treasurer); Bob Eather and Amity Green (Maleny representatives); Duncan Drew and Rev George Woodward (Montville representatives); Mele Lolohea-Cameron (Palmwoods representative)

**Retired Ministers:** Rev Graham Dempster, Rev Bruce Johnson, Rev Bob Philpot, Rev Ron Potter, Rev Brian Richards, Rev George Woodward.

## LIENA'S LINES

My memories of an African Christmas are deeply formed by my childhood on a farm in Zimbabwe. So, here are a few scenes from my childhood memory, ending with a more serious muse over Christmas in Africa and the influence European Christmas' had over my, and perhaps others' experience of Christmas.



Christmas was certainly family time. We always had family for Christmas. Officially our core family was small, countable on one hand: father, mother, two brothers and the baby sister, me. However, I cannot recall a Christmas with less than twenty and more (many years up to forty) people staying over on the farm for several days. Cousins, aunts, uncles, friends. Beds & mattresses overflowed onto bedroom floors, into corridors, lounges and caravans. And food, food, food. Maize meal porridge with sausage in the morning, biltong (jerky) for snacks and watermelon for afternoon tea.

Another fond memory is of going carol singing. We had a 2 1/2 blue tonne truck (ute) and coupled with a lovely enterprising neighbour, Helen Kirstein and my father as

driver we would roundup teenagers and children onto the back and we would travel from farm to farm singing Christmas carols. Neighbouring farmhouses were not close to one another and we would travel 4-6 hours covering a few hundred kilometres. The merriment on the back of that blue kobalt is etched into my Christmas memories.

Boxing Day was another community affair known as the Boxing Day ride (a tradition born out of the English steeple chase). More than 100 horse riders, plus many others would descend upon the neighbour's farm and we would ride down to the river. Riders were usually divided into two groups – novice and experienced riders - but one more than one occasion the novices reached the river first!! Non-riders would catch a ride on a tractor and open flat-bed trailer. Down by the river there would be games, like bare-horseback wrestling in the water, dumping people into the river and water-polo. Then there was the ride back home again and an afternoon spent playing tennis, volleyball, putt-putt golf, croquet, braai (barbeque) and watermelon again!

Christmas was also a time of puzzlement for me. I was puzzled over Christmas cards with scenes of snow and trees I did not know. 40-50 years ago, I remember us putting up strings and strings of Christmas cards and the excitement on the number we received. And of-course hours and hours I spent helping mum write Christmas cards. Puzzlement however as to why Christmas cards only had names in it. Nothing more. No news, no story behind the names. I wondered if the value of the Christmas card covered the cost of the postage and why there was no message? Why send a Christmas card with no news, no message?

Now I miss receiving Christmas cards. Even ones from the bank manager and the butcher and the local wholesaler. I miss reading the names, yes even just the names. I reflect on how Christmas cards influenced and still influence our experience and image of Christmas. How the European scenes of snow and conifers are strange to and far removed from a hot summer Christmas in Zimbabwe. How the bonny smiling white baby Jesus on golden hay are as strange and far removed from a dark animal shelter and a used food manger in a small town in Bethlehem and a baby Jewish boy born out of wedlock. Yet, I also reflect that behind the romantic scenes on Christmas cards, the printed words on Christmas card remain true:

Peace! Joy! Love! A Saviour is born! Merry Christmas! And Happy New Year!

REV LIENA

## UPDATE BLACKALL RANGE CHURCH COUNCIL

On behalf of the BR Uniting Church Council and our Congregation – a BIG WELCOME to Rev Liena Hoffman.

Praise God for Rev Liena's calling to the Blackall Range Congregation. Liena feels a strong pastoral call and, a call to enable our people and ministry locations to fulfil their various ministries.

'Enabling' is a very trendy word in use around the business sector. It became popular in the ICT sector a few years ago and has become common to the vernacular as a descriptor for many parts of business processes.

Enabling means to give (someone) the authority or means to do something; OR; make it possible for.

'Enabling' best describes what the Blackall Range Uniting Church Council (BRUCC) is all about. The BRUCC 'enables' our people to live out their faith and has general stewardship of the ministries and resources on behalf of the BR congregation comprising Palmwoods, Montville and Maleny.

The BRUC Council is comprised of the Ministry Agent in placement, Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, together with two representatives from each Ministry Location (with a minimum of one from each location).

The Church Council meets quarterly and is responsible to implement the policies and decisions of the mission and vision of the BRUC and the Uniting Church of Qld.

How does the BRUCC 'enable' our ministry locations?

Since establishment, the Council has met three times. Some outcomes include –

- Generated 15 actions and completed 11
- Established key contact people responsible for Ministry, Outreach, Finance, Property and Administration portfolios
- Established Ministry Task Groups in each Ministry Location
- Approved Strategic Plans for each location
- Working on an Annual Program of Governance Responsibilities
- Updated and approved Child Safe and WHS Policies/Processes on behalf of the congregation
- Commenced reporting to the congregation after each meeting, and
- Agreed to the use of and commenced work on the Ron Fallon Bequest to Maleny Ministry Location
- And commenced work on the 2020 budget for presentation to the congregation.

As a Church community we are extraordinarily blessed with people who give generously of their time and resources in the Service of our Living God on the Blackall Range

Particularly, I thank –

- Church Council members
- Karis Ross who has recently resigned from the Council
- Joint Nominating Committee (JNC) members for their work in their journey with Rev Liena in fulfilling this call.
- Our Pastors and Preachers who brought the Word this year, and,
- Our special thanks, to Rev Bruce Johnson and Heather for their ministry during this period of calling Rev Liena.

I look forward to seeing how our triune God enables our people to minister in the coming year.

PETER CALLAGHAN,  
BRUCC Chairperson Mobile: 0458 263 322



## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

## SUFFERING LOSS

Dear Editor,

Further to our chat with a few others over coffee on Tuesday, I write in the hope that something might eventuate for those among us suffering loss.

Most of us, at some time in our life's journey, will experience some form of suffering. Perhaps it is not as obvious and acute as that experienced by people under persecution or oppression; those living in war torn zones; or those impacted by devastating flood, drought or some other form of natural disaster. Nevertheless, it is very real and significantly impacts on our lives.

The Bible has much to say on the subject of suffering and I would urge all who are presently suffering, or know someone who is, to use a concordance or index in a study bible to turn up relevant passages that help us to understand, cope with, and come through what can be a very difficult period in our life. There are also some very good Christian books on suffering and one I have personally found helpful is "*Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*" by Timothy Keller.

Suffering can come in many forms but a common form of suffering for people in the Western world is grief. Grief is essentially associated with loss – loss of a job, home or other precious possession; loss of independence and/or faculties through ill health; a broken relationship; financial instability or loss of other forms of security. These are just a few common forms of loss but the most common of all is loss of a spouse, parent, child or other loved one through death.

While books, and even walking through the pain of others who have lost a loved one, can help our understanding and our ability to help others, it is only when we personally experience such a loss for ourselves that we truly understand what a difficult journey it is. There are a number in our congregation who have travelled, or are travelling, this road.

So, a couple of us - four all told - got together recently for a chat. We shared a desire to support one another and those on a similar journey and also to be available to others who may have to go through similar loss in days to come - and to this end we resolved to establish an informal group for grief ministry within our fellowship. Our aim would be to meet from time to time and generally to be of support of any going through grief and loss.

We are truly fortunate to have pastoral carers, Connect Groups and caring folk who have and are, providing support to those going through hard times, including those struggling with grief, and this support I know, will continue. However, anyone who would appreciate sharing their special journey with one of us who have also experienced what they are going through, are invited to contact Graham Dempster [5494 2594 / 0429 944 051] or myself [5494 3640 / 0408 152 281] so we might be able to include you in this caring ministry.

Grieving is very natural, and though it is a difficult time, I have found that God can give joy in the midst of pain – with His help and the support of His people – especially those He has walked with through their personal pilgrimage of loss and suffering.

Love and Blessing,

BOB

## YOUR ROVING REPORTER

Way back in August it was agreed that placing an article about Maleny's Christmas Tree Festival [TCTF] in The New Vine [TNV] would be a good way to create interest, and hopefully, encourage preparation of trees from among our congregations. An interview was decided upon as the best way to achieve these ends.

Unfortunately, one thing did not lead to another, and that interview didn't take place until just this last week because you have to have two people together to have an interview and Murray and Graham could not arrange to both be in the same place at the same time – until now.

Both experiencing the joys of jet lag, they were able to sit down together, too tired to do otherwise, and this is the result. The emphases have changed as it is way too late to be touting for extra trees, but it is hoped it still has something interesting to say. [Graham]

**TNV:** What has been the main springboard for the initial creation, and continuing inspiration, of the Christmas Tree Festival?

**TCTF:** As the committee considered this earlier in the year, we identified four things really.

- Our heartbeat
- Our calling
- Our adventurous spirit
- Our desire

**TNV:** Can you expand on that a little?

**TCTF:** Our heartbeat is our passion for the value of the message of the coming of Jesus to all people. Our calling is to share that message with our community at large. Our adventurous spirit urges and inspires us to make that message of Jesus' birth relevant and to give it meaning in 2019. And our desire is to see lives changed when people hear, see, touch and feel how Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection are real.

**TNV:** Thank you for that explanation. You have chosen an interesting theme this year - *Old becomes new at Christmas* – Where on earth [or in heaven] did that theme come from?

**TCTF:** That, too, is interesting. It arose from a comment by an eleven year old grandchild of one of the committee members – and so we decided to pick it up and use it.

**TNV:** How do you think such a theme might speak to people?

**TCTF:** We shall have to wait and see, I guess. But the committee believes there is scope for both traditional and creative approaches to occur – perhaps even with the one tree. There is nothing like a challenge to bring out the best in people.

**TNV:** Do you have any special old/new thoughts that you expect to be displayed?

**TCTF:** Yes, as a matter of fact, we do. The committee chose three particular scenarios we thought may be pertinent today. They are –

- What if Jesus was born into a modern homeless situation?
- What if he were born in a refugee camp?
- What if he were born in the outback among drought and bushfires?

We think they are really very topical and worthy of our imaginative responses. In fact they have been a focus for worship at Maleny during Lent.

**TNV:** What is it, do you think, that attracts involvement in this spectacular event?

**TCTF:** Really, it is best you ask those who respond to our invitation. But it gets easier each year as the community is very keen to be involved and we have no trouble filling all the spaces.

**TNV:** What gives organisers the greatest satisfaction?

**TCTF:** I really can't answer that for everyone - but generally, it has to do with the team work, the community involvement, even what might be seen as community ownership, the

interaction with a variety of groups and people, the creativity, right down to the joy on people's faces when they enter. It is many-fold.

**TNV:** Do you have any other comments you'd like to make?

**TCTF:** Well, yes, I suppose there are a couple of things. This year we are expecting a couple of tourist bus loads of people to arrive. That will be a first for us. Another first is the way the Maleny Neighborhood Centre is working with us and having a group of trainees being an active part of the creative input and also the physical preparations. Then, there is the way the congregation embraces the festival – they volunteer above and beyond – and then on Sunday, we worship among the trees and that's an experience in itself – and the congregation takes that in its stride. We are being blessed, really.

**TNV:** That all sounds rather wonderful and I wish you every success in meeting your four initial reasons for involvement – heartbeat [passion], calling, adventure and desire. May they come to pass.



## KARL'S KORNER

### The little Pub in our street?

As some will know, I have occasionally been persuaded to give small presentations to U3A folk. In recognition of same, I was invited to their end of year "Thank You" luncheon, at which a couple entertained us with Christmassy songs culminating in a sign-along where the audience sang the chorus of 'The Red Rose Cafe'. Initially, I recognised the tune but couldn't place it. But, as we were leaving, I realised it had the same tune as a German folk song entitled "Die Kleine Kneipe in unsere Strasse" which translates as "The little Pub in our Street".

The words, again translated, go:-

*The little Pub in our Street;  
There where life is still worth living.  
The little Pub in our Street;  
There no-one asks what you have, or are.*

The song evokes a congenial place of fellowship and light-hearted sharing among friends although it may involve a little lubrication. But it made me think of how we see "church". Is it such a congenial place? Does the church represent a place that makes life worth living? And what about the last line? Do we share our hopes, dreams, and misfortune in a light-hearted way? Do we focus on what people have/are? Or, do we engage in a bit of self-flagellation, thinking up all our 'sins'?

The late Rev. Geoff Paxton used to say that church was "a rehabilitation centre for Christians", not "a Christian rehabilitation centre". Do we feel 'rehabilitated' each Sunday?

There are those who would wish the church to be a place of evangelism, but is that its function? Or should we be seeking other means of doing same? In a book I once read, the author noted that evangelism was often portrayed as people going into the mission field "over there" - but nowadays, the mission field has come to the church's front door. So, people see us going to church and probably, silently, ask themselves – why?

Do we evoke that congeniality and realistic optimism that our faith would suggest we should have?

What do you think?

KARL TIETZE



## CHRISTMAS STORIES

*It's important we all know the first Christmas story. The story of a simple birth in humble surroundings; the story of long journeys and shattered expectations; the story of simple delight and the promise of a better world. The story of God's entry into our world in a very special way.*

*We should also be able to tell our own Christmas stories - and have those stories heard.*

*This is so, as, when we don't know the first story, and when we can't tell our own story, we allow other stories to take their place - stories of shopping and excess; of perfect families and unrealistic expectations; of sadness rather than joy.*

*We probably all agree on those points but, where is all this leading?*

*It brings us to two Christmas stories written by Professor Heather Walton, Professor of Theology and Creative Practice in the School of Critical Studies, University of Glasgow. The stories bring imagination to bear in a way that colours the Christmas narrative a little differently and which challenges us to think about the Christmas story afresh.*

*Have we ever thought of Mary and Joseph in this way before? Do these interpretations make sense to us? If we were to write something along these lines, how would it be different?*

*It seems that so much of our understanding of the biblical texts is simply accepted as given – without our seriously considering what may have actually been happening at the time. But, by allowing our imaginations to blanket the text, we may well gain a different appreciation and understanding.*

*See what you think. [Graham]*

### Being Mary

And all the generations shall call me blessed.

Why is that so? Because the story of a young woman, who peered out from behind the closed shutters of her father's house, who carried the heavy water jar back from the well, who kneaded dough and baked bread on hot stones, has become the story of the one who opened her heart so the world might receive its hope. Who gave her body so that joy might be born from her. Who calculated the price that love demands and paid it – all of it.

The Angel said to me, 'hail thou favoured one,' and those who call me blessed know that every person who brings life into the world shares in my blessing. Every child who puts a wild flower into a mother's hand, every boy who stammers the prayers over the Sabbath bread for the first time, every girl who carefully lights the holy lamps under her mother's watchful eye, they are all the bearers of a blessing. Those who feed the poor, or heal the sick, or pray in the night – they are, each one, birthing a blessing. Everyone who cradling a little baby, looks into its face and recognises the soft, small bundle as a miracle, as living proof of the promise 'God is with us' they share in the blessing. It is, in part at least, a common blessing. We have all glimpsed Angels in the sky at night.

But the generations who call me blessed do so not *only* because they mark in me their wonder at the way we *all* birth love into the world. They tell my story, glad that it reflects their own stories, but in their hearts they also say 'let it not be my story. Let it not be for me how it was





for Mary. Let her be the favoured one – not me!’ As they celebrate my visitation they hope to escape their own! We all want a mighty change, the day of God’s appearing. Peace on earth. But we don’t want the terror of wings, the days of sickness, the exhaustion, the pain and the awful cost. The baby is so small and it cannot be kept safe. And a sword shall pierce your heart also.

Perhaps I did not want to see the dear, sad face of Joseph, pale because of his God ridden dreams? Maybe I did not wish my baby to be haphazardly delivered in the chaos of a crowded town where soldiers patrolled the streets and spies controlled the synagogues? It might have been that I called out for my mother? Would have preferred a visit from midwives rather than shepherds? Chosen custom, kindness and ceremony above the ecstasy of Angels? As I stood in a darkened room that was suddenly alight with the flames of God did I remember what it was like to be a little girl who has seen the walls of her world collapse around her?

Perhaps, maybe, might.

But I was not a child or even a girl calling for her mother. I was not an innocent or a fool who did not know the scriptures. Those who God calls upon to bear love into the world are always branded by its fire. I knew this. But I must tell you – the Angel was beautiful. And the stars were so bright. And the hopes of my brothers fighting in the hills, and the dreams of my sisters waiting at the well, and the longings of the people of the town, the priests in the temples, the soldiers in the streets and of every waiting soul that there has ever been, they all rose up within me and I said Yes. Be it unto me according to your word.

And all the generations will call me blessed.

### Being Joseph

Two things you know of me. That I am a carpenter and that I am the one who gave refuge to Mary.

Two other things you think that you know. That I am an old man, past the age of desire, and that I fear God.

Let’s start with the facts. I am a small boy and the soldiers come. Plump foreign boys who think they own our land. Galilee is a troublesome province and it must be subdued. We must be subdued. They break down the doors searching for rebels. If their spies tell them that the fathers and the brothers of the house are fighters then it is not only the doors that are broken. Furniture is smashed. Cradles, wedding chests, the trestles set for the Sabbath meal – all are broken into fragments and then torched. Flames quickly catch the rafters. The roof is down, the home destroyed.

The first time I saw this happen I ran away and hid myself amongst the thorn bushes. The second time I saw this I took my small knife, I was just seven years old, and began to whittle a new drinking cup for the thirsty toddler sat amongst the ashes. By the time I was twelve I knew how to repair a door frame and secure a home quickly against the night. In my spare time I learned to make the intricate carvings that adorn a wedding chest – the place a young girl stores the things she is saving for the day when she will be married. Now I am a man. I am Joseph. I am the carpenter. The one who restores and mends and makes good. The one who builds homes and carefully carves the ancient patterns of the spirals of life. I am the one who does what he can so that our people can continue to live in the land where our ancestors are buried.

Let us stay with the facts. I am the one who sheltered Mary – and Mary was a little girl I saw crying and thirsty and covered with white ash amidst the ruins of her home. I was seven years old and I took my knife and I made a cup so that I could bring water to her. Her brothers and fathers had fled. Full of talk of God and of the vengeance he would bring upon our enemies.



I watched as the men who remained gathered to cut planks, measure new rafters and began rebuilding amongst the charred embers. I thought how fine it would be to build a safe house for this scared child and to secure it against danger. When she grew and stopped playing in the market place with the other children, when she began to veil her hair, I gave her the wedding chest I had been carving and I promised her that always I would always care for her.

I am not a man whose blood runs hot and whose eyes are blinded by crazy visions. I do not pray to God for vengeance and I do not go out into the wilderness and wait for signs and wonders. I am a carpenter and I am the one who was betrothed to Mary, who was building a house for us to live in and was keeping aside small pieces of good wood which would become the cradle of our child. I had the same dreams and desires that any of you might have and these were not to do with ancient prophecies or promises. I am not an old man whose dreams are smoke but a young man who wakes early and works hard and sleeps soundly.

This time it was not soldiers who raided us destroying what we had. No this time it was a different power that overshadowed us. Terrible and irresistible, a wind, a fire a spirit. 'Joseph,' said the voice, 'take care of Mary. Love Mary. Embrace her as your wife. Give her shelter' – and of course I do so. With all my heart I do so.

Is it because I fear God? Who does not fear a power such as this that brings down all before it. But fear is not the first thing in my heart. First I am angry that our lives and our hopes and dreams seem to count for so little and are so easily burnt to ashes. I do not understand why God reaches out to us in this terrifying way when we are so weak and seek only to live in peace and build as humans do, homes and hearths and happiness. I am angry. And I am bewildered. I do not understand why God chose a carpenter to be part of this 'burning' work. It is not the kind that I am used to. But I will care for Mary. And for the child too, if I am able.

*Printed with permission from Professor Heather Walton, Glasgow University*



## OUR COMPUTER PROBLEMS

Many of us, as Silver Surfers, know we sometimes have trouble with our computers.

Recently, I had a problem, so I called Steven, the 11 year old next door, whose bedroom looks like Mission Control, and asked him to come over. He clicked a couple of buttons and solved the problem.

As he was walking away, I called after him, 'So, what was wrong?

He replied, 'It was an ID ten T error.' I didn't want to appear stupid, but nonetheless inquired, 'An, ID ten T error? What's that? In case I need to fix it again.'

Steven grinned. 'Haven't you ever heard of an ID ten T error before? 'No,' I replied. 'Write it down,' he said, 'That will help.'

So, I wrote down: ID10T.

I used to like Steven.



## THE REAL STORY OF RUDOLPH THE RED-NOSED REINDEER

A man named Robert L. May, depressed and broken hearted, stared out his drafty apartment window into the chilling December night. His 4-year-old daughter Barbara sat on his lap quietly sobbing. Bob's wife, Evelyn, was dying of cancer. Little Barbara couldn't understand why her mummy could never come home. Barbara looked up into her dad's eyes and asked, "Why isn't Mummy just like everybody else's Mummy?"

Bob's jaw tightened and his eyes welled with tears. Her question brought waves of grief, but also of anger. It had been the story of Bob's life. Life always had to be different for Bob. When he was a kid, Bob was often bullied by other boys. He was too little at the time to compete in sports. He was often called names he'd rather not remember. From childhood, Bob was different and never seemed to fit in.

Bob, after completing college, married his loving wife Evelyn and was grateful to get a job as a copywriter at the Timothy Eaton Department Store, in Toronto, during the Great Depression. Then he was blessed with his little girl. But it was all short-lived. Evelyn's bout with cancer stripped them of all their savings and now Bob and his daughter were forced to live in a two-room apartment in the poorer area of Toronto. Evelyn died just days before Christmas in 1938.

Bob struggled to give hope to his child, for whom he couldn't even afford to buy a Christmas gift. But if he couldn't buy a gift, he was determined to make one - a storybook! Bob had created an animal character in his own mind and told the animal's story to little Barbara to give her comfort and hope. Again and again, Bob told the story, embellishing it more with each telling.

Who was the character? What was the story all about? The story Bob May created was his own autobiography in fable form. The character he created was a misfit outcast like he was. The name of the character? A little reindeer named Rudolph, with a big shiny nose. Bob finished the book just in time to give it to his little girl on Christmas Day.

But the story doesn't end there. The general manager of the T. Eaton Store caught wind of the little storybook and offered Bob May a nominal fee to purchase the rights to print the book. They went on to print, "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" and distribute it to children visiting Santa Claus in their stores. By 1946, Eaton's had printed and distributed more than six million copies of Rudolph.

That same year, a major publisher wanted to purchase the rights from Eaton's to print an updated version of the book. In an unprecedented gesture of kindness, the CEO of Eaton's returned all rights back to Bob May. The book became a best seller. Many toy and marketing deals followed and Bob May, now remarried with a growing family, became wealthy from the story he created to comfort his grieving daughter.

But the story doesn't end there either. Bob's brother-in-law, Johnny Marks, made a song adaptation to Rudolph. Though the song was turned down by such popular vocalists as Bing Crosby and Dinah Shore, it was recorded by the singing cowboy, Gene Autry. "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" was released in 1949 and became a phenomenal success, selling more records than any other Christmas song, with the exception of "White Christmas."

The gift of love that Bob May created for his daughter so long ago kept on returning back to bless him again and again. And Bob May learned the lesson, just like his dear friend Rudolph, that being different isn't so bad. In fact, being different can be a blessing.



## THOUGHTS OF ADVENT

Advent this year started on Sunday 1 December. Traditionally, it covers the four Sundays leading up to Christmas and finishes on Christmas Eve. It has a convoluted history, as much within the church does, as there is uncertainty about, and no agreement on, when it started; what it actually is meant to signify; and why there are different interpretations of it between various arms of the church.

All that said, if we try to cut through and look at it at its simplest, we identify Advent as the church season that waits expectantly, and prepares diligently, for the coming of Jesus.

Over recent times, BRUC has responded to Advent fairly simply by the use of Advent wreaths within worship and, on occasion, undertaking Advent studies for the duration of the season.



The wreath has five candles – four coloured [a new one is lit each week] and one central white candle, known as the Christ candle, lit on Christmas Eve and which, theoretically at least, burns for the remainder of the year. Each coloured candle is given a name – there is even no universal agreement what these names are or what they symbolise – but generally, we accept them as – HOPE, PEACE, JOY and LOVE.

Advent is a period of reflection and we are encouraged to take time out to consider things a little more deeply.

I am not aware if anyone is undertaking a study this year, but if we are not, there is an opportunity for each of us to sit with these four aspects of the Christian life and think about them. In the context of both world events and our own lives, we might ask ourselves how we expect Christ's coming to bring hope, peace, joy and love into our world this Advent season.

After all, we know, with certainty, that Jesus is coming because he has already come – but what will this mean this time round? What will he discover upon arriving? We are expecting to meet him but equally, he is expecting to meet us! What does that mean? Is Jesus expecting to find hope, peace, joy and love among us and our community? How might this be manifest?

One response might be that we could write a prayer each week, on the aspect of the Advent season that is being concentrated on that week? It doesn't have to be a long prayer – may only be a few words - but I'd be delighted to receive them.

[I appreciate that the journal will be too late for this to happen sequentially from the start of Advent, but it is surely not beyond us all to pray and write prayers in retrospect so we each have a full set.]

It would be wonderful to be able to have an item in next year's Summer edition of *The New Vine* that included a number of prayers written by our very own congregational members.

And here's an idea – they could even form the basis of a study for Advent 2020. Why not ???

The space below is left deliberately blank to give you somewhere to start.

GRAHAM



## CHRISTMAS IN OTHER CULTURES

*What is your experience of celebrating Christmas? How do you go about it? Has your approach changed over the years as your family grew up, or now that there are grand-children and great-grandchildren? Have you moved between states, or even countries, and found different approaches in different places? How do the different seasons of the northern and southern hemispheres impact on celebrations? There are so many variables. What do all these differences say about the Christmas story to you?*

*We could explore so many different things, but I have chosen to look at the difference between cultures as I have a sense that in some instances, at least, these differences run quite deeply into how we see and understand the Incarnation. [Graham]*

Christmas for me has always meant time with family. I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of Christmases where I have not been with at least one member of my family.

Two occasions do stand out in my mind.

The first was when I was a medical student and spent my fifth year holidays working in the Nonga Base Hospital, Rabaul, Papua New Guinea. I was anticipating a rather lonely, homesick day on December 25<sup>th</sup>. However, a family in the United Church in Rabaul had noted my aloneness, and they invited me to join them that day to be part of their family. It was unexpected, and a real blessing to me. I experienced the incarnation in a new way through their hospitality – a never forgotten gesture!



The second was when I was working in Bangladesh. This story is a tragedy, for which I have no explanation, but its pathos remains with me to this day. I had been warned that I should expect to have to do a Caesarean section on Christmas Day – it just always worked out that way! So, with some trepidation I approached the day. On Christmas Eve, we had a young girl in labour, and late in the evening she was delivered of a healthy baby after a difficult instrument birth. We gave thanks, and hoped that was the only delivery for the period. Christmas Day came and went. Boxing Day came and went. The following day a small family party arrived at Outpatients from a distant village, carrying a wooden litter with a heavily pregnant young woman on it. The family explained that she had been in labour for over two days and they were worried.



They knew it was a Christian hospital and that we had just celebrated one of our main holy days. They had not wanted to trouble us during that time, and so had waited until the festival was over! The girl required a Caesarean section for obstructed labour though the baby had already died. Tragically, we could do nothing to prevent other complications affecting the young girl's life and future. Where was salvation, hope or Good News for that family? I have

never been able to answer that question.

So, Christmas spent with family is a blessing and one that I can never take for granted.

FRANCES GUARD

It was at a "B & B" in London that our family enjoyed our one and only really COLD Christmas. There was no snow but it was the stuff of Christmas fantasies! Our three daughters were living and working over there (20 years ago) and we had decided to join them for Christmas. The Christmas household included our hostess, Rachel, her small son, Ben, and an Australian nanny. Everything was different - food shopping at 2am (to avoid the crowds) on Christmas Eve at a local Sainsbury's; all eight of us attending the nearby Baptist Church; cooking traditional fare together in a cosy kitchen where we welcomed the warmth of the oven; and an after lunch walk on the common where we saw two lads in tee shirts (in contrast to our many layers) playing cricket. To top the day off, the three year old poked a small toy from a Christmas cracker up his nostril and it was stuck! The ambulance was phoned, and two genial officers arrived at the door. Ben was excited to be having a ride in a flashing vehicle. Brian followed the ambulance to the hospital in



Rachel's car. The offending obstacle was removed efficiently in the Emergency department. The rest of Christmas night was uneventful but the whole experience was certainly memorable.

BARBARA AND BRIAN RICHARDS

Many years ago, my ship spent Christmas at St Petersburg in Florida. On the way there, I asked the Captain, if I could start up a choir, which he thought was a good idea. We started practising at sea, with a good cross section of the Ship's company.

We eventually sang at a veterans' hospital and a black orphanage. We were quite surprised that the orphanage was only for African Americans. Both venues gave us a very good welcome and it was great to meet the veterans and children and have a chat. They all enjoyed the Carols and were invited to join in.

The kids seemed surprised that we came to sing to them and that we had a sailor with Jamaican heritage singing with us.

Most of us had never experienced racism before, so it was a bit of an eye opener. However, we enjoyed our time at both places.

Yachi Da,

RAY JAMES



Some years ago, we visited Peru. One of the first things we noticed was how the nativity scene was presented in all the tourist shop windows – they covered the whole range of sizes from mini to maxi scenes - and they were everywhere. While that was surprising in itself, as it was nowhere near Christmas, there were further surprises awaiting e.g. all the figures were depicted, not in Middle Eastern dress, but in traditional Peruvian costume. As we moved out of Lima and travelled around the country, we found that this dress changed to reflect the local area in which we found ourselves. And what is more – horror of horrors, there were no sheep. Alas for the shepherds, they were obviously out of a job. But wait, there were llamas, the traditional beast of the fields, instead.

This was a matter of wonder and caused lengthy discussion, the outcome of which, for me, was that the Peruvian people had taken the Christmas story and appropriated it to their own context, their situation, their country, their story. The Incarnation was relevant to them where they were – it wasn't something from a long time ago in another land.



That made me ask myself – Have we done that in Australia? Have we really taken the birth of Jesus into our culture in a way that says it is at home here; it belongs here. Or do we still see it as something that happened in Bethlehem 2000 years ago and we celebrate it like any other birthday. Have we ever imagined Jesus as a blue-eyed child, in a bouncinette with toes in the sand at the beach with parents in summer holiday gear, zinc cream and thongs? Or beside a creek with over hanging gums trees and the smell of eucalypts and flies everywhere?

Would it make a difference if we did?

GRAHAM DEMPSTER

Christmas lunch 1993 was a memorable event, as mother, sensing that this was to be her last, took it upon herself to testify to the blessings and “coincidences” which Christ had brought about in her life. She had made a lifetime commitment to Christ in her pre-teenage years through a radio broadcast by the healing evangelist, Smith Wigglesworth.

She recalled, sometimes emotionally, many instances that can only be described as Divine intervention:

- \* Her first born son, Frank had been playing in the sandpit in our back yard. For no conscious reason she quickly left the house, removing Frank from the sandpit just minutes before a tree branch fell on it.
- \* Her third son, Geoffrey, then aged about 11, had been swimming in a neighbour's dam with several others. Mother became overwhelmed with her sense of responsibility for her care of children from 2 other families as well as her own; it being school holidays, so she recalled going on her knees on the laundry floor and pleading for the Lord's help just as Geoffrey was in the process of drowning. Fortune had it that one of our guests from Sydney, a girl aged around 14 was a keen swimmer and had just recently completed the latest lifesaving course, administering the “breath of life”.
- \* Whilst still living in Canowindra, mother worked part-time in the local hospital. She was Certificated in general, surgery, and obstetrics. In the process of carrying a stillborn aboriginal boy to the morgue it was impressed upon her to pray for the baby; he came to life.
- \* Shortly after we relocated to Adelaide in 1958 a recent migrant family living around a mile away suffered a tragedy; father and the only child were killed in a car accident. Stricken with grief the widow prayed words to the effect “God let me die or send someone to me to prove you exist”. Mother was chosen for the task, taking a walk without knowing her destination, arriving at the home of the grief-stricken woman and through an interpreter bringing an answer to her desperate prayer.



Sanctified amnesia is cutting me short at this point as I feel that in some way, I am breaching mum's privacy. She would be blushing. She regarded testimony as amplification of Christ; not something to boast about. She was neither a platform nor pulpit speaker, serving as an elder for only one or two years of her life.

She had trained under the famous Matron Bullwinkel; had she still been single at the outbreak of WW2, she would most probably have volunteered along with the matron and those with whom she worked and trained.

Shortly after attending the 1994 ANZAC day dawn service she was admitted to hospital, lapsing into a coma and died three days later.

RICHARD HACKETT - JONES



We got a preview of Christmas in the USA when we were there in November. It seems that Christmas comes as part of a trifecta of cultural celebrations that are highlights of the year. To me they embody qualities that seem to be built into the American psyche. Having a good time, lots of fun, plenty of special foods, seasonal change and with it, decorations in houses, family gatherings, and shopping.

We arrived on Halloween, at the end of October. Autumn colour changes, pumpkins, ghosts, ghouls, spider webs, trick or treat street parties. A month later it's Thanksgiving. A four day holiday, rare in the USA. The big turkey dinner, more elaborate than our Christmas dinners. The Black Friday shopping spree.

Then they head for Christmas a month later. Snow-laden Christmas trees, light displays of every imaginable kind, featuring Santa, elves, reindeer, gift

giving, and a strong emphasis on goodwill to all. Christmas Eve night seems to be the time that Christians go to their Christmas services, rather than on the 25th. And of course, it's cold. In many environments, the word Christmas (and its link to the birth of Jesus) is disappearing: greeting cards, advertising, television, the shops. Instead, I saw slogans like Happy Holidays, Celebrate the holiday season. While the Christian element of Christmas remains in these celebrations, I can see a trend to embrace a multiculturalism. Will we go that way in Australia?

MURRAY ROBERTSON

### Christmas in other cultures or Bits and Pieces of Christmas.

If the Gospel records of the first Christmas are read carefully, they will reveal an amalgam of all sorts of interesting details that would not normally be put together. For example, the human characters: Shepherds; Magi; Kings; Peasants; a baby; and an innkeeper, just to name a few. And then there are the extras like donkeys, sheep, food stalls and an overcrowded pub - and so the list goes on.

Here are a few bits and pieces of the Holy season that have come my way over the years.

In 1975 to 1978 my family served in Broome in W.A. which at that time had a population of 2200 people and a 400 mile dirt road cutting us off from the south and with floods often to the north. This meant that, except for emergencies, the town became isolated for three months.

During this period the townspeople drew closer together. The prime example was the Christmas Eve service. A tradition had developed that, on that night, the whole town would gather in the Catholic church for midnight mass and afterwards retire to the convent where refreshments were served to all and sundry. Suitably fed we would then retire to our own homes to snatch a few hours' sleep to be up early in the morning for Christmas day service in our own denomination.

Aboriginal observers of these events came to understand that they too had cultural seasonal events with a calendar more complex and just as interesting as those the Christians used.

Paddy Roe, a significant elder, said that the Christian calendar of two main events, Christmas and Easter, was eclipsed by the natural calendar that they read in nature. Mangroves of a certain type





indicated when the salmon would be running and the blossom on plants of the solanum family indicated when and where you could find bush fruits of certain types.

Broome blisters which infected the families of all races of people were indicated by particular signs and then concerned parents would have their children off to the ambulance station to have them coated in mercurochrome, or if you were aboriginal, then you would look for the supplejack tree, to make a concoction of the suffused bark which was just as effective, and less decorative, in treating this condition.

While their natural calendar had much more to contribute to life than this, this couple of stories is enough to get the picture of what they read in the world around them,

BOB PHILPOT, - *One time patrol padre*

Last year, I had been asked to help out, at Christmas, in a group of churches in the Scottish Highlands. I accepted the invitation, but realised I had no idea what this might mean. In the end, it meant taking the Christmas services at two churches on the same day, some half to three quarters of an hour's drive from where I was living.



A few things from this experience stand out for me.

Both services [at Skerray and Tongue] were on Christmas Eve - one at 3.00 pm and the other at 11.30 pm. There was nothing in the worship spaces to suggest anything special.

There were no services at all on Christmas Day.

However, each service was followed by a variety of Christmas refreshments. The service was really a celebration – in a way it led to a party almost – and allowed folk to gather, greet

and meet together. Nobody left and went home immediately worship finished. There was no thought of having to move on quickly to open presents or get to a big family get together. Totally un-hurried was my impression, creating a real sense of community.

There were a couple of surprises for me.

The first was that, as it was very cold, neither they nor I, wanted me to learn to drive in the snow on my way to the services – so, they said “if it snows, you stay home and we’ll do something ourselves”. I wondered what that might be [go straight to party mode?] but thankfully didn’t have to find out as it was a beautifully clear day and night.

The second surprise was finding my way into the eighteenth century church, just before midnight, walking through the graveyard and tomb stones that surround the church. Hadn’t experienced that before and found it a little bit daunting.

The third surprise was the way the people took to my introducing them to a new hymn – *Come and join the celebration* – we sang it at the start, at the finish of the service and again after the final Amen. Some of them even started to move to it and sway with it.

I was rewarded by a slow drive home through the Highlands on a clear, crisp moonlit night with no other traffic and a sparkling landscape and seascape around me to remind me of another way in which God is with us.

GRAHAM DEMPSTER

# STOP THE WORLD- I WANT TO GET OFF



Christmas, with all its ceremony, celebration and commercialism, can become very daunting and even over-powering. At times, the clamour seems to never stop – it just gets louder and louder and more demanding. It can, for some, develop the cry – “Stop the world. I want to get off.”

Now that’s not an original line – it comes from the title of a UK musical from the early 1960’s, but it does shout a message loudly and clearly – there are things in this world that drive some people to distraction and they are prepared to try anything – however beyond their experience – to try to overcome their torment.

For those of us for whom this happens during the Christmas season, how may we respond allowing us to get away from all the hoo haa that goes on around us? It is, perhaps, important for each of us to find a way to approach the perpetual noise of the busyness of the season.

One possible way, found among some old papers recently, and worth sharing, comes from a long time ago.

It is an abridged version of the five step daily Examen taught and practised by St Ignatius in the sixteenth century. It was a way of centring oneself, either on the things of God rather than those of the world, or, in fact, allowing the things of the world to be brought before God. Our choice.

Here are the five steps recommended for use at the end of each day:

- *Become aware of God’s presence*
- *Review the day with gratitude*
- *Pay attention to your emotions*
- *Choose one feature from the day and pray over it*
- *Look forward to tomorrow with prayer and thanksgiving*

This practice does not focus only on that which is good – it really allows all activity, including the busyness, noise etc to be part of the exercise and it allows for a range of emotions – not only that which we might consider ‘good’. We can raise the annoying and distracting stuff as well if we choose.

Now. While St Ignatius suggest this as an end of the day exercise, it could be used at any time during the day – and more than once, if we wanted.

Worth a try?



## KIDS' RIDS

HERE ARE A FEW SPECIAL RIDDLES FOR CHRISTMAS AND THE HOLIDAY SEASON

**What do they call Santa's helpers?**

*Subordinate Clauses.*

**If athletes get athlete's foot, what do astronauts get, especially around Christmas time?**

*Missile toe.*

**How does Santa Claus take pictures?**

*With his North Pole-aroid.*

**What do you call the fear of getting stuck while sliding down a chimney?**

*Santa Claus-trophobia.*

**What do sea monsters eat?**

*Fish and ships.*

**How do you stop a fish from smelling?**

*Put a peg on its nose.*

**What day of the week do fish hate most?**

*FRY day.*

**What lies in the bottom of the ocean and shivers?**

*A nervous wreck.*

**What would a friendly boy octopus say to a girl octopus?**

*"I want to hold your hand, hand, hand, hand, hand, hand, hand, hand."*

## A LITTLE LIGHT RELIEF FROM THE STRESS OF THE SEASON

The oldest computer can be traced back to Adam and Eve.

Surprise! Surprise!

It was an Apple.

But with extremely limited memory.

Just 1 Byte.

Then everything crashed.



I've reached the age where my train of thought often leaves the station without me.



GRANDPARENTS: So easy to operate, even a child can do it.



You come from dust; you will return to dust.

That's why I don't dust.

It could be someone I know.



I thought growing older would take a lot longer!



The healthiest part of the donut is the hole.

Unfortunately, you have to eat through the rest of the donut to get there.



## BLACKALL RANGE CHURCHES – CONGREGATIONAL ACTIVITIES

### MALENY

#### *Sundays*

9.45 am

4.30 pm

5.30-7.30

#### *Tuesdays*

7 am – 8 am

9 am – 3 pm

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#### *Wednesdays*

8.30 am

#### *Thursdays*

9 am – 3 pm

9.30 am

10.00 am

10.00 am

#### *Fridays*

1.30 pm

#### *Saturdays*

9.00 am

Worship Service held weekly; Holy Communion 1st Sunday of month  
Worship Service with focus on young people, all ages welcome  
Year 6 Youth Group P1

Silent Prayer: weekly, Moyra Jones 5494 2661

Church Office Open: Weekly, 9.00am to 3.00pm, 5429 6995

Band of Brothers: 1st and 3rd Tuesdays, time and venue vary,  
Roger Smith 5494 3784

Christian Meditation: Weekly, Rev Graham Dempster 5494 2594

Church Office Open: Weekly, 9.00am to 3.00pm, 5429 6995

Ladies Friendship Group: 3rd Thursday of month, Nancy Baker 5494 2961,  
Marnie McCallum 5499 9807

Ladies' R&R Book Club: 1st Thursday of month, Jocelyn Brooker 5494 3693

Ladies' MUCR Book Club: 1st Thursday of month, Karin Ellemor 5494 3379

Know Your Bible Group (KYB): weekly, Dorothy Tietze 5494 2486

Prayer Meeting: 2nd Saturday of month

### MONTVILLE

#### *Daily*

10 am – 3 pm

#### *Sundays*

8.15 am

#### *Tuesdays*

9.00 am

Reflection Gallery

Worship Service held weekly; Holy Communion 2nd Sunday of month

“Know Your Bible” at Flaxton, Margot Stuart, 5476 3777

### PALMWOODS

#### *Sundays*

10.00 am

1.00 pm

10.00 am

#### *Daily*

8.00 am

English Worship Service held weekly

Tongan Worship Service held weekly

Combined Service held on 2nd Sunday of the month with Holy Communion

Soil and Soul Community Garden open every day.

Prayer in the Soil and Soul Community Garden

### OTHER MEETINGS

Pastoral Care: Quarterly in February, May, August and November at Maleny,  
Dorothy Tietze 5494 2486

One Church Council: Quarterly meetings. Merilyn Milton (Secretary) 5435 2595

Maleny Home “Connect” Groups: Stuart and Jan Craig 5494 2990

