

Leaflet



Greenbank Parish Church
Braidburn Terrace, EH10 6ES
No 648 December 2015 / January 2016

Pulpit Diary

- Dec 4 Friday**
7.30pm Pre-communion service
- Dec 6 Second Sunday in Advent**
9.00am Communion
10.30am Communion
(Spectrum and Springboard meet as usual)
3.00pm Communion (Braid Room)
- Dec 13 Third Sunday in Advent**
10.30am Lessons and Carols
(Spectrum and Springboard – end of first term)
3.00pm Blue Christmas Service
(for those coping with loss)
- Dec 20 Fourth Sunday in Advent**
10.30am All Age Gift Service
4.00pm Carol Party
- Dec 24 Christmas Eve**
7.00pm All Age Service
11.30pm Watchnight Service
(Carol singing from 11.10pm)
- Dec 25 Christmas Day**
10.30am All Age Service
- Dec 27**
10.30am Morning Worship
- 2016**
- Jan 3**
10.30am Morning Worship
(Spectrum and Springboard – start of second term)
- Jan 10**
10.30am Morning Worship
- Jan 17**
10.30am Morning Worship
- Jan 24**
10.30am Morning Worship
- Jan 31**
10.30am Morning Worship
- Feb 7**
9.30am First Sunday Service
led by Kirk Session
10.30am Morning Worship

Minister's Letter

Dear Friends

Recently I came across a painting by Albrecht Altdorfer. Altdorfer was born in 1480 in Regensburg in Germany and he inherited an interest in art from his Father. He became a painter, engraver and architect of the Renaissance. Throughout his life he was also active as a leading politician in the City at a time of great upheaval – the Reformation was sweeping through Europe. In 1526 Altdorfer became City Architect and in 1533 he was a member of the City Council which decided to adopt Lutheranism. Many of Altdorfer's paintings and engravings included biblical scenes. One of his paintings, the Holy Night Nativity, painted in 1511, shows Mary and Joseph and Jesus sheltering in a ruined building. Not one part of this building remains untouched by ruin and decay. Walls are falling down. Most of the roof has disappeared. The new family hide behind a broken-down wall. Indeed the family seem to shrink to secondary significance while the light shines on the building itself in all its decay and corruption.

On looking at this painting, we might wonder what Altdorfer had in mind when he wielded his paintbrush. What does the ruined building represent? Does it depict a Church brought to its knees by corruption or division? Does it speak of a broader malaise in civic life? Or does it point to the condition of humanity itself? A few years after this painting was completed, Altdorfer would be implicated in the expulsion of the Jewish community from Regensburg and the destruction of the synagogue and the building of a church in its place.

Whatever the intention of the artist, surely today this picture speaks to us of the presence of the Christchild in the midst of an overwhelmingly broken world. Over the next few weeks in Church we will be reflecting in different ways on the biblical story that is at the heart of our Christmas celebrations. And we will hear the words of the angel, "Do not be afraid!"

Do not be afraid - 365 times we find these words or words with a similar meaning ap-



pearing in the Bible – that is once for every day of the year. But they are particularly prevalent in Luke's account of the birth of Jesus. "Do not be afraid". And Luke also spells out to some shepherds why we should not be afraid. "Do not be afraid; for see I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people; to you is born this day in the City of David a Saviour who is the

Messiah, the Lord." (Luke 2:10)

In Jesus Christ God entered our world. He was born into poverty. His family were forced to flee for refuge to Egypt to escape the violent atrocities of Herod. He faced ridicule, persecution by the religious leaders, endured an unjust trial, a horrific death. In all these ways and more the Son of God shared our human vulnerability, lived our human life and died our human death, so that we might in turn receive the healing and wholeness of his risen life. In the vulnerability of an infant, God comes among his people - Emmanuel, God with us, - and things will never be the same again.

"Do not be afraid" – those words lie at the very heart of the Christmas story. And still today we hear them. We hear them whispered softly to those who are grieving. We hear them reassuring an overwhelmed mother and father wrestling with the challenges of parenthood. We hear them penetrate our anxieties about the future – our own future, the future of our community, the future of the world. We hear them spoken defiantly in the midst of the distress caused by terrorist atrocities. We hear them reminding us constantly that in the midst of our brokenness God is with us, and that because this is true, the way to healing and wholeness is thrown open for all the world.

Those words "Do not be afraid" are spoken for all of us and I hope that you will hear them for yourself and find in them the peace that Christmas offers.

I look forward to welcoming you to our Christmas services and other events

With warmest wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

Alison I Swindells

YACHT Campaign

The YACHT Committee would like to thank everyone who supported and took part in the fundraising events which took place over 26th September to 4th October 2015.

The Ceilidh was attended by 200 people, with many families enjoying the fine playing from the Greenbank Buskers; the stirring bagpipes and drums; and the excellent musical performances; the dancing – and of course the stovies, macaroni and treats from the kitchen.

This raised £1,704 for the campaign.

Then the following week the Auction of Sale and Talents found some brisk and generous bidding for many of the wide variety of the lots on offer – we hope that both offerers and purchasers will enjoy the fun and friendship (and in some cases the learning experiences!) which will arise as the bids are redeemed over the coming weeks and months.

This event raised £5,564 for the campaign.

At that time the Exhibition of Photographs took place with the winning entries as chosen by the judges revealed – many remarked on the high quality and rich variety of the entries and

there was much discussion on the pictures chosen for the Greenbank 2016 Calendar! If nothing else the Greenbank congregation have shown themselves to be far travelled!

Sales of the Calendar are ongoing but at the time of writing the profit

on sales to go to campaign funds amounts to £735 so far.

On Harvest Sunday the Service included celebration of the 70th Anniversary of the founding of Quest at Greenbank (which became the present day QII) with some fond memories being recalled. The picture taken at the Ceilidh of members past and present of Quest/QII was a very visible reminder that a strong youth presence in the Church leads to a strong congregation – and underlined the worth of the YACHT campaign.

So a good week in fundraising terms (**total over the week £8,003**); in having fun; and in being reminded of the purpose of the YACHT appeal. Thanks again to all who took part.

Jim Young



Pictures from the Ceilidh evening



Former members of Quest and QII present at the Ceilidh

Lent/Easter Appeal 2016

Members of the Congregation are invited to nominate local charities to be recipients of monies raised in next year's Lent/Easter Appeal. Nominations can be sent to me via the Church Office, left for me in the appropriate pigeonhole in the Main Hall, or emailed to alandfio@yahoo.co.uk before **Tuesday 5th January**.

Selection of a nominated charity (or charities) will be made at the January meeting of the Congregational Board.

Alan Ramage

Clerk to the Congregational Board

Coffee Group News

Thank you to all the coffee and tea drinkers after the 10.30am Service. With your donations, after expenses, this year I was able to write cheques for £500 to SLA, £500 to help with the cost of new flooring in the Gents' toilet in the Main Hall corridor and £200 to the Edinburgh *Help the Homeless* group.

As ever I am very grateful to Pauline Walker and Fiona Grant for all their support throughout the year.

Isobel Thom

Coffee Morning



**Morningside Parish Church Hall
(Foot of Braid Road)**

**On Saturday 5th December 2015
10am-12 noon**

- Home Baking and Jam
- Fairtrade Christmas Cards & Crafts
- Books
- Morningside Heritage Association will display photos of old Morningside by Bill Smith
- Admission £3 (children £1) includes:
 - Refreshments
 - Coffee, Tea, Juice, Christmas Pies, Scones, biscuits

Please bake for the Baking Stall!

Extreme Weather in Pakistan

We've all complained about the weather this summer and it seems as though the Scottish sun has rarely come out from behind the clouds. For many of our partners in Asia, however, summer has brought about extreme weather.

June saw Pakistan brought to a standstill due to an extreme heatwave, which mostly affected Sindh province and its capital city, Karachi. Approximately 2,000 people lost their lives from dehydration or heatstroke and countless livestock died.

Sindh province suffered from more extreme weather in July and August as floods devastated the country. Starting in mid-July heavy rains continued for weeks and it has been reported that 917,791 people have been affected and 173 have lost

their lives, with many more suffering injuries across Pakistan.

Sindh was particularly affected, because it sits at the tail end of the Indus River so water flows there from all over the country. In addition to the heavy monsoon rain, the persistent melting of glaciers in Diamer District added to the rise in river levels.

Our partner *Community World Service Asia* has been meeting the needs of people in Sindh by distributing monthly food packages to families who have been displaced. They also established a water treatment plant in Ghokti which provided treated, clean water to 5,000 people affected by the floods, on a daily basis, for a month.

Just a month ago, at the end of October there was another earthquake affecting the area bordering on Afghanistan.

Our next regular stall will be on **28th February**, which is the start of Fairtrade Fortnight 2016.

World Mission Committee

Recordings



Listen to a recording of the service – this is appreciated by those who find it difficult to get to church. Monthly CDs can be delivered.

Weekly recordings can be emailed.



Please request these services through your elder, or email the church office (greenbankchurch@btconnect.com), or speak to David Ferguson (Tel 445 2838). Please could elders consider whether members of their district might appreciate this service?

David Ferguson

Work Party

This year the ladies of the Work Party have again produced many knitted items for charities.

Hats have gone to the homeless via Blythswood and Bethany Trust, knee rugs to Morlich House, baby hats to Simpson's, and sackfuls of jumpers, cardigans, hats, mitts and baby blankets to the Edinburgh Clothing Store and Children 1st.



We are very grateful to those who have donated yarn – machine-washable Double Knitting please.

We now have twelve ladies who regularly attend our meetings and another eight "outworkers". If you would like to join us, come along to one of our meetings. We start again on Thursday 7th January 2016, at 2.30 pm in the Hermitage Room. Or contact me:

Anne Oxbrow



Induction

Professor David Fergusson, the Principal of New College at Edinburgh University and a member of Greenbank Parish Church, was installed as a Chaplain-in-Ordinary to the Queen at a ceremony at Greenbank on 4th November 2015, in the presence of The Chapel Royal and a congregation composed of members of Greenbank and many other well-wishers including several of Prof Fergusson's former students. The New College choir sang the Introit and Anthem.

This prestigious role dates back to the 15th century and is today largely a ceremonial honour with chaplains taking part in formal



The Very Reverend John Chalmers, the Right Reverend Dr Angus Morrison (current Moderator), Reverend Professor David Fergusson, and the Very Reverend Professor Ian Torrance (Dean of the Chapel Royal)

state occasions and conducting services at significant national events.

Church of Scotland Principal Clerk, the Very Rev John Chalmers, who is also one of the Queen's Chaplains, preached a sermon on the qualities of leadership. He said, "We need the leadership of women and men who are recognised for their devotion to duty, who have earned the respect of their peers, who have demonstrated excellence in their field, but who, all the while, remain humble and who exercise their leadership

in the interest of others. Most particularly in the interest of those who have no voice, who have no status and who have no advocate."

Professor Fergusson's ministry began more than 30 years ago. He was ordained at St Mungo's in Cumbernauld where he served as associate minister while working as a part-time lecturer at Glasgow University. Having held the chair of Systematic Theology in the University of Aberdeen from 1990, he came to Edinburgh as Professor of Divinity in 2000. Professor Fergusson, who was appointed Principal of New College in 2008, is a fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the British Academy.

Extracted from the Church of Scotland website

Gift Service

Sunday 20th December

Each Christmas, our children and young people bring presents to the Gift Service. These are given to children in difficult circumstances in our own city and, sadly, the need is great.

We'd love to have a large collection of gifts to pass on and so we're asking everyone to join in! We know the presents are appreciated.

Please bring any gifts to the Service, preferably in a gift bag, with a detachable tag saying whether the gift is suitable for a boy or girl and what age/s it is suitable for. The age range requested is from 3 up to 14 (slightly changed from previous years).

Many thanks,

Janet Ferguson, on behalf of the YES Group (Tel 445 2838)



For information about church organisations, please contact the Church Office (Mon–Fri, 8.30am–12.00 noon, 1.30pm–3.00pm):
Mrs Virginia Johnston

tel and fax: 0131 447 9969

e-mail: greenbankchurch@btconnect.com

The pastoral team can be contacted through the Church Office:

Rev Alison Swindells

tel and fax: 0131 447 4032

email: alisonswindells@blueyonder.co.uk

Rev W. Peter Graham

tel: 0131 445 5763

Youth Minister: Rev Bill Stone

tel: 07883 815 598

email: billstoneiii@gmail.com

28 Nov
to
4 Dec

Christmas
The **Open door**  **Festive**
Week 

Baking Preserves Mincemeat Muffin Mix
Crackers Decorations
(Orders taken for our famous Table Decorations)

420 Morningside Road Tel 447 9757

As well as welcoming you along to support the event and buy some Christmas goodies, we are also seeking donations of baking. These can be delivered on any day from **28 November to 4 December**, to **The Open Door**, 420 Morningside Road, between 10am and 4pm. Preserves are also welcome: they can be delivered at any time from now.

Very many thanks from The Open Door fundraising team.

Book Review

When I Pray What Does God Do?

David Wilkinson

ISBN 978 0 85721 604 5

Lion Hudson, £8.99

I was drawn to this volume as David Wilkinson, a theologian, is a scientist by training. He is not scared to ask basic and challenging questions about what happens when we pray. He does not try to provide a definitive answer as to how God answers prayer; it is more a record of how Christians who want to take the Bible and science seriously think about these things.

In exploring several popular myths about prayer created by various teachings or cultural assumptions, the author encounters some key questions about the nature of faith and the relationship of God with the world as described by science. He examines the way in which miracles are perceived and how science has been used to argue against their possibility. He explains the scientific worldview of Darwin and Newton then moves on to discuss how recent developments in quantum and chaos theory may be used to explain some miracles. However, God works in, through, and beyond physical laws to do unusual things for explicit purposes.

David Wilkinson includes a helpful chapter on how to pray, explaining many of the phrases in the Lord's Prayer, which is a model for how we should understand God and his purposes in the world. Sometimes when prayer is unanswered we come to a new understanding of who God is, but some people are so hurt in the experience of unanswered prayer that they reject God completely. He encourages us to listen to stories of unanswered prayer and help others to rediscover the Biblical God.

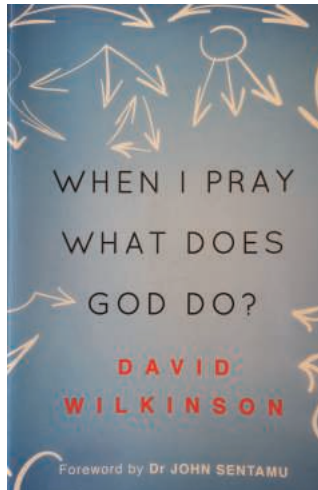
The author gives examples from the Bible of people asking God to act in specific ways and how their actions became the answer to their prayers. God sustains the structures and laws of the universe, transforms this creation into a new creation and transforms the person who prays to collaborate in building the kingdom. He could be answering some prayers through working in the hidden arena of the quantum world and in chaotic systems. He could also transcend his normal ways of working for specific purposes. There may be other models of God's action that we will learn about in the future.

Joan Ritchie

Yacht Campaign – Children's Talents

At the end of September, 22 of the children attending Spectrum and Springboard each received £5 and were asked to use this 'Talent' money to raise funds for the Yacht Campaign. So far, this has produced a total of £162.71. Most of the children have raised money from Bake Stalls, with car washing also featuring as well as Katie Pink holding a Recorder Concert. Well done to all the children involved (and their parents!)

Bill Stone



Wanted: Fresh Start needs Hit Squad Volunteers, Cooking Class Volunteers, and Gardening Volunteers. To find out more about the Hit Squads use the website at the end of the article, or ask John Ferguson. For the Cooking Classes, ask Janet Ferguson.

Good quality items for Fresh Start will be accepted on **24th January and 21st February 2016** at the Sunday Service (table in Main Hall).

Here is a full list of the items needed:

Dishes and Crockery

Dinner plates, side plates, bowls, cutlery, mugs, glass tumblers, tea-towels.

Pots and Pans, etc.

Pots with lids, milk pans, frying pans, plastic boxes, cooking utensils, can openers, potato peelers, wooden spoons.

Cleaning Things

Washing-up basins, washing-up liquid, toilet cleaner, toilet rolls, hand soap, toothbrushes, toothpaste, dust pans and brushes, pedal bin liners, rubbish bags, all-purpose cleaner, laundry tablets.

Bed Linen, Towels, etc.

Single flat sheets, double flat sheets, single duvet covers, double duvet covers, pillow cases, blankets, duvets, bed covers, towels, face cloths, bath mats, curtains, rugs.

Small Household Electrical Items (not TVs)

Pick up a leaflet on a Fresh Start Sunday, see www.freshstartweb.org.uk or telephone 476 7741, to find out more about Fresh Start.

Alison Ambler

Friendship Club

Trekking to Machu Picchu at 2,430m (7,970 feet) is indeed the challenge of a lifetime, taken in memory of her husband and as a Thank You to the Marie Curie Hospice, by Julie Read, an Edinburgh GP who is going to tell us on 2nd December how she accomplished her ambition. Kathleen is following, on 9th December, with a seasonal selection of music, then on 16th December we will be entertained at our Party with *Magic at Christmas* by Bill McLeod, a past president of the Edinburgh Magic Club and the Scottish Association of Magical Societies who has lectured in Canada and Australia. Who knows what excitement awaits us?

We start the New Year on 13th January here in Edinburgh with a Ranger from Historic Scotland telling us about the *Flora, Fauna and History of Holyrood Park*. Piano music features in Kathleen's musical afternoon on 20th January under the heading of *Piano Features*. Hamish Coghill, a well-known and very knowledgeable Edinburgh speaker on a vast range of subjects will, on 27th January, help us to find *Lost Edinburgh*.

Val Smart



Guild Notes†

The service that we led at 9.30am on 1st November was well attended and we appreciated the support of the congregation. The talk with slides and examples of cashmere shawl and Paisley patterns at our meeting on 3rd November was fascinating and, as I write, we look forward to the joint meeting with Morningside and Fairmilehead Guilds at Morningside Parish Church on 17th November when Marjorie Paton, a former National Convenor of the Guild, will talk about her life after her term of office.



Our December programme opens on 1st December with an illustrated talk on the history of Scottish cooking in Scotland by Olive Geddes who curated the recent exhibition “*Lifting the lid*” at the National Library of Scotland. The following Tuesday at 7pm we shall have our Christmas Party – a buffet meal with in-house entertainment (for catering purposes this is restricted to Guild members only). On 5th January we hold the first coffee morning of the year, from 10.30am to 12 noon in the Main Hall, and on 19th January we are having an afternoon meeting at 2.30pm at which the Rev Peter Graham’s talk is entitled “*Go in Peace*”; this is the subject of our theme for the year within the overall National Guild strategy “*Be bold, be strong*” and can be viewed from a number of different aspects. On 2nd February at 7.30pm we shall learn about one of the National Guild projects, Christian Aid’s programme in Bolivia “*Caring for Mother Earth*”, for which we shall be holding a fundraising event on 16th February.

With the exception of the Christmas party all our meetings and the January coffee morning are open to members of the congregation and friends and so we welcome visitors. Moreover, we hope that many of you who read this *Leaflet* will come to support the fundraising event on 16th February which is part of the Guild’s outreach beyond its members and the congregation. Further details of that event will be posted nearer the time on the noticeboards, in the Sunday pew intimations in the February *Leaflet* and on the Greenbank church website.

The National Guild has recently developed new methods of communication and a revised multi-colour format for its printed newsletter, and has just gone live with a monthly e-bulletin. Facebook and other modern media forms of communication are also being promoted along with some new merchandise, including aprons (which will be given their first public outing by members who are serving coffee after the service on 15th November and will be seen at future coffee mornings). There is also an updated presence on the Church of Scotland website.

Kathleen Patrick

†The paper version of the December/January Leaflet contains an old Guild article, printed in error. The above article is the correct one.

Have you looked at the website?
www.greenbankchurch.org

December Issue of *Life and Work*

‘On the First Day of Christmas’

The Rev Colin Dempster explores the religious roots of the well-known Christmas song.

The Pain of Loneliness

The work of the charity ALTERnativity, offering a different Christmas.

Lemon Ice Cream

An Advent-themed story from poet and author Kenneth Steven

Behind the Scenes

A Lanarkshire teenager’s work experience with a Church of Scotland minister

‘It’s a Miracle I am Here’

Jackie Macadam learns about the work of Glasgow City Mission in dealing with the increasing numbers of asylum seekers, relating one man’s harrowing journey from Africa to Scotland

Bombed, Rescued – then Arrested

Bruce Cannon relates the untold story of a Church of Scotland chaplain 75 years on from his escape from a sinking ship during World War 2.

70 Peaks for Christian Aid

Thomas Baldwin joins the walkers tackling Schiehallion, the final event of Christian Aid Scotland’s 70th anniversary 70 Munros challenge.

A High View of Prayer

In the final part of his reflections on the book of James, the Rev Dr Martin Fair considers the power of prayer.

The Superhero Youth Room

Jackie Macadam reports on a mural with a difference at an Ayrshire church.

Plus news, letters, reviews and crosswords, all for just £2.

Online: Visit www.lifeandwork.org, or find us on Facebook and Twitter.



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447 9969 OR VISIT WWW.GREENBANKCHURCH.ORG

Congregational Register

*Omitted from the Online
version of the Leaflet*

Welcome Teams

December

- 6 **John Rutherford**, David Allan, Richard Denison, Caroline Kehoe, Anne Kinnear, John Mowat, Jean Roynon-Jones
- 13 **Ian Thom**, Keith Clark, Ray Dely, Catherine Hardie, Elizabeth Htet-Khin, Anne Oxbrow, Isobel Thom, Kay Ellis, Charles Black, Greig Scott
- 20 **Donald King**, Brian Barron, Walter Crosby, Donald MacLeod, Roderick Morrison, Mairi Stevenson, Jim Young, Kathryn Sangster
- 27 **Rosemary McCulloch**, Rona Ferguson, Fiona Grant, Christina Morrow, Alison Murison, Malcolm Reid, Joan Ritchie, Toby Tucker, Alastair Ross

2016

January

- 3 **Keith Winton**, Eileen Campbell, Richard Dunbar, Clifford Hastings, Chris Horne, Doris Laing, Enid Mowat, Robin Nimmo
- 10 **Stuart Sanders**, Moira Davidson, John Murison, Jenny Wright, Sandy Cameron, Carrie Reid, Moira Land, Julia Dunbar
- 17 **John Ritchie**, Eric Brown, Rachel Cadell, Ralph Davidson, Susan Inch, Gill Sweetman, Ian Thomson, Susan Jackman
- 24 **Alan Armit**, Edith Armit, Louise Coghill, Hugh Cowan, Iain Davidson, David Easton, Susan Black, Malcolm Watters, Nora Kellock, Elizabeth Mackay
- 31 **John George**, Rhian Ferguson, Mark Fergusson, Tony Foster, Alastair Hunter, Hazel Macaulay, Kathleen Patrick, Diana Teasdale, Dorothy Whitehead

February

- 7 **John Rutherford**, David Allan, Richard Denison, Caroline Kehoe, Anne Kinnear, John Mowat, Jean Roynon-Jones

Coffee Rota

December

- 6 Communion
13 Susan Inch & Chris Horne (D48 & D37)
20 Library
27 Teachers' Group

2016

January

- 3 Help the Homeless Group
10 Anne Oxbrow (D23) & Janet Walker
17 Moira Davidson (D31B)
24 Gillian Sweetman (D22)
31 Wednesday Badminton

February

- 7 SLA



Crèche Rota

December

- | | | |
|----|-----------------|------------------|
| 6 | Lorna Htet-Khin | Shona Murray |
| 13 | Ailsa Cameron | Vivien Hutchison |
| 20 | Lucy Teall | Hazel McLachlan |
| 27 | Carrie Reid | Ailsa Cameron |

2016

January

- | | | |
|----|-----------------|-----------------|
| 3 | Isobel Thom | Jenny Wright |
| 10 | Ailsa Cameron | Janet Ferguson |
| 17 | Lorna Perris | Eileen McKinnon |
| 24 | Lorna Htet-Khin | Ailsa Cameron |
| 31 | Hazel McLachlan | Pauline Walker |

February

- | | | |
|---|---------------|--------------|
| 7 | Ailsa Cameron | Jenny Wright |
|---|---------------|--------------|



Flower Rota

Provided by

December

- 6 Paddy Bowman
13,20,27 Christmas

2016

January

- | | | |
|----|------------------|------------------|
| 3 | Christmas | |
| 10 | Ishbel Clark | Diana Hastings |
| 17 | Sinclair Family | Win Kerr |
| 24 | Mackay Family | Margery Goodban |
| 31 | Christine Willis | Rosemary Collier |

February

- | | | |
|---|--------------|---------------|
| 7 | Innes Family | Janet Edwards |
|---|--------------|---------------|

Delivered by

- Enid Mowat



Material for the February *Leaflet* should be delivered to the Church Office or to the Editors' pigeon-hole in the Main Hall by **Sunday 17th January**, or sent by e-mail by **9am on Tuesday 19th January** to greenbankleaflet@googlemail.com

To make contact with any of the organisations referenced in this *Leaflet*, please use the telephone number given, if there is one. Otherwise please contact the Church Office. Website: www.greenbankchurch.org

CONCERNING WORSHIP – THE CHRISTIAN YEAR

The sacred year has now revolved, accepted by the Lord... we sometimes sing in an Advent hymn. This serves as a reminder that the Church follows a calendar of its own, distinct from the January to December year of the Gregorian calendar or the tax year which begins on 6th April every year. It is based on the festivals of Easter, Pentecost and Christmas, but begins on the first day of Advent. Sundays have traditionally been numbered through Advent, after Christmas and after Epiphany, through Lent, after Easter, and after Pentecost. The Christian Year provides a framework for the celebration and proclamation of what God has done in and through Christ.

Just as Christian worship itself has evolved over many centuries, so too the Christian calendar as we now have it is the outcome of a long process. The first Christians were Jews and had grown up with a number of annual feasts and festivals. These included the Feast of Unleavened Bread or Passover, the Feast of Weeks (later known as Pentecost) and the Feast of Booths. Although there was an agricultural element in these, each kept before worshippers part of the story of Israel's pilgrimage with God and commemorated what God had done for them. In common with the Jews of old, Christians take time and history seriously: it is through actual events in historical time that God is revealed. Salvation is accomplished by God at definite times and places.

Easter is the Feast of feasts, the greatest and oldest of all the Christian festivals. It is the time when Christians, having followed the last days of Jesus in Holy Week, celebrate God's mighty act of raising Jesus. According to the gospels he was killed three days before the Resurrection, around the time of the Passover, when Jews celebrated their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. So Christians wanted to have their feast day around the same time as the Jewish festival. Its date was determined by the first full moon following the vernal equinox – the spring day when night and day are exactly the same length. The date of Easter is still calculated according to the date of the full moon. As a general rule, it falls on the first Sunday following the first full moon after 21st March. There have been various controversies about the day of the week on which Easter should be observed and about the method of deciding its date. In Britain, an Easter Act was passed in 1928 fixing the holiday as "the first Sunday after the second Saturday in April". The law remains on the statute book but it has never been enforced. It looks as though Easter will remain a moveable feast.

Easter was a popular time for baptisms. Those who sought baptism had to undergo a period of instruction. This eventually developed into a season of preparation for Easter. Lent is the period of forty weekdays before Easter. The Sundays in Lent are not counted, because every Sunday is a little Easter, a day of celebration and joy rather than of introspection and sadness. In the early days of the Church there was a short period of fasting leading up to Easter, but this was gradually extended to correspond with the forty days Jesus spent fasting in the wilderness. The only vestige of the formerly rigid observance of a time of strict self-discipline is the

giving up of something for Lent.

After Easter the celebrations continue for seven weeks until Pentecost. Pentecost was originally a Jewish celebration, the Feast of Weeks. It came fifty days after Passover. For Jews it marked the giving of Law at Mount Sinai, which had been fundamental to the definition of Israel as God's people. According to the Book of Acts, it was at Pentecost that the Holy Spirit came to followers of Jesus, in effect bringing the Church into existence as the new people of God by the creation of a Spirit-filled community.

At Christmas Christians rejoice at the birth of our Lord. Although the exact date of Christ's birth is unknown, for nearly 1700 years it has been marked on 25th December. It is first mentioned in a calendar which reflects what was done in Rome in AD 336. The date was probably chosen to oppose the relatively new pagan feast of the Birth of the Unconquered Sun, a midwinter celebration already taking place on that day.

As Christmas began to rival Easter in importance, it acquired its own preparatory period. Advent begins on the Sunday nearest St Andrew's Day (30th November). Although it is very often seen as simply a period of preparation for Christmas, taken up by special services, as a countdown to Christmas marked by the opening of doors on Advent calendars, it was in the past a much more

solemn period, being regarded as a season of preparation not only for Christmas but also for the second Coming of Christ at the Last Day. The traditional themes of the season were death, judgement, heaven and hell.

Epiphany may be an older festival than Christmas. And it has a deeper meaning. Its somewhat cumbersome alternative title of *The Manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles* may remind us that it has to do with the revealing of our Lord's true nature. This was declared in three vivid signs: at his baptism in the Jordan, in the first miracle recorded by St

John, the story of water into wine, and the Adoration of the Magi, the shadowy wise men from the East who visited the infant Jesus. Nowadays it marks a new start after the Christmas break, as the Church begins to reflect upon the consequences of Christ's coming among us.

In the Church of Scotland this annual cycle of remembrance and celebration has not always been followed. The observance of the Christian Year ceased in the Church of Scotland at the time of the Reformation in the 16th century. However, by the early 20th century there was a renewed interest in the Christian calendar. By adopting, developing and following it, the Church is enabled to glorify God through recalling what God has done and continues to do through the Holy Spirit. Season by season, worship keeps alive the memory of God's marvellous acts in creation and redemption: our acts of remembrance bring the original events back to us with all their meaning. Far from being merely interesting data from the past, they come alive for us and can become part of our personal history. Above all, the Christian Year is a constant means of grace, affirming what God does for us and bringing us ever closer to God through Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.

