

From the movies

'We elves try to stick to the four main food groups: candy, candy canes, candy corn, and syrup.' —*Elf*

'Seeing isn't believing. Believing is seeing.' —*The Santa Clause*

'Oh, Christmas isn't just a day, it's a frame of mind.' —*Miracle on 34th Street*

'What if Christmas, he thought, doesn't come from a store. What if Christmas...perhaps... means a little bit more?' —*Dr Suess's How the Grinch Stole Christmas*

'Blast this Christmas music. It's joyful and triumphant.' —*How the Grinch Stole Christmas*

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Saints Alive

Newsletter of All Saints Anglican Church
Northcote
Parish of South Darebin

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Reflections on the Seasons

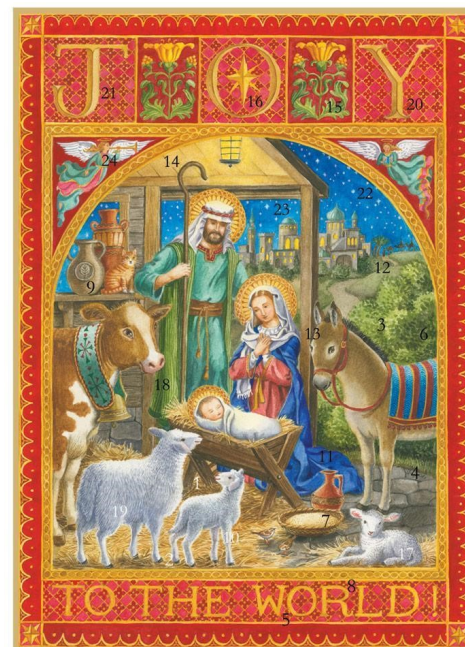
Fr Barry Fernley

As we begin the season which helps us prepare for the One who was described as the King of peace, we remind ourselves of God our Father who continues to renew our lives as well as the life of our parish. How then can we as Christian people celebrate what is an essential part and story of our faith? What do the seasons of Advent and Christmas mean today?

For the Church, Advent was originally a period of reflection, repentance, fasting and a time to prepare to welcome the Advent of the king (Jesus Christ). However, a different emphasis for the season of Advent has gradually unfolded and it has come to be celebrated more in terms of expectation or anticipation. Rather than a time of mourning and fasting, Advent is celebrated as a time of joy and happiness as we await the coming of the Christ child – born in a humble stable to a young couple who were probably what we would call today 'engaged'. His birth in the stable would have had its risks, particularly with the young age of the mother, the smells, lack of hygiene and the animals around!

Perhaps one of the main characters of the Advent season is John the Baptist – the one who was called to prepare the way for the coming of the Christ child. He is a strange and enigmatic figure whose main messages to the people of Israel were 'Repent' and 'Prepare the way of the Lord'. We need this message for the modern church of today.

Could I suggest that during the Advent season you go to your Bible and read the story of what some have called 'the reason for the season'? The ancient Jewish people never forgot to tell the story of the great exodus from Egypt fleeing from oppression



Advent Calendar
Casparionline.com/products

and their pilgrimage to the Promised Land. I realise that many of us have heard it all before but it is a very important part of our Christian story. It is so easy to get caught up in the 'hype' and rush of Christmas preparations and so my suggestion is that during the Advent and Christmas season you spend time simply 'stopping' and quietly pondering what the Christmas message means for you – simply being still can be both refreshing and helpful to our souls. The Christmas story itself is a simple story with a profound meaning not only for those of us who call ourselves Christians but also for the whole world.

We as Australian Christians have much to be thankful for but often fail to recognise it or we take things for granted. Let us be thankful for all God has given us – why not as you get up in the morning remember something you can be grateful or thankful for and repeat it again in the evening. There is that wonderful verse which

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Reflections — continued from page 1

*"I have known people
who speak of
Christmas Day as just
another day in their
lives. Do we know
anyone like this and
is there anything we
might be able to do?"*

says 'Be still and know that I am God'. Often it is in that silence and waiting that God speaks to us 'in the still small voice of silence'.

The significance of Advent is that it is in the Church's year a penitential season and so a further suggestion is that we do some penitential act – whether that be making a special offering to the Christmas Bowl Appeal or some other cause which is dear to our hearts. It may also be some special act of kindness to another person less fortunate than we are, doing it in a humble and perhaps anonymous way.

For the world Christmas is a time of great commercial enterprise and the business and retail world will speak about it in terms of dollars and cents. We could buy mince pies back in October and several Councils had Christmas decorations along the streets in November. Food, presents, decorations and a round of social activities – and Advent almost becomes blurred as we prepare for our celebration of Christmas. Life becomes an increasing rush – just think about trying to find a parking spot in your local shopping precinct! People tend to lose patience at this time and often will become angry and abusive. It is no surprise to see on the many advertisements and commercials that there is no mention of the reason for this season's celebration – the birth of Jesus.

For many years at Christmas the shops and shopping centres used to play carols over the

public address system but now the carols are mostly silent. What a pity this has happened! It is often blamed on our multicultural society; in fact the people who would be most offended would be those who consider themselves non-believers or 'no religion at all' and not the people of other faiths who actually enjoy joining in our celebrations along with their own traditions.

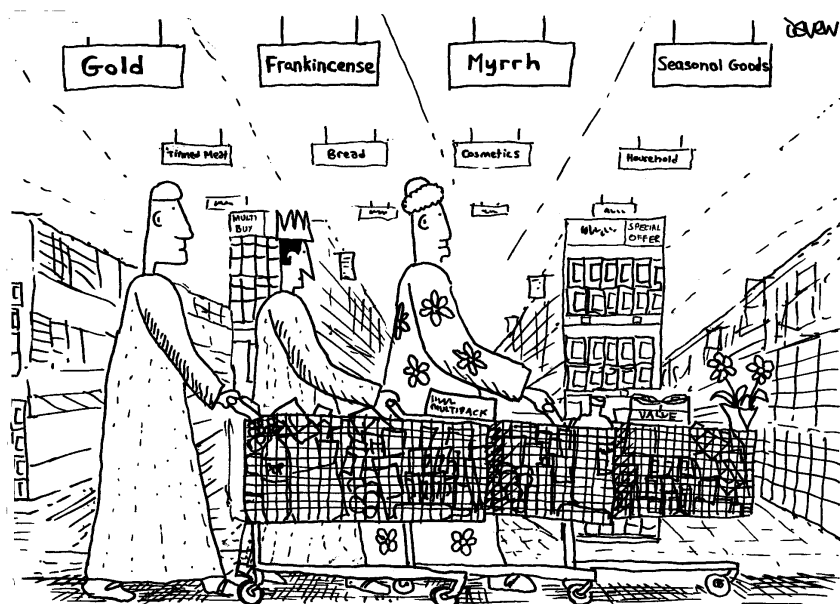
How then can we prepare in a meaningful way to celebrate Christmas? For some people Christmas particularly is a time of loneliness and despair and I have known people who speak of Christmas Day as just another day in their lives. Do we know anyone like this and is there anything we might be able to do?

Finally, one of the great themes of Christmas is joy. Isaac Watts (1674–1748) wrote these beautiful words of the carol that we often sing at this time:

Joy to the world – the Lord has come!
let earth receive her king,
let every heart prepare him room
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven, and heaven and nature sing!

My hope and prayer is that you will indeed enjoy your Christmas in whatever way you choose to observe this great season of the Church's year.

May you all have a blessed, holy and joyous Christmas.



Thar she blows!

In response to another parishioner's whale watching activities, Jenifer Watson recalled an adventure of her own

I have been on a whale-watching tour years ago. It was up the east coast. I can't remember exactly where, but I remember the boat and the whales and the rough sea. The friend I was touring with, now dead long ago, went downstairs to the covered cabin area, as did most of the 'tourists'. I went out on deck into the fresh, strong wind. When we left the wharf there were about twelve people clinging on there. The wind became stronger, and one man's glasses blew off. Most of the outside clingers-on quickly moved under cover. I stayed outside because I thought the wind was too strong to battle through. Next thing, my hat blew off into the water. I was on my way to the cabin and I turned around to enter, looked at the faces of the passengers, and saw that they all had little bowls and were throwing up. Their faces were white. I was not affected and had forgotten people can be sea sick in rough weather. I saw whales, but I don't think anyone else noticed them.



Humpback whale breaching
Publicdomainpictures.net

We are survivors (for those born before 1940)

Contributed by Aileen Fielder
Reprinted from <https://www.uglyhedgehog.com/>

We were born before television, before penicillin, polio shots, frozen foods, Xerox, contact lenses, videos and the pill. We were before radar, credit cards, split atoms, laser beams and ballpoint pens, before dishwashers, tumble driers, electric blankets, air conditioners, drip-dry clothes ... and before man walked on the moon. We got married first and then lived together (how quaint can you be?). We thought 'fast food' was what you ate in Lent, a 'Big Mac' was an oversized raincoat and 'crumpet' was what we had for tea. We existed before house husbands and computer dating, and sheltered accommodation was where you waited for a bus.

We were before daycare centres, group homes and disposable nappies. We never heard of FM radio, tape decks, artificial hearts, word processors, or young men wearing earrings. For us 'time sharing' meant togetherness, a 'chip' was a piece of wood or fried potato, 'hardware'

meant nuts and bolts and 'software' wasn't a word. Before 1940 'Made in Japan' meant junk, the term 'making out' referred to how you did in your exams, 'stud' was something that fastened a collar to a shirt and 'going all the way' meant staying on a double-decker bus to the terminus. In our day, cigarette smoking was fashionable; 'grass' was mown, 'coke' was kept in the coalhouse, a 'joint' was a piece of meat you ate on Sundays and 'pot' was something you cooked in. 'Rock Music' was a fond mother's lullaby, 'Eldorado' was an ice cream, a 'gay person' was the life and soul of the party, while 'aids' just meant beauty treatment or help for someone in trouble.

We who were born before 1940 must be a hardy bunch when you think of the way in which the world has changed and the adjustments we have had to make. No wonder there is a generation gap today ... BUT by the grace of God...we have survived!



<http://thevintagepatternfiles.blogspot.com>

Saints Alive

Glory, and the thin places

Caroline Miley

“O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, get thee up on a high mountain; lift up thy voice, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold, your God!” (Isaiah 40:9 excerpts)

Christmas is my favourite season in the church calendar. Not so much for the Nativity of Jesus, despite the beautiful story, but the Incarnation, the moment when God becomes human. That’s so amazing that it’s impossible to understand, but just thinking about it is thrilling.

A few weeks ago Bishop Paul spoke about the Celtic saying that heaven and earth are only three feet apart, but in the thin places that distance is even smaller. I like that, that keen sense that heaven, eternity, God, is always there, just behind the visible world. People talk about geographic locations like Iona, as such thin places. To me, though, the thin places aren’t so much geographic, they exist in time. They can happen anywhere, any time the veil between heaven and earth is lifted, even partly, and for an instant the divine rushes in.



Govert Flinck (1615—1660)

Angels Announcing the Birth of Christ to the Shepherds

commons.Wikimedia.org

There are some clearly marked thin places in the Bible, and some of them are very thin indeed. Moses on Mount Sinai was enveloped for a moment in time. Elijah, too, when the heavens opened and he disappeared into them. There are of course several very thin moments in the New Testament, and the thinnest of all is the Incarnation:

“For while all things were in quiet silence, and the night was in the midst of her course, Thy Almighty Word leaped down from heaven.” (Wisdom 18:14)

At that moment, there was no barrier at all between heaven and earth. It was torn open. Earth and heaven were one, and God became human. I like this painting of the annunciation to the shepherds. Many artists have depicted the scene in this sort of way, and it seems clear that they thought of this as a thin moment indeed. In the busy scene, there’s a huge golden glow of light filled with angels. The sky has been ripped open to reveal a glimpse of heaven. This one’s by Govert Flinck. And in many paintings of the Nativity, the baby Jesus shines with an unearthly glow, the glory of heaven itself, as in the painting by Gerard van Honthorst on the next page.

Because Jesus himself is the thinnest place of all, the place where heaven and earth meet. He is the glory of God. Not just a human baby, but the one who made the world itself:

“Lo, within a manger lies
He who built the starry skies;
He who, throned in height sublime
Sits among the cherubim.”
(‘See, amid the winter snows’)

Then there are what one might call the ‘thick places’. For me, many of these have to do with the institutional church. In the thirty years I’ve been a Christian, I’ve never been able to get the hang of the church, and it often seems to be a place where heaven and earth are very far apart indeed. I can see that some sort of structure and authority is necessary, but what we have seems to be a giant superstructure of hierarchy and bureaucracy, a very thick place a long way from the simple calling and ministry of Jesus and the early Christians. And that labyrinthine edifice seems to get between us and that simple faith.

Glory, and the thin places—continued

At synod Archbishop Freier described, in some bewilderment, same-sex marriage and the blessing of same-sex civil marriages as “the issue of our times”. I too am bewildered. In the great narrative of Christianity, surely same-sex marriage is a blip on the radar, like the ordination of women, in itself a far more important innovation, because it was one that deeply affected half the human race. People have said they would leave the church over these developments. I don’t understand that. To leave a particular parish church, yes. But to leave the church altogether? Stop worshipping God and receiving the sacraments?

Professor Dorothy Lee spoke about the matter, and put it so much better than I can:

“What gets to the core of the issue is that word doctrine... To my mind as a theologian, doctrine refers to our love of Scripture, our commitment to Scripture and to the ecumenical creeds of the church, not to what the church might teach on marriage, or any other secondary issue... It disturbs me greatly that we are losing unity when we all have in common a love of Scripture, a commitment to Scripture, a love of Christ, a belief in the most Holy Trinity, and yet we are dividing ourselves ... surely we can disagree on these matters, surely the bishops themselves can disagree on these matters, and yet hold our unity in Christ” (*The Melbourne Anglican*, November 2019).

I wish we heard more from theologians. Because what Christ is, is the glory of God, the Creator. Not rules and factions. We are defined as Christians by our worship of God and the central doctrine Professor Lee refers to. All sorts of issues have seemed important at one time or another in the life of the institutional church – dietary laws in Paul’s time, and whether Gentiles had to be circumcised. He had to tell people: ‘Were you baptised into Paul?’ Later, there were arguments about vestments and candles and the language of the Bible and the liturgy, and whether priests should marry. But there is only one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God. There are only two divisions in the world: the believers in Christ, and those who don’t believe. Everything else, surely – marriage laws, vestments, liturgy – is local tradition, that can change according to custom.

And in the West today, especially in Australia, the Christian faith is constantly under attack and the numbers of believers are falling rapidly. Increasingly, there are whole generations who have never heard the word of God, who have never opened a Bible. Surely the great issue of the times is the flagging of Christian witness in the West, of the rise of a world that does not know God. Of a world without the glory, a world where heaven and earth seem far apart and the places and the times are very thick.

I hope that this Christmas some of those places may become a little thinner and the glory of God shine through into this dark world.

“Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee”
(Isaiah 60:1)

*“Because Jesus himself is
the thinnest place of all,
the place where heaven
and earth meet. He is
the glory of God.”*



Gerard van Honthorst (1592—1656)
Adoration of the Shepherds
commons.Wikimedia.org

Saints Alive

All in the same boat

Alma Ryrie-Jones

Our second social justice forum, 'The Greatest Moral Challenge', was developed by a core working group comprising Fr Ken Cahill, Arnaud Gallois and myself, with our friend Robert Dawlings from St Philip's Collingwood. As the planning progressed, others from both churches agreed to undertake essential organisational tasks such as distribution of publicity materials, venue preparation, booking and parking arrangements, catering support, photography and audiovisual services. All of this time and expertise was donated. The event was not the work of any one mind, then, but a genuine joint effort between parishes, generating real engagement with the community around us.



Arnaud rings the All Saints bell 350 times

When Arnaud rang the All Saints bell 350 times, signifying the 'safe' level of carbon dioxide in Earth's atmosphere, a level long since exceeded and still rising, we approached people in the local café and in the streets, explaining what all the noise was about. We were greeted with approval and support: 'Make as much noise as you want'; 'Good on you! What a progressive church!' It was wonderful to know that St Mark's Fitzroy, in the old style of lighting the beacons and sounding the alarm, was also ringing out the same message. This sense of unity in response to the critical challenges we are facing globally, became something of a theme for the forum itself, which began with the beautiful, haunting sound of the Shofar, blown by Rabbi Jonathan Keren-Black, as a call to turn from the trivial and attend to creation.

In the unfolding of this very well attended event, with an audience of about 130, we had only to count our blessings in our choice of panellists and our good fortune in securing the Rev'd Alex Sangster, of the Uniting Church in Fairfield, as moderator, leader and guide.

Alex brought to the role dramatic and musical flair, wit, political edge and a spiritual conviction that sustained, buoyed and connected people to each other in their concern for others, and for those yet to be born. She was able to draw everyone, no matter what their connection to the issues, into a common space and then sanctify that space, not so much in a traditional church sense as in the sense by which any space is made holy when we properly apprehend the

bonds that tie us to each other, within our various faith traditions and in the world.



The Rev'd Alex Sangster, moderator
Brett Scapin Photography

The panellists achieved a very difficult feat – they spoke honestly, urgently and directly, without adding to the weight of helplessness and despair that many of us may feel from time to time. This is difficult in view of the accelerating environmental crisis, with competing global and local interests blocking the actions needed to mitigate it.

Professor David Karoly, a highly distinguished and awarded Australian climate scientist, was there to lend authoritative insights into what science is telling us. Yet he stated from the outset that the problem is no longer a science problem: it is a people problem – fundamentally, a problem of affluence. It is the developing countries who will be most adversely affected, so the cause of climate degradation lies with one group, while the effects will be visited on others. The remedy is for us to understand that an unprincipled minority must not be allowed to destroy the inheritance of generations unborn.

Anjali Sharma, a leader of the School Strike 4 Climate that saw 150,000 in the streets calling for government action, spoke from her own immediate experience of watching her family in India trying to work the land that was their main source of food, as the monsoon period gradually became weaker and shorter, making

All in the same boat—continued

life unsustainable. She spoke of the loneliness, fear and helplessness young people feel in the face of Australia's continuing investment in fossil fuels, in what she called 'blatant disregard of our future'. Meanwhile, concerned strikers are 'reduced to recalcitrant children and told to go back to school'. Anjali spoke with a maturity and cogency that made it hard to believe that she is still several years away from being able to exercise full citizenship.

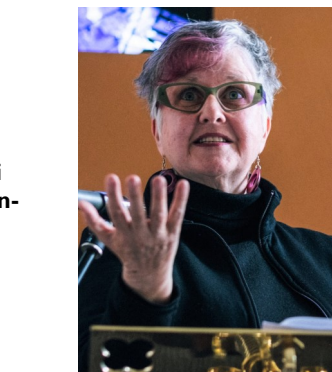
Rabbi Jonathan offered a reflection on the creation of humanity, as presented in the Torah, pointing in particular to what turns out to be the destructive element of God's creative action – the introduction of humanity. He noted that creation does not need human beings – the bow of reconciliation in the clouds will be there, regardless of us. Indeed, if we don't rapidly turn to exercising our obligation to care for all creatures, including the voiceless animal and plant life of the world, then clearly we are the problem. The most dire predictions of scientists are coming true, and there is no time for delay. But we have the power of consumers, he reminded us. In the past, economic power resided in nations and national economies. Now, corporations and multinational entities account for most of the economic activity, and they can be influenced to act in their own interests. It is up to us to mend our ways and do all in our power to call others to action.

Dr John Hewson AM, whose standing as an economist, politician and media commentator is well known to many, offered a frank assessment of the failure of Australian politicians on all sides to lead and to think with genuine strategic intent – 'Denial is not a policy' – and argued for the challenge of

climate change to be seen as beyond party politics. He pointed out that the blockages to action are not found in the struggle between parties but in the conflicted interests *within* them. He supported Anjali's perspective, citing his own daughters' involvement in strike action, and urged us to challenge all politicians, business leaders and civil society, to support transition to a low carbon economy, which is achievable. He noted the general slowness of business to recognise the enormous entrepreneurial opportunities that are there for the taking, in the task of building the renewables sector and achieving solutions to problems of clean energy generation and environmental management.

From Religions for Peace Victoria, Dr Sue Ennis offered a practical and personal perspective, speaking about how difficult it is, yet how doable for all of us, to pay attention to our own daily lives. She offered a set of simple factually-based strategies we can all implement as part of the process of living more simply and less selfishly, wastefully and destructively. Many of these actions mean going without things, but they are things we can do without and don't really need. This might mean anything from walking and taking the bus once a week instead of driving, up to a family decision to do without a second car. It might involve stopping using a clothes dryer and relying on the free and effective power of wind instead. Even adjusting the air conditioner thermostat up by 1 °C will result in keeping 40 kg of carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere in a year. Sue described a program, *Living the Change*, available to faith communities and others, to help us achieve these small but significant changes.

Continued on page 8



Top to bottom:
Panellists,
Professor David Karoly, Anjali
Sharma, Rabbi Jonathan Keren-
Black, Dr Sue Ennis

Left:
Dr John Hewson AM
Brett Scapin Photography

Saints Alive

All in the same boat—continued

“Denial is not a policy...”

—Dr John Hewson

The question and answer session with these engaging and very well informed speakers was stimulating and involving for all. Guided by Alex, it included a moving moment of blessing and community support offered to the young people and children present – an expression of the love and commitment we know we owe to them.

The formal part of the forum was followed by excellent meatless food from the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, information and engagement with ten community environmental groups, and musical entertainment with a pointed message from the Climate Choir.

Organising this forum was a very good learning experience for us, and the event, with the background of the wonderful windows of St Philip’s, the excellent facilities and local

support to be found there, the arrangements for streaming the event live on Facebook, and the use of the online booking program, was considered by all a great success.

We received congratulations from many quarters, from people in the community for holding it at all, from others who saw the signs on our church and elsewhere, from those who attended, and from some who provided unsolicited donations to offset our costs.

The event was substantially funded by the Clifton Hill Fund. All of our outstanding participants donated their time without any appearance fee, for which we are profoundly grateful.

If you missed the forum, it can be viewed on Facebook@stphilipscollingwood, in two video files.



Many people stayed to enjoy hospitality and pick up information from the ten local organisations present

At right: Robert Dawlings accompanied the Climate Choir

Brett Scapin Photography



On style over substance: *First Reformed* (2018)

Bruce Clezy

Be warned ... this is *not* a Christmas movie review.

When hunting around for a movie to review this December I wanted to find a Hollywood movie about climate change, but one that nevertheless still had a faith-based component. This was partly with a view to continuing the discussions promoted by our recent community forum; but also because the present wholesale destruction of the planet would seem to be quite a fertile topic for any modern movie maker wanting to explore religious issues in a contemporary way. After all, with all the connotations of 'fire and brimstone' and 'the end of days', global warming proves simply ripe with religious imagery. It was then that I stumbled on *First Reformed* (2018), the latest movie by the famous American screenwriter/director Paul Schrader (*Taxi Driver*, *Raging Bull*, *The Last Temptation of Christ*). It is a movie that I had never heard of before, despite an all-star cast and several accolades.

Reverend Ernst Toller (Ethan Hawke) is the local priest at First Reformed, a small Dutch Reformed church based in Snowbridge, New York. First Reformed is about to celebrate its 250-year anniversary, under the guidance and sponsorship of Abundant Life, a nearby evangelical megachurch. We learn that Toller is both an alcoholic and suffering from gastric cancer, conditions no doubt symptomatic of a larger malaise. He is still grieving the loss of his son, who enlisted in the military at his direction.

Toller is approached by one of his parishioners Mary (Amanda Seyfried) about her husband Michael, a radical environmental activist who is threatening to kill their yet unborn child for fear of climate change. In responding to this crisis, Toller learns more about the dire situation facing God's planet, and in the process discovers some dark truths about Abundant Life.

Wounded by his own mortality, horrified by unfolding environmental disaster and disgusted by corporate Christianity, Toller decides to take matters into his own hands.

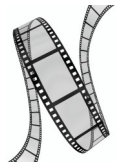
First Reformed is a very bleak film, and I found the horrors it depicted somewhat trying and unbelievable. Seriously, how much can one lonely priest (let alone the viewer) bear in the spate of a two-hour movie? Alcoholism, gastric cancer, environmental destruction, suicide, corporate greed, jihadism and even reminders of the history of American slavery, all combine to form a movie that feels heavy handed, too didactic; and even, dare I say it, in the light of the seriousness of the issues, a touch melodramatic. Rather than feeling uplifted, or finding a path of hope through all the cataclysm, it left me feeling rather empty.

But to dismiss the film solely on the basis of its content would deny the viewer other aspects of its visual pleasures. It has a style and beauty so profound that they are just as rewarding as the story or the acting. It is slow and meditative and owes much to the work of great European directors such as Bresson, Tarkovsky and Ingmar Bergman. The colour palette is dull and muted. The camera barely moves, forcing characters to walk in and out of scenes as if they were live on stage. Despite the heat of the subject matter, the mood and composition are restrained and unadorned. The style of the movie, in other words, is much like the church that lives at the centre of its story. It is not big and brash like the Abundant Life megachurch. There is no outpouring of tears, no 'happy clapping'. There is no visual 'emotional punch' to vicariously draw you in. It is as if the spiritual meaning of the movie resides in its style.

First Reformed is a stunning movie. Its strength lies not in content, nor narrative or plot. Rather its strength is to assert the value of reflection and contemplation in troubling times marked by political excess and corporate greed.

In hindsight, perhaps *First Reformed* is in fact a very good film to watch at Christmas.

FILM REVIEW



"Just because you put Jesus Christ into a Hollywood melodrama doesn't mean that it's a spiritual film."

—Paul Schrader

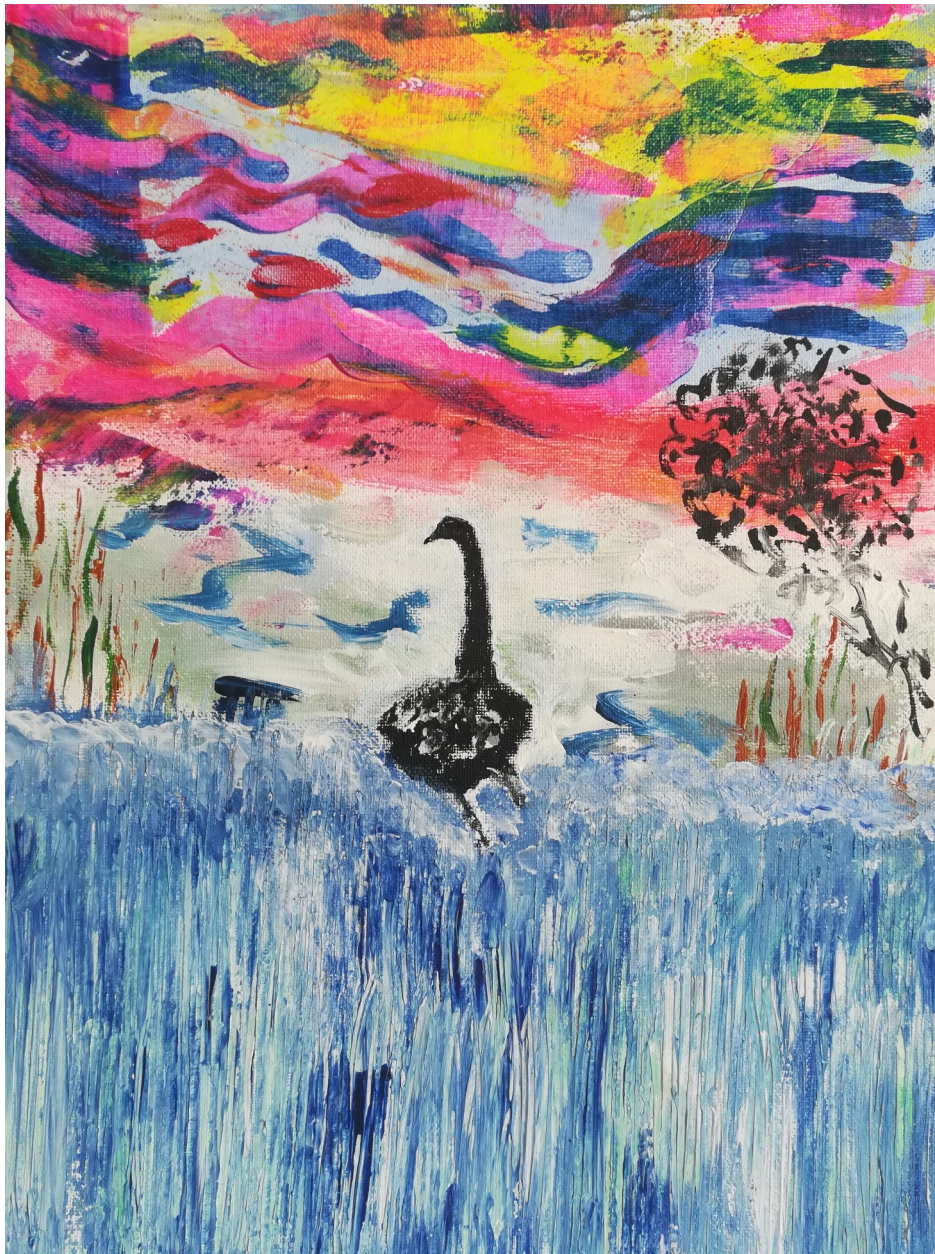


Ethan Hawke as Ernst Toller in *First Reformed*

He and Paul Schrader received numerous nominations and awards for their work on this film, including an Academy award nomination for best screenplay. It is listed by the American Film Institute as one of the top ten films of 2018.

Saints Alive

Man of vision



All Saints parishioner Željko Jurišić was born and raised in Croatia. Australians know this country as an increasingly popular tourist destination, since gaining independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. It was once the Kingdom of Croatia, established in 925 and enduring for nearly a thousand years, with a deep and rich history.

Željko paints as a pleasurable and creative way to use his time. He has travelled widely in Europe, Africa and Asia, including many visits to India. He sees himself as on a spiritual journey that crosses many countries and involves many ways of seeing and ways of being.



If you have not yet met Željko, here he is seen taking breakfast with **Santa Claus**—quite appropriate, as **St Nicholas** is a favourite figure in Croatia.

Synod 2019

Laura Tsakmakis

We did a lot of good work at Synod 2019. We carried motions calling for next steps for reconciliation, for raising the Newstart payment level, for preparing for the impacts of changing work, for comprehensive child safety, and for the protection of the environment, just to name a few.

But the one thing that made it into the headlines, the one thing that divided the Synod, was the issue of same sex marriage. There were three motions that broadly related to this topic:

- That this Synod welcomes the Church of confessing Anglicans Aotearoa/ New Zealand, assuring that church and its bishop of our love and prayers, and praying for God's blessing on all Anglicans in New Zealand.
- That this Synod expresses its sorrow to the bishop and synod of the diocese of Wangaratta for their approval of a liturgy that could be used to bless persons in same-sex relationships.
- That this Synod affirms the resolution made by our Primate and Bishops following recent changes in the *Marriage Act* at the National Bishops Meeting in March 2018.

To put this all into context, same-sex marriage was legalised in Australia in December 2017 following a postal plebiscite on the issue. Marriage in Australia is now defined as 'the union of two people to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life'. There is no longer a requirement that those two people be a man and woman. In response to this change, in March 2018, the bishops of the Anglican Church of Australia passed a resolution affirming that (amongst other things) 'the doctrine of this Church is that marriage is a lifelong union between a man and a woman'. The bishops also agreed in that resolution that if the Church were to change this doctrine, it recognised that the appropriate mechanism to do so is through the Constitution and Canons of the Anglican Church of Australia. The bishops committed to act within that framework.

In 2019, the Synod of the Diocese of Wangaratta approved a service of blessing for those married according to the *Marriage Act 1961*. As that Act now allows for same sex marriage, this service of blessing could be used to bless people in same sex marriages. The Bishop of Wangaratta stated in his opening address to his Synod that he had received legal and theological advice on what powers he might have to promulgate a form of blessing for persons married according to Commonwealth law. The advice he received was that there was no legal or theological reason for not proceeding, and that the actions proposed by him were not in breach of the Constitution or the Canons of the Church.

The Bishop asserted in his address that "the Bible, properly and critically read together with the other formative factors in theology that [he had] identified leads inextricably to the conclusion that loving monogamous faithful Christian persons ought to receive the blessing of God in their church to strengthen them for their lives as disciples".

Following the approval of this service by the Diocese of Wangaratta, the Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia (currently the Archbishop of Melbourne) referred the matter to the Appellate Tribunal of the Anglican Church of Australia. This is a national Tribunal and the highest ranking in the national church. The questions arising under the Constitution for the Tribunal to rule on are:

- Whether the Blessing of Persons Married according to the *Marriage Act 1961* Regulations 2019 made by the Synod of the Diocese of Wangaratta is consistent with the Fundamental Declarations and Ruling Principles in the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia
- Whether the regulation is validly made pursuant to the *Canon Concerning Services 1992*.

Updates on the progress of this matter can be found at: <https://anglican.org.au/governance/tribunals/appellate-tribunal-current-matters/>

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Synod 2019 — continued

The Melbourne Synod carried a motion expressing its sorrow over the approval of this service by the Diocese of Wangaratta, but it was by no means a clear 'win' or 'loss'. The Synod was split nearly 50/50. Each individual vote had to be counted to see which way it would fall. If ten or twenty people had voted the other way it would have changed the outcome.

Synod also carried the motion affirming the statement of the bishops I referred to earlier, but this motion was amended to highlight the fundamental pastoral position in that statement, that "all people are made in the image of God, loved by God and welcome in the community of God's people. We earnestly desire that all people hear and respond to God's word and receive the grace of the sacraments".

The other motion that broadly relates to same sex marriage was the motion welcoming the Church of Confessing Anglicans Aotearoa New Zealand (CCAANZ). The CCAANZ is a group of Anglicans who left the mainstream New Zealand Anglican Church following that church's decision to permit the blessing of same sex marriages and civil unions in May

2018. The CCAANZ was formed with the recognition, fellowship and support of GAFCON (Global Anglican Future Conference, a conservative Anglican movement), and is not a member of the worldwide Anglican Communion. Some members of Synod argued against this motion because we should not welcome schism. Yet others voted for it as they felt the best way to maintain unity amongst Christians is to welcome and pray for all of them, regardless of affiliation. One Synod member took issue with the name of the church, because by calling itself the Church of Confessing Anglicans, it implies that others who take a different viewpoint are not confessing Anglicans. It was a point that came up a few times – one should not imply that others with whom you disagree are not faithful Christians.

The issue of same sex marriage in the church raises very strong feelings on both sides of the divide. One of the points raised in debate is perhaps the best way to summarise the issue – regardless of what some say, we are all trying to faithfully uphold the scriptures, it's just that people have different interpretations of how to do that.

Goodbye to Walker Street

Alma Ryrie-Jones

Members of the Save Public Housing Collective and the local Darebin Friends of Public Housing groups, both of which meet regularly in our meeting room, were invited to a party at a unit on the Walker Street Housing Estate last week—a celebration of its importance as a home for many years, a place where a family had sheltered, children had grown up and the safety of assured housing had been provided. It was one of the last units still occupied, and the party was a brightly lit island of warmth, solidarity and companionship, in an otherwise virtually empty, locked and desolate set of buildings - patrolled by security services to warn off squatters, but otherwise left alone.

The gathering was an act of grace under many kinds of pressure. We can only hope that those of us who have the enormous benefit of decent and secure housing would be capable of a similar expression of gratitude and affection if we found ourselves in the same position. All our good wishes go to William and his family, and to others in the last stages of forced relocation.

As an expression of sadness and outrage at the loss of public housing, a wake is being planned in February, to raise awareness in the neighbourhood and the wider community of the impact of replacing this community-owned asset by mainly privately owned housing.

A challenge to us all at Christmas

The Rev'd Philippa Wetherell

The Gospel for the Third Sunday of Advent featured John the Baptist, a prisoner in the fortress of Herod Antipas at Machaerus, sending his disciples to ask Jesus a question: "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" In the darkness of his prison cell he was asking if Jesus was the Messiah, the one sent by God to make the Kingdom of God a reality. Tales had reached him of Jesus teaching the people to love their enemies, to turn the other cheek, to rejoice in persecution. Strangely, Jesus' ministry seemed to involve showing mercy, forgiving wrong doers, curing even sinners of disease and disability, and raising the dead. This was not what John expected of 'the one who was to come', the one who he had declared would come with fire, his winnowing fork in his hand, condemning the wicked as 'chaff'.

Now we, with a background of Christian teaching and in possession of the whole New Testament, may not share the doubts and questioning of John the Baptist, but even as people of faith in Jesus I suggest that our understanding of who Jesus is, and of the significance of his life, death and resurrection, is often deficient. It is not surprising that we ask such questions as these: Can Jesus really be God? Is Jesus truly Emmanuel – God with Us? How could Jesus really be fully human and fully divine?

Reason, rational thought and argument cannot answer such questions, and these are legitimate questions, highly pertinent as we approach the feast of Christmas. Like John the Baptist you may feel that your questions will remain unanswered when I say that these questions can only be addressed by poets and mystics. But there is a way into such people and their writings! Become again a child, a Narnia child or even a Harry Potter child and, with the eyes of faith, enter imaginatively, with your senses fully alive, into the world of the Incarnation, rather than the Nativity. With the celebration of Christmas too often the birth of the baby in circumstances that are too easily sentimentalised means that the essential truth lying behind the birth is lost. The sweet picture of Mary giving birth in a Bethlehem outhouse, adored by marginalised shepherds, can eclipse the awe one should experience in kneeling before 'God in man made manifest'.

Perhaps I can introduce this sense of awe in the words of an ancient Antiphon originally sung at Midnight Mass (from Wisdom 18:14):

When all things were in quiet silence, and night was in the midst of her swift course, your Almighty Word leapt down from Heaven out of His royal throne.

These beautiful words speak of God's longing to identify with us – God leaps down from Heaven. This sense that it is God, the one true God, who reveals himself to us in the Babe of Bethlehem, comes through strongly in the paradoxes expressed in these opening lines:

The great God of Heaven is come down to earth
His mother a virgin and sinless his birth
The father eternal his father alone
He sleeps in a manger, yet reigns on a throne

The Incarnation, God becoming Man, God entering into humankind, God taking into himself the fullness of our humanity, finds expression in countless poems and songs as in this hymn whose opening lines remind us of our creatureliness at the hands of our Creator:

Behold the great Creator makes
Himself a house of clay

The emphasis on the Incarnation rather than the Nativity is aptly expressed in this verse from a modern hymn (Frederick Pratt Green, *Together in Song* 283):

God in time, God in man,
This is God's timeless plan;
He will come, as a man,
Born himself of woman
God divinely human.

And in another that opens with:

When God almighty came to be one of us,
Masking the glory of his golden train,

It goes on to embrace the whole human race – see the final verse of this most incarnational hymn (Michael Hewlett, *Together in Song* 281).

"Become again a child...and, with the eyes of faith, enter imaginatively, with your senses fully alive, into the world of the Incarnation, rather than the Nativity."

Saints Alive

A Challenge—continued

The Elizabethan poet, Edmund Spenser, in 'An Hymne Of Heavenly Love' expresses why it was that God became man:

Nor spirit, nor angel, though they man
surpass
Could make amends to God for man's
misguide,
But only man himself, who selfe did slyde
So taking flesh of sacred virgin's womb
For man's deare sake he did a man become.

It was St Anselm who, in the 12th century, articulated what the poet Spenser expresses in the lines quoted above. Our salvation could only be achieved by one who was both fully God and fully human. Dwelling on the Incarnation draws us to St Paul who, writing to the Philippians, says of Jesus:

Who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.

The Incarnation was supremely the self-emptying of God, referred to theologically by the Greek word *Kenosis*. The youthful John Milton, long before he wrote *Paradise Lost*, wrote his wonderful 'Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity', which includes the lines:

That glorious form ...
He laid aside, and here with us to be
Forsook the courts of everlasting day,
And chose with us a darksome house of
mortal clay.

And it is the emphasis on Incarnation of God rather than the Nativity that links our thinking to the Passion. Thus St Paul continues:

And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.

Again I quote lines from Spenser and his 'Hymne':

And that most blessed Bodie...
He freely gave to be both rent and torne
Of cruel hands, who with despiteful shame
Reviling him...
At length Him nailed on a gallow-tree,
And slew the Just by most unjust decree.

A beautiful contemporary Christmas hymn, *Canticle of the Gift*, also links the Incarnation to the Passion, taking us to the hill of Calvary:

O what a gift, what a wonderful gift
Who can tell the wonders of the Lord!
Let us open our eyes, our ears and our
hearts
It is Christ the Lord, it is he!...
God gave his Son, his very own Son
For the love of you and me.
(Pat Uhl, *Together in Song* 278)

As we celebrate 'The great God of Heaven come down to earth' so our love and trust in God can be quickened, not by denying our questioning, but by entering with a sense of awe and wonder into the great mystery of the Incarnation.

Signs of our caring



We have received much positive community comment on the church signs

*Climate signs: Design by JohannaVillaniDesign, Preston; Public Housing signs: Design by Sign&Fitouts, Preston
Signage infrastructure by Sign&Fitouts, Preston
Photos by Brett Scapin Photography*





All Saints Anglican Church
Northcote
Parish of South Darebin

12A High Street
NORTHCOTE 3070

LOCUM VICAR

Fr Barry Fernley

0421 903 390

fernley2@optusnet.com.au

CONTRIBUTIONS WELCOME

Send or hand to:

Alma Rylie-Jones

Phone: 0409 339 046

Email: rylie@ihug.com.au

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1860 — 2019

We acknowledge the
Wurundjeri people as the
traditional owners of the land
on which our church stands,
and pay our respects to their
Elders, past, present and
emerging.

Welcome!

We seek to share with others our experience of God and to make of All Saints Northcote a place of permanent welcome, a refuge and anchor for the human spirit.

Welcome the Lord – worship

Reverence for liturgy and joy in music are central to our worship. The observance of season and feast has continued in unbroken service in this place for 159 years. We seek to be close to God in the celebration of Baptism and in the breaking of the bread, and to draw others into a sense of the sacred. We hold to a middle way, resisting extremes, allowing for difference and listening to new ideas, but always anchored in Bible, prayer book and hymnal, in parish and Diocese, and in the great Anglican tradition. In practising our faith here, we acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which the church is built, and respect their spiritual connection to country.

Welcome the stranger – relationship

The defining spiritual features of our community are love, tolerance, warmth and inclusiveness. We are less concerned about numbers, money, appearances, power or status than about hospitality, participation, and the gifts each person brings, regardless of their age or abilities or sexual orientation or any other personal characteristic. We love children and young people. We treat outcasts and fringe dwellers compassionately and support church agencies of social action. We look for opportunities to support reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and actively oppose racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination.

Welcome the friend – partnership

We are enriched by our connection with St Paul's Fairfield and St James the Great Thornbury as part of a united parish, and we respect the different identities of each community. We are active participants in ecumenical exchange and inter-faith activity. We value our relationship with St Philip's Collingwood and St Mark's Fitzroy. We view our partnership with the Brotherhood of St Laurence as an essential part of our mission. We seek to reduce our environmental footprint through energy conservation and sustainable practices.

allsaintsnorthcote.org.au

Saints Alive is published on our website, along with other information about All Saints.

CHRISTMAS CARDS

