



**A child has been born for us.
We have been given a son who
will be our ruler. Isaiah 9:6**

**Christmas Newsletter 2020
Benbecula Church of Scotland
Linked with
Carinish Church of Scotland**

Dear Church Family and Community Friends

If you have never read through the book of Isaiah I strongly recommend that you do at some point, and at some point soon. All of the prophets offer something amazing but for me Isaiah stands out. I have always enjoyed the Old Testament and used to get teased a wee bit during my theological studies for it. I was at times referred to as “Rabbi” for my interest of the Hebrew elements of our faith, including taking a semester of Hebrew instead of a full year of Greek in my third year of study. I am not sure it was meant to be complimentary but that is how I took it. It has never diminished a love for the rich text of the OT in which I find it easy to see the love of God at work on our behalf.

Isaiah is one of the better known books of the Bible which speak of the coming Messiah, outlining in particular the suffering that he would endure. This is found in chapter 52. However, it is chapter 51 that I wish to draw our attention this week. If you have a Bible with you or near to you, I would suggest you pause here, and give chapter 51 a read before continuing on. With the chapter fresh in your mind I really would like to pull out a few elements of the passage...particularly verse ¹ *Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the Lord...verse ⁵ My righteousness draws near speedily, my salvation is on the way, and my arm will bring justice to the nations. The islands will look to me and wait in the hope for my arm...and lastly the end of verse ⁶ But my salvation will last forever my righteousness will never fail.*

These passages and chapters are written for the nation of Israel in order to bring hope but also to affirm that the Lord knows of their situation and that help is on the way. The gist of chapter 51 is that salvation is coming. Chapters 52 and 53 give the reader an early indication of what is to take place in order to secure that salvation on Calvary. The servant, the arm of the Lord, the one who saves, is of course Jesus, Joseph’s boy. The Christmas story has only ever been a

story of salvation and rescue. An elaborate rescue mission to save people, nations and all creation from sin and the separation it causes between us and our Heavenly Father. Thousands of years before Mary and Joseph held wee Jesus the plan had been announced. The promised arrival of a means of salvation and restoration.

Christmas is for most, a very special time, filled with all the best we can offer one another. We smile, we sing, we give, we make time, we try to be that little bit better, we gather. Though things will no doubt look and be different this year we will each likely try to hold fast to some tradition or another to ensure some familiarity. Each year I ask people to respond to the gift of Jesus. For I believe the Christmas story demands a response. Mary responded to the angel. Joseph responded to the dream. The shepherds had their response as did the magi from afar. So, I think it is only fair to ask what your response to the Father's plan of salvation will be? Isaiah 51.1 hints at what is perhaps the best thing we could do...pursue righteousness and seek the Lord. It is maybe not the normal suggestion at this time of the year, but it is perhaps the best response we could give to such an elaborate plan of salvation! Take time to seek Him and what it is He asks of you...and then listen.

I would now like to take a moment to make you all aware of goings on for this week ahead...

Wednesday evening at 7pm - Family Christmas Quiz via Zoom

Contact me to get a spot and the details for the gathering.

Thursday Eve - Live Watchnight Service via Zoom - This will be a first! The gathered choir have been busy recording a couple of songs for the event and we will add a mixture of live and pre-recorded content to celebrate together as a family. Start time is likely 11.30pm but keep an eye out for emails and details via the church Facebooks accounts.

Christmas Morning - a short video will be made available with the lighting of candles and a video telling the Nativity Story.

Boxing Day - Will be the first day of two weeks off! ☺ I have some leave that I need to use. So due to the labour intensive nature of putting together a video service, I will simply sign post on the Facebook pages some suggestions. Thank you for your understanding.

So, as we approach the final days of Advent and countdown to Christmas I very much pray that in the midst of all the wonderful noise of the season you are able to enjoy the hope, peace, joy and love that was ushered to Earth to seek and to save what was lost. May your Christmas be full of earthly and heavenly encounter!

Happy Christmas

Rev Andrew Kuzma



And is it true? And is it true,
This most tremendous tale of all,
Seen in a stained-glass window's hue,
A Baby in an ox's stall?
The Maker of the stars and sea
Become a Child on earth for me ?

And is it true? For if it is,
No loving fingers tying strings
Around those tissue'd fripperies,
The sweet and silly Christmas things,
Bath salts and inexpensive scent
And hideous tie so kindly meant,

No love that in a family dwells,
No carolling in frosty air,
Nor all the steeple-shaking bells
Can with this single Truth compare –
That God was man in Palestine
And lives today in Bread and Wine.
from Christmas by John Betjeman



NO SANTA?

By Carol Laycock



My grandma taught me everything about Christmas. I was just a kid. I remember tearing across town on my bike to visit her on the day my big sister dropped the bomb: "There is no Santa Claus," jeered my sister. "Even dummies know that!"

My grandma was not the gushy kind, never had been. I fled to her that day because I knew she would be straight with me. I knew Grandma always told the truth, and I knew that the truth always went down a whole lot easier when swallowed with one of her world-famous cinnamon buns.

Grandma was home, and the buns were still warm. Between bites, I told her everything. She was ready for me.

"No Santa Claus!" she snorted. "Ridiculous! Don't believe it. That rumour has been going around for years, and it makes me mad, plain mad. Now, put on your coat, and let's go."

"Go? Go where, Grandma?" I asked. I hadn't even finished my second cinnamon bun.

"Where" turned out to be Kerby's General Store, the one store in town that had a little bit of just about everything. As we walked through its doors, Grandma handed me ten dollars. That was a bundle in those days.

"Take this money," she said, "and buy something for someone who needs it. I'll wait for you in the car." Then she turned and walked out of Kerby's.

I was only eight years old. I'd often gone shopping with my mother, but never had I shopped for anything all by myself. The store seemed big and crowded, full of people scrambling to finish their Christmas shopping. For a few moments I just stood there, confused, clutching that ten-dollar bill, wondering what to buy, and who on earth to buy it

for. I thought of everybody I knew: my family, my friends, my neighbours, the kids at school, the people who went to my church.

I was just about thought out, when I suddenly thought of Bobbie Decker. He was a kid with bad breath and messy hair, and he sat right behind me in Mrs. Pollock's grade-two class. Bobbie Decker didn't have a coat. I knew that because he never went out for recess during the winter. His mother always wrote a note, telling the teacher that he had a cough; but all we kids knew that Bobbie Decker didn't have a cough, and he didn't have a coat.

I fingered the ten-dollar bill with growing excitement. I would buy Bobbie Decker a coat. I settled on a red corduroy one that had a hood to it. It looked real warm, and he would like that. I didn't see a price tag, but ten dollars ought to buy anything. I put the coat and my ten-dollar bill on the counter and pushed them toward the lady behind it.

She looked at the coat, the money, and me. "Is this a Christmas present for someone?" she asked kindly. "Yes," I replied shyly. "It's ... for Bobbie. He's in my class, and he doesn't have a coat." The nice lady smiled at me. I didn't get any change, but she put the coat in a bag and wished me a Merry Christmas.

That evening, Grandma helped me wrap the coat (a little tag fell out of the coat, and Grandma tucked it in her Bible) in Christmas paper and ribbons and wrote, "To Bobby, From Santa Claus" on it.

Then she drove me over to Bobbie Decker's house, explaining as we went that I was now and forever officially one of Santa's helpers. Grandma parked down the street from Bobbie's house, and she and I crept noiselessly and hid in the bushes by his front walk.

Suddenly, Grandma gave me a nudge. "All right, Santa Claus," she whispered, "get going."

I took a deep breath, dashed for his front door, threw the present down on his step, pounded his doorbell twice and flew back to the safety of the bushes and Grandma. Together we waited breathlessly in the

darkness for the front door to open. Finally it did, and there stood Bobbie. He looked down, looked around, picked up his present, took it inside and closed the door.

Fifty years haven't dimmed the thrill of those moments spent shivering, beside my Grandma, in Bobby Decker's bushes. That night, I realized that those awful rumours about Santa Claus were just what Grandma said they were: Ridiculous!

Santa was alive and well ... AND WE WERE ON HIS TEAM! I still have the Bible, with the coat tag tucked inside: \$19.95.

May you always have LOVE to share, HEALTH to spare and FRIENDS that care...And may you always believe in the magic of Santa Claus!



A Prayer for Christmas Morning. Henry Van Dyke

The day of joy returns, Father in Heaven,
and crowns another year with peace and good will.
Help us rightly to remember the birth of Jesus,
that we may share in the song of the angels, the gladness
of the shepherds, and the worship of the Wisemen.
Close the doors of hate and open the doors of love
all over the world...
Let kindness come with every gift and good desires
with every greeting.
Deliver us from evil, by the blessing that Christ brings,
and teach us to be merry with clean hearts.
May the Christmas morning make us happy to be thy children,
And the Christmas evening bring us to our bed
with grateful thoughts, forgiving and forgiven,
for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Do not be afraid

This year, we will be celebrating Christmas while a pandemic is raging all over the world. And while most of the news that reach us every day seem rather depressing and disheartening, I have recently read a German newspaper article containing a couple of encouraging and uplifting thoughts which I found worth sharing.

If you switch on the telly during the current Advent period, it is very likely that the first item on the news will be COVID-19. And most of us have probably got used to that; it has been pretty much like this all year. Recently, however, there has been a slight difference: Our politicians are now talking about *Christmas* as well.

In 2020, governments in many countries are deciding how we celebrate Christmas.

The message seems clear: Accept the restrictions on our daily lives, stick to the rules, let us all be brave, grin and bear it until 23 December, and if you do all that, but ONLY IF you do all that, then we should be able to celebrate Christmas with our families. As if there hadn't been plenty of the usual expectations already - e.g. Christmas has to be particularly harmonious and simply perfect - now there is even more pressure to make Christmas "a success".

While it is, indeed, important to follow the guidance on preventing the spread of the coronavirus, we should at the same time remember one crucial message of Christmas - the words the angel spoke to the shepherds more than 2000 years ago to announce the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ: "Do not be afraid!" (Luke 2, 10).

I have heard many people describing the current situation as horrible, challenging, demanding, awful... And while loneliness, sorrows and fear will be an even bigger issue for many this Christmas, the angel's message can, at the same time, provide more comfort, strength and confidence, too. The bible tells us that human life is often related to suffering, and, over the centuries, people had to celebrate Christmas in other terrible circumstances - just think of famines and wars. You may have heard the moving story of German and British soldiers during World War I who left their trenches to celebrate Christmas together.

The internet is rife with conspiracy theories regarding the pandemic. And you will also see some people claiming that the coronavirus had been sent into the world as God's punishment for our way of life. Thinking of the Lord's covenant with mankind and all living beings after the destructive flood (Genesis 9), I do not believe this. Has Jesus not made it more than clear to us that suffering is not a consequence of sins and guilt?

In one of the previous church newsletters, I was talking about the question why God allows bad things to happen. I told you how Psalm 23 had helped me through a few dark valleys in my life. Now, more than ever, I firmly trust that our Lord loves us and cares about us like nobody else and that there will be peace and eternal goodness waiting for us behind whatever mountains life - nature or, indeed, other human beings - put in front of us.

This year, when Christmas might be quieter than usual, when we might be less blinded by extensive festivities, this year can provide a real opportunity to remember and to celebrate the birth of our saviour Jesus Christ, a chance to truly take in the wonder and awe of the season. Jesus came into the world as an infant to save us all. Do not be afraid!

Volker Labitzke



UK government angel

Digging ponds and ditches

Since retiring, I seem to have been doing a lot of this. Something that has fascinated me is the number of times that I have come across, contained in the thick black peat, a random, solitary piece of quartz. Not in amongst other stones and rocks, but just on its own, suspended in a world of soggy darkness.

I have found myself collecting a number of these pieces. I have a quiet joy at finding them, putting them in my pocket and then bringing them home for a good wash. In fact, it is not unknown for Sarah to ask “what’s this in the dishwasher??!!”. I usually employ selective deafness; or mutter something inane; or, if I’m feeling especially brave, say “a teaspoon?”.

What I really want to say is “Well, darling, it’s a piece of quartz that I rescued from the miry peat where it was lost in darkness and soiled by the mire. I bent down and took it in my hands and brought it home and now, thanks to a brush in warm water and a steamy Jacuzzi in the dishwasher, it is clean and sparkly and can stay in our home in the dish with the duck-billed platypus that we brought back from Australia.” But Sarah is busy at work and has a life to lead.

This is a season where we can rejoice that someone bent down into the darkness and saw something valuable in each of us, even when we were mucky and soiled, and showed that He is ready to take us in His hands and to bring us home, for a wash and, amazingly, for His joy and delight.

As Psalm 40 says (well, near enough): “*He lifted me out of the peat of despair, out of the mud and the mire. He set my feet on solid ground and steadied me as I walked along. He has given me a new song to sing, a hymn of praise to our God.*”

Alastair Banks.



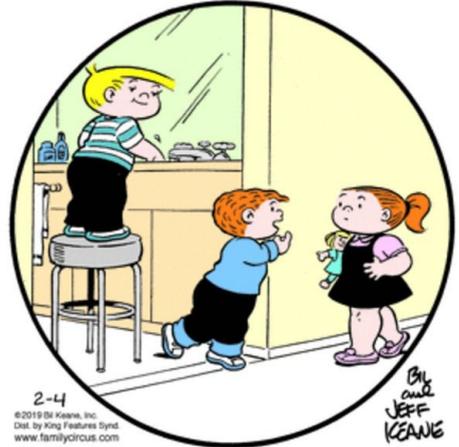
Thank you to everyone who filled a shoebox for this year’s Blythswood **SHOE BOX APPEAL**. **Twenty-nine** boxes were collected and sent to the depot in Evanton to join over 75,000 boxes to be distributed to make Christmas more enjoyable for our brothers and sisters in Eastern Europe.



6-18

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“If we’re only gettin’ Daddy one present, who gets to give it to him?”



2-4

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“C’mere — Billy’s gonna show us how to pretend to wash our hands.”

What would you like for Christmas?

A little girl went to visit Father Christmas in the local garden centre grotto. He welcomed her with a smile and the question of what she would like for Christmas. The little girl gasped, and stared up at him in horror. "Didn't you get my email?!"



We must never allow anything to blind us to the true significance of what happened at Bethlehem so long ago. Nothing can alter the fact that we live on a visited planet. J B Phillips



This advent activity pack produced by the Scottish Bible Society was distributed to families with children from our Sunday Clubs as well as the families attending Little Coffee Stop and Baby & Toddler Group. Ten activity cards with pictures to colour in as well as a daily podcast followed the Biblical Christmas story. At the end of the 10 days each family should have a nativity themed window display.



Christmas songs quiz

1. Hey, approach all you who are steadfast
2. Ecstasy toward the orb
3. Hush, the foretelling spirits harmonize
4. Hey, miniscule urban area of southwest Jerusalem
5. Quiescent nocturnal period
6. Us, the autocratic triumvirate
7. The primary holiday
8. Embellish the corridors
9. (I'm fantasizing concerning a) blanched yuletide
10. During the time ovine caretakers supervised their charges
11. Travel to the high place and relate it n
12. The thing manifested itself at the midpoint of a transparent night
13. What offspring abides thus
14. Removed in a bovine feeding trough
15. Seraphim we aurally detected in the stratosphere

Keeping in Touch



Regrettably the Kirk Sessions of both churches still feel unable to recommend the opening of our churches for in-person worship. In order to comply with Church of Scotland and government rules for opening buildings either church could only accommodate 18

people. Other issues that have influenced the decision for the buildings to remain closed at this time are that singing is currently not permitted; face coverings must be worn and there are deep cleaning and hygiene requirements as well as a requirement to keep registers of those attending the church buildings to enable track and trace.

So, at this present time our buildings remain closed to all but the designated individuals who are tasked with maintaining and inspecting our buildings in compliance with Scottish Government, our insurance provider and Church of Scotland Regulations.

We thank you for your patience and prayers. Restrictions have been difficult in so many ways and the desire of the sessions is to keep us all safe and to look forward with anticipation to a time when we can all gather again and worship as family. A review of our situations will take place as information on the easing of restrictions becomes available. Should you have any questions please feel free to get in touch.

However with the advent of a vaccine against Covid 19 **HOPE** is in sight.

Although the buildings are closed we have been able to meet as board and sessions via Zoom, wither online or via phone connection.

Prayer and Bible study take place weekly at 11:00 am (Benbecula) and 7:00 pm (Carinish) on Thursdays. Both meetings are open to anyone

wishing to join and all are most welcome. Sign-in details are available from Drew.

We are also grateful for the morning services streamed on YouTube as well as the weekly Pastoral Letters which are available on our FaceBook pages or by email or post. If you have not been getting these, please get in touch with your district elder or parish visitor.

NOT FAKE NEWS



* NOT FAKE NEWS

CHUKA “non-visit” to UISTS 2020 -



Very sadly, the proposed visit of our friends from Kenya has gone the way of most other events which have had to be postponed due to the pandemic. Kenya has also suffered with lockdown and restrictions including school closures. Although Ben and company have been unable to visit us here, we have been able to keep in touch by phone, email and video-calls. It was wonderful to have Ben reading the scripture in the morning service a few weeks ago. We pray for our brothers and sisters in Chuka after a year with many bereavements, that Christmas might be a season of blessings and hope.

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven... Ecclesiastes 3:1

Wedding: Donald John Smith to Fiona Morrison

Funerals:

- Peigi Sadler - Balivanich
- Sadie McKenzie - Liniclate
- Annie Sarah MacPhee - Torlum
- Craig Graham - Balivanich
- Eilidh MacDonald - Griminish
- Eric Booth - Balivanich

Benbecula District Elders and Parish visitors

Minister	Rev Drew Kuzma	602180
Session Clerk	Rachel Elliott, E 5a Aird	602726
District	Elder/Parish Visitor	
1/2	Katie MacGillivray E , 12 Uachdar	602265
with	Peggy MacLeod PV	603090
3	Sylvia Norton, PV Clachan Cottage lochdar	610222
4	Ronnie E & Dolly MacDonald PV , 21 Aird	602209
5	Rachel Elliott, E 5a Aird	602726
	Catherine MacLennan E , 17 Aird	602324
6	Norman MacDonald E , Star Cottage	602198
7	Cherrie McKinlay, E Rhughasinish	610393
8	Alasdair & Annie MacGillivray PV , 28a Aird	602240
9	Mary Robertson E , 9 Liniclate	602532
10	Graham MacIntosh E , 3 Creagorry	602239
	Katie MacRury E , 7 Nunton	602168
	Alison Macvie E , Nurse's Cottage	602663

. Your district number is on the address label on your newsletter



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Clachan Church Office Bearers

Minister: Rev Drew Kuzma.

Ordained Local Minister (OLM): Rev Ishie Macdonald.

Elders serving on the Kirk Session:

Alastair Banks (Session Clerk); Donnie Johnson; Alistair MacDonald; Roddy Macleod; Colin Rankin; John MacDonald; Tina Wakeling (Treasurer) and Sarah Banks.

Elder retired from the Kirk Session: Robin Wallace.

Members of the Congregational Board:

Katherine Macleod; Donalda Haxby; Charlie Matheson; Alastair MacQuarrie; Margaret MacDonald and Anne Quarm.

Sunday School Superintendent and Church Safeguarding Officer: Karen Maclain.

Contacts

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Rev Ishie MacDonald: 01876 580367

Ishie.Macdonald@churchofscotland.org.uk

Session Clerk, Alastair Banks: 01876 580617

banks@madasafish.com



**The minister, elders, parish visitors
and office bearers wish you all
a most blessed Christmas
and safe and healthy 2021!**

Many thanks to everyone who has contributed to this newsletter.



Dear Good People of the Uists!

Bwana asifiwe and greetings from Chuka!

It is a great honour to get an opportunity to pen something in this Christmas Newsletter! Christmas 2020 is a Christmas like none other! And I hope there will not come a similar one in future. Not the Christmas itself of course, but the circumstances that surround the season!

2020 Christmas has come a little bit too fast! May be not everywhere but, certainly that is how it looks like here in Chuka, Kenya. The year 2020 has been summarised rather creatively by some Kenyan in the following way:

2020 has been a short year

January

February

Corona

'Jerusalema'

BBI

December!

The year has been that short indeed! For clarity, 'Jerusalema' is this hit song by the South African, Master KG a song which has been viewed by over 260 million people and counting! BBI is an abbreviation for Building Bridges Initiative, a political clamour for amending the Kenyan Constitution. Needless to say, politics and politicking takes $\frac{3}{4}$ of our time in Kenya!

2020 was the 10th year of the twinning between our churches. The beginning bore such great promise. It was our turn to visit. The dates were even set. We, Kenyans were to land at Glasgow on 3rd June! The team had already been selected by end of January and all but one had already acquired the passports! Rearing to go. But, alas! Corona! The first case was reported in Kenya on 6th March 2020 and with the week,

the country came to a standstill. Schools closed, travel was restricted, many governments services were suspended and the places of worship were also closed!

This unseen enemy has disorientated everyone, everywhere! After a while, the church services were allowed to continue with a limited no of worshipers and eventually the number was increased, and pegged to the space available in the church. For JKMC, this was a big blessing. Our sanctuary is quite spacious and we must have held services with over 400 worshipers once in a while. Further, we introduced a third service to avoid congestion! Thus, we have 1st Service (English); 8: 30 – 9:30; Second Service (Swahili), 10:00- 11:00 and the Third Service (Vernacular); 11:30 to 1pm!

Community life has been adversely affected. Of course, we had nothing near your experience but the fact is that life has not been normal. We haven't had restrictions on visiting with other families; The ministry of Health only gave certain protocols but most of it was left to the discretion of the community members. It goes without saying that man by the very nature is wont to go for the "dents". We have strayed on many occasions and indeed, it is by the grace of God that we are where we are. It is a miracle that to date, at the national level we have had less than 100,000 confirmed cases of infection while the death toll is less than 2000!

Far from the fear and uncertainty brought about by Corona, it has also been a great moment of reflection and strategizing! One of the new discoveries, is our ability to adapt to the limitless usages of the very fast evolving technology. This has helped the families and friends keep together despite the distances! Needless to say, I have followed all your sermons and Drew's Pastoral letters (just read letter 38 a while ago!). Others have had ample time to read. Within the first 3 months of Corona, March – June, I had read the bible consistently from Genesis through Isaiah! Others may have read much more. It has also been a great moment to realise how not to take many things for granted. Nothing should be taken for granted: not family, friends, sources of income and least of all, the church!

This letter was meant to herald Christmas wishes but see how I easily get swayed off course!

My brothers and sisters, we love you! We pray for you! We talk about you! We ask about you (quite often I answer questions about you, some known by name by folks over here)! This twinning has enabled us to share experiences even in such awkward situations as this. I must mention Drew, Cherrie, Alasdair (MacGillivray) and Annie; they have always kept me posted!

We can't forget to marvel at your generosity too; that even during such a difficult period you have continued to support our community. The 2 teachers and 1 cook at Rev Carol School count themselves blessed to have you as their benefactors! Take it from me, these three ladies will for ever be grateful to you. For your information, Alasdair has always informed every time he makes a transfer!

Allow me to get to end; 2020 comes to an end with great hope! The vaccine! For the first time, they have developed a vaccine in less than a year. Of course, there are many that will merely see science. But many others will see God answering the relentless prayers from all the corners of the globe! This hope is a sure promise that come summer 2021, the Kenyans are sure to come with the Kenyan sun to the Uists!

Above all and beyond the hope that the vaccines bring, let us always remember, in the words of Stuart Townend:

In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light my strength, my song
This cornerstone, this solid Ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm...

Our dear friends, may I now, on behalf of the entire JKMC fraternity wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! **Ben Rugendo**