

The Light of the World was born for us in the darkness of a stable. Christ is the



unquenchable light, still shining in the darkness. This Christmas, may we light up our families, friends, work colleagues and neighbours with his Light, given to us in Baptism.

Despite our troubles, and regardless of how powerful evil seems to be, the spirit of generosity in people has never been extinguished. May we be blessed with joy in giving and receiving.

Christ is far away from his heavenly home: our work in building the Kingdom is carried out in what sometimes feels like an alien land. During this holy season and in the new year may we never give up but take up our cross daily and follow him all the way to the Resurrection.

Christ takes on our humanity and is subject to all that makes him human. May we humbly recognise the divinity we share in receiving the gift of his Holy Spirit.

Our Lady attends to the Christ child. Mothers hold their family together. They long for the unity of their families. May those who have it be blessed with thanksgiving and may those who have not, be comforted by the Giver of Life.

May Christ be born in your heart and be recognised in your words and actions this Christmas and every day.

Fr Austin

A Greener Christmas?

Christmas joy and peace to all our readers from the Stella Maris team! If the year 2019, had a recurring theme, then it was the damage humans have caused to the natural world and how there is now a real sense of urgency about doing all we can to repair and maintain creation for future generations.

Care for the environment - once considered to be only a concern of cranks and "eco warriors" is now centre stage. Pope Francis has highlighted this vital issue and has called us all to make a real contribution to a more sustainable future. He reminds us that this world is a gift from God and we all must do more to nourish it.

In the annual welter of consumerism in the festive season, it is worth remembering this essential truth. We can all strive for a "greener" Christmas in our choice of gifts and celebrations: buy less - choose recyclable cards - replace wrapping paper with wallpaper remnants or newspaper - reuse and recycle wherever possible.

Our own Pastoral Council will soon be embarking on a "green" initiative to help us make better choices in our own parish - you can read more on this in "The Web of Life".

Finally, to all our fellow parishioners - we hope you enjoy reading our Christmas issue - and may 2020 be kinder - and "greener" for you and yours.

ST. MARY'S STAR OF THE SEA, PORTSTEWART **CHRISTMAS SERVICES 2019**

Penitential Service:

The Editorial Team

Star of the Sea, Tuesday 17th December at 7.30pm

Confessions:

Saturday 21st December from 12noon until 1pm and from 4pm until 4.45pm

Carol Services in Star of the Sea:

- St Colum's P.S. Thursday 12th December at 6.30pm
- Cantemus Choral Concert Friday 13th December at 7.30pm
- Joint St Colum's & Portstewart Primary Schools Wednesday
- 18th December at 10.30am
- Dominican College Choir Wednesday 18th December at 7.30pm.

Christmas Masses:

Christmas Eve: Tuesday 24th December - 9.00pm (Vigil Mass) Christmas Day: Wednesday 25th December - 9.00am and 11.00am

Inter-Church Travelling Service:

Sunday 5th January at 11.30am starting at Portstewart Methodist Church.

The Web of Life

"Treat the earth as if your life depends on it." (Genesis 2:15)

September saw us celebrate the Season of Creation, its theme being 'The Web of Life'. The theme was chosen help us reflect on the essential facts of creation - that al creation comes from God and that we all play our part in it - and that it is up to us whether our actions in our dail lives support and nurture our environment or contribute to its destruction.

It can often feel as if our individual actions are but a mere drop in the ocean and that we can't make any difference, but as the Christian author, Max Lucado, writes in Outlive Your Life:

"No one can do everything, but everyone can do something"

Our September chapel noticeboard was a challenge to us all to 'change one thing' and thanks to all who added suggestions to it, some of which are included in the image above.

We all live busy lives and perhaps we can't all be as committed to the cause of the environment as Greta Thunberg. However, we can all make a few simple changes to how we consume and dispose of goods,



and to how we care for this beautiful earth of which God has entrusted us to be stewards. Pope Francis has recently entreated us all to take up this duty: "You are called to care for creation, not only as responsible citizens but as

Travelling Clergy

Portstewart clergy in three of the four "main churches" have hired furniture removal companies recently. We welcome back to Portstewart the new Rector of Agherton Church of Ireland parish, the Reverend Malcolm Ferry who replaces the Reverend Stephen Fielding. Stephen moved to St John's on the Malone Road, Belfast. Malcolm was in Portstewart as a curate in the eighties.

Portstewart Presbyterian Church await a new minister since the retirement

of the Reverend Terry Laverty last September. The Presbyterian Church can take up to a year to replace a minister so we'll keep them in our prayers.

The Methodist Church have a replacement for the Reverend Stephen Woods. He is the Reverend Tommy Stevenson who will also care for Ballymoney, Coleraine and University Chaplaincy. We will have an opportunity to meet the new ministers and their congregations at the Travelling Service

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In the coming months, as a parish, we will be looking at ways in which we can reduce our own

environmental footprint and fully respond to this call. In Star of the Sea our Pastoral Council intends to start by conducting an "eco audit" which will highlight the areas where we are making progress, but also where we can do better.

PublicTrans

We are also hoping to form a group in the near future that would focus especially on this area as it relates to our parish. If you would be interested in becoming part of such a group or would like to know more about how our parish can become "greener", please contact me at emer.m.okeeffe@gmail.com

Emer O'Keeffe - Chairperson, Parish Pastoral Council.



which will take place next year on Sunday 5th January, starting at 11.30am at the Methodist Church.

Within our Pastoral Community three Parish Priests have been changed since last August: Ballymoney parish now has Coleraine-born Fr Damian McCaughan; Dunloy and Cloughmills Parish has Fr Darren Brennan and Rasharkin Parish has Fr Luke McWilliams.

They and the people they serve are in our prayers during this time of change.

The Year in Pictures

The Travelling Service January 2019



1. Leaving Portstewart Methodist Church...





3. At the Church of Ireland...



Our Corpus Christi Procession in the grounds of Dominican College made its way down to the chapel in June.



One happy couple's transport awaits them in the chapel grounds at their wedding this summer!



Caption? Page 3.



The "Not in My Name" Pro Life march in Belfast in autumn which many of our parishioners attended.

The Spirit of Christmas

St Colum's P. S. children were recently Writers' Competition entitled 'Two asked to produce original writing on the theme of "The Spirit of Christmas". We have included two fine poetic pieces here, by Akino Smith (P3) and Isla Pepin (P7). Some also took the opportunity to enter the BBC Radio Ulster Young

Minute Tales' where entrants wrote a 300-word story around the theme. Christmas artwork by some of the P5 children can also be seen on other pages in this issue.

A "Coastally" Christmas

Walking along, kicking the sea foam on the Prom from the night before, Doireann exclaimed, 'I wish we had snow in Portstewart at Christmas. It doesn't feel like Christmas without snow.

- "Look! What's that in the sea?" Interrupted Erin.
- "It looks like a tree...like the Christmas tree from outside the library!"
- "Maybe it got washed away in the storm last night."
- As they turned corner of the steps in below Dominican College, they saw it clearly... "Erin, that's it - we need to do something." shouted Doireann.
- "I saw Richard setting up his boat at the harbour," remembered Erin.
- "The girls ran towards the harbour shouting, "Help! The tree is in the sea!"
- "I'll take a spin out and have a look," Richard replied, "but we'll need a rope to tow it in."
- "I'll sort a rope!" said Doireann, remembering the day the National Trust had towed their family car off the Strand. She quickly ran to Warke's Deli. "Can somebody please drive me to the Strand to get a rope?"
- When Doireann returned, word had spread about the missing Christmas tree and the whole town came to help. Some surfers swam out with the rope and attached it to the tree and Richard's boat.
- The boat towed the tree closer to shore where everyone came together. With all their might they pulled the tree on land and carried it to the Library.
- On Christmas morning the children woke to find new lights and decorations from Santa on the tree. The town gathered again to watch the lights turn on and Doireann exclaimed, "Who needs snow? This is the true spirit of Christmas!"

Doireann Campbell (P6)

A Recipe for Christmas Joy

You will need this mix:

- Start with lighting the fire. To make your heart's desire, A shake of snow falling gently, A dash of presents and decorations,
- A chapel filled with plenty of joy, To sing Noel - to the baby boy.

Mix with family, friends and snuggles, Stir gently with candles, hot chocolate and carols, With a twist of Santa down the chimney, A sprinkle of Christmas movies so merry, The tree lights up - you're lovely and cosy, The Christmas spirit is baked and ready! Isla Pepin P.7

The original and engaging story, "A Coastally Christmas", was written by Doireann Campbell (P6) - other entries by her schoolmates can be found on the school website: www. stcolumsprimaryschool.co.uk

A Christmas Acrostic Christmas has snowflakes. Holiday time with your family. Run upstairs to bed. I love Christmas. Santa down the chimney. Time together. Mary had Jesus on Christmas Day. A cold time of year. Snow is fun! Akino Smith P3

Outside the Chapel Gates

With Eugene Kelly

Twin Cathedrals Visit

On Wednesday September 11, a party of forty-three parishioners left on a trip (sponsored by SVP and the Marian Club) to Armagh to visit the home cathedrals of St Patrick. While the weather wasn't too good no one really cared because we would not be out in the elements for too long!

After a brief stop in Cookstown for a coffee break we arrived at the St Patrick's Church of Ireland Cathedral. Sam our tour guide showed us the salient aspects of the Cathedral's history.

After a hearty lunch in the Armagh City Hotel we made our way to St Patrick's Catholic Cathedral. It's a good job we had the bus handy because

both Cathedrals are on the top of a hill so access would not have been too easy. The guide brought us around and again pointed out the historical aspects of the Cathedral Everyone on board really enjoyed the visit to the cathedrals and the day out and are looking forward to next year's outing.

The trouble with words is that they can sometimes come back to bite the author. Below are two real church bulletin announcements that Prove the point:

Sunday at 5pm - prayer and medication to follow." "We are pleased to note that there has been a change of mind by the Housing Department regarding the name for the new Housing complex for the elderly. 'st Peter's Close' did seem somewhat inappropriate."



Soaring Star

When many a person would have called it a day after a horrific sports injury Grainne McGoldrick, teacher in St Colum's and Eoghan Rua stalwart, was determined that her camogie career would not end in such an ignominious way. It is that determination that has seen her struggle through surgery and months of painful physiotherapy to get herself back on her feet, let alone step back into the fray of the camogie pitch. So it is truly fitting that Grainne received her "Soaring Star" award from her colleagues in the camogie world, to cap her "All Star" award from ten years ago. Her dedication to her sport and work, her determination to overcome adversity and love of the game of camogie make her a good role model for all young girls out there who wish to be "Soaring Stars".





The Real Santa Claus

We may call him Santa, Saint Nick, Father Christmas or one of the many other names he goes by, but Santa Claus has long been the jolly, redsuited personification of Christmas gift-giving and patron saint of children. But who was he really? Where did he come from

and how did he become so central to the Christmas traditions and customs we know today?

We do know that the real person Santa is based on was on an early Christian bishop called Nicholas. He lived in Myra, in what is present-day Turkey. He was guite wealthy about him concerns a poor couple who had no money and they believe it is an old lady called "Befana". (This would have condemned the girls to a life of slavery.) down the family's chimney – one for each daughter. One landed in one of the daughter's stockings which had been hung up to dry - which explains the custom of hanging up stockings by the fire on Christmas Eve! Needless to say, everyone lived happily ever after.

Nicholas continued helping people and always tried to help them secretly. He didn't want any attention or thanks. Time passed and he was chosen to be a bishop. Bishops look after their people as shepherds look after their sheep and that is exactly what he did. When there wasn't any food, he found wheat; so that no one went hungry. He always helped those in trouble and throughout his life he showed people how to love God and care for each other. However, Nicholas was eventually exiled from Myra and put in prison during the persecution of Christians by the Roman Emperor, Diocletian. He was released after a time and lived to an old age and died peacefully. Nicholas became a saint by popular acclamation (before formal canonization procedures were introduced).

Surprisingly, St Nicholas is not only the patron saint of children, but also of sailors. One story tells of him helping some sailors that were caught in a fearful storm off the coast of Turkey. The storm was raging around them and all the men were terrified that their ship would sink beneath the giant waves. They prayed to St. Nicholas to help them. Suddenly, he was standing on the deck before them. He ordered the sea to be calm, the storm died away, and they Bryan Rooney

were able to sail their ship safely to port.

It is said his bones were stolen from Turkey by some Italian merchant sailors. His relics are now kept in the

Church named after him in the Italian port of Bari. On St. Nicholas' feast day (December 6th), the sailors of Bari still carry his statue from the Cathedral out to sea, so that he can bless the waters and so give them safe voyages throughout the year.

From fourth century Turkey and Italy, the legend of St Nicholas spread rapidly across Europe where different nations and cultures changed his name and costume to suit local tastes.

All over the world, families and friends give presents to each other. Most Christian children around the world believe in a Christmas gift-bringer. He's often Santa Claus, Father Christmas or Saint Nick, but in parts of Germany they believe that it is the "Kris Kringle" (or "Christkind"); in and was known for his kindness and generosity. One story Spain they believe it is the Wise Men and in parts of Italy

- so could not afford for their three daughters to be married. Dutch settlers took their ideas of Saint Nicholas to the New World and it was in America that the legend of Santa The legend goes that Nicholas dropped three bags of gold Claus really took off when Clement Clarke Moore wrote "The Night Before Christmas" for his three little daughters in 1822. The images we still have of Christmas Eve, with expectant children; a flying sleigh pulled by reindeer;
 - stockings stuffed with toys and gifts and a jolly, grinning Santa climbing down the chimney - owe much to this poem. Santa's red suit trimmed in white probably borrows something from the red and white robes of Bishop Nicholas as seen here.

 - Whatever we think of Santa Claus, Christmas itself is really
 - about the amazing present that God gave the world about two thousand years ago - Jesus. John's gospel says: "God loved the
 - world so much, that he gave his one and only
 - Son, so that whoever believes in him may not be lost but have eternal life..."

When we are opening our presents this Christmas or giving gifts to others, we

- should always remember why we are doing so -
- to honour Jesus the
- greatest gift of all.

Baptisms at Star of the Sea



Faye Macniallais – parents Padraig and Em











Ella Fenn – parents Thomas and Cathering



Niall and Megan) with her

Weddings at Star of the Sea





Proclaimers of the Word POPE FRANCIS INSTITUTES A DAY TO PROMOTE KNOWLEDGE AND LOVE OF SCRIPTURE.

Pope Francis has declared the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time to be the "Sunday of the Word of God" in order to promote a closer relationship with holy scripture and its dissemination in the world. In 2020, that date will be January 26th.

"A day devoted to the Bible should not be seen as a year event but rather a year-long event, for we urgently need grow in our knowledge and love of the Scriptures and of the risen Lord," the Pope wrote in an apostolic letter this September.

"For this reason, we need to develop a closer relationship with sacred Scripture; otherwise, our hearts will remain cold and our eyes shut, struck as we are by so many forms of blindness."

He added, "the Bible is not a collection of history books a chronicle, but is aimed entirely at the integral salvation the person."

In his apostolic letter announcing the celebration, Aperuit Illis, Pope Francis has said Catholics should keep in mind God's teaching in the Book of Revelation:

"Christ Jesus is knocking at our door in the words of sacred Scripture. If we hear his voice and open the doors of our minds and hearts, then he will enter our lives and remain ever with us," he said.

"The Bible," he noted, "cannot be just the heritage of some, much less a collection of books for the benefit of a privileged few. It belongs above all to those called to hea its message and to recognize themselves in its words." "The Bible is the book of the Lord's people, who, in listening to it, move from dispersion and division towards unity. The word of God unites believers and makes them one people," he stated.



lack White and Courtney Swir 31st August 2019

,	Each community can decide how to mark the Sunday of	
	the Word of God, but it is important, he said, that sacred	
	scripture be "enthroned."	
	One example he gave was for priests to give out Bibles or a book of the Bible to encourage daily prayer with sacred	
arly	scripture, such as lectio divina, or for bishops to celebrate	
to	the Rite of Installation of Lectors that day. He added that	
f	this is a good opportunity for parishes to renew their	
5	efforts to train lectors to be "genuine proclaimers of the word."	
ip	In Portstewart Parish there will be a special mass on	
	Sunday 26th January at noon, during which The Liturgy of	
	the Word will take a little longer than usual. After hearing the proclamation of the Word, the	
or	congregation will divide into small groups to break open	
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Fingerprints to **Footprints**

Among those who visited Jesus in the crib were poor shepherds and kings. Both groups came to know something which lay outside of their understanding or experience. They witnessed a remarkable event, which has never been surpassed in all human history.

It's a familiar tale but recently I became intrigued by the following suggestion: "Look at Jesus in the crib and imagine yourself as a child speaking to him in all simplicity, child to child as it were". One question some thought to ask was, "Jesus, what is it like not to be in Heaven?" This is a question that I had not considered before and it reinforced the fact that we all have something in common - indeed. none of us are in Heaven. This simple truth goes to the very heart of the Christmas story.

Archbishop Fulton Sheen in 1956 guipped that, "Given the state of the world now we may sometimes wish that Noah had missed the boat!" Looking around at today's world, we too may be tempted to think the same. Humanity seems at times to be giving up on humanity. However, the message of Christmas challenges these moments of despair. It was love that brought God to break into our human story and changed everything for ever. (Thank God for people like Noah who responded to God's love.)

Before Noah, many displayed an imperfect awareness of God's love. They believed that they could make their own way to heaven by their own efforts and, under their own initiative, bring "God down to earth". They failed to experience or respond to God's love - which is always present on earth. There are many today who live by similar desires to accumulate possessions, wealth, power and prestige - without any acknowledgement of God. They wish to rise by their own human enterprise and their 'god' is certainly not the God who came down from Heaven in Bethlehem.

John's Gospel opens with words found at the start of the creation account in Genesis, "In the beginning". This tells the truth that God first revealed himself in creation and from the very beginning of time sought ways to reveal his love to those who lived on earth. God left his fingerprints on what he had created for humanity to discover his presence.

From early on, however, some have tried to cover up the fingerprints of God. The same 'Word' spoken at the beginning then became flesh in the birth of Jesus. God alone took the initiative to descend from Heaven to live among us in a much more visible and personal way on earth.

It was through the love of God and not by any human effort or enterprise, that God became one of us. The God of Christmas is not a God who seeks us out to make things more difficult for us or to exercise his power and authority, but rather a God whose fingerprints became footprints. We are not left to make our own way to heaven. Jesus has joined us on our journey through human experience. Look for his footprints, they are everywhere in our lives and be thankful that at his birth Jesus, in his human nature, was like us, not in Heaven

So, "child to child", what questions or comments would you have for Jesus in the crib?

Kieran Hill

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Welcome into your Kingdom our departed relatives and friends NOVEMBER 2018 - NOVEMBER 2019

Mary Heneghan Anne Connors Joan Kerr Bridget Curtis Veronica Brolly Corrado Morelli Hugh Stewart Theo Laverty Brendan Loughrey Eileen Stuart Peggy Clarke Hilary McGowan Seoirse Mc Kinney

Monica Horner John Ferris Robert McLaughlin Kathleen Higgins Harriet Dugan Mary Mc Keever Sean McGuigan Margaret Campbell Maurice McConnell Vera Mc Keaque Bern O'Malley Cassie Houston





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Prop: Brendan Finnegan

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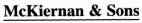
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