



A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

ADVENT/CHRISTMAS - 2011

www.fortmasseychurch.com

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

NOTES FROM UCW 2

FROM THE MANSE 3

PADRE PREMA 4
JOSEPH'S COAT

RATLAM SCHOOL 5
APPEAL

T'was the night before Christmas when all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse. The stockings were hung by the chimney with care, in hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there.

Most of us are familiar with these words. We have curled up in front of fireplaces listening to them. We have snuggled up in bed waiting for the sound of the reindeer up on the roof worried about whether we have the right kinds of cookies, and fallen asleep with visions of sugar-plums dancing in our heads.

Christmas Eve is a magical night, and children are very aware of that. They dance around counting the hours, knowing what comes next. It is a night for stories and music bringing alive for all of us the spirit of Christmas. It is a night to celebrate and to find within ourselves the ability to laugh and love, to care and hope, and to hear again,

Now in the same district there were shep-

herds out in the fields keeping watch over their flock.

We do not live in a place with shepherds, but in those days shepherds were plentiful. Children likely grew up dreaming about being a shepherd. The world has changed. We could talk about call centre employees keeping watch over their phones by night in a world of facebook and texting. We might expect the angels to announce the message over the internet rather than through the shepherds.

Today there has been born to you in the city of David a deliverer, the Messiah, the Lord.

Some arrive at Christmas Eve hoping for angel voices, wishing that we were shepherds who could hear them singing. Others of us wonder what this story, which has been told for a couple of thousand years, has to offer us in this new world. We live in a world of constant change, where we are often overwhelmed and stressed out. We think that most of what hap-

pens in this story is for the naive and those who do not understand the world. Yet Christmas, despite everything, cracks open that sliver within us in which mystery and holiness slip in. We think about a message of the sacred in a manger, hoping for peace and longing for faith.

While they were there the time came for her to have the baby. And she gave birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them at the inn.

May you find in the story, and in the music, that sense of what it might mean. **Silent night, Holy night. All is calm, all is bright.** May Christmas 2011 bring its own memories and give you light in the midst of darkness. 'Lighten our darkness, Lord, and take us into this Christmas.'

Rev. Trent



THE CHRISTMAS TRUCE

It was December 25, 1914, only 5 months into World War I. German, British, and French soldiers, already sick and tired of the senseless killing, disobeyed their superiors and fraternized with "the enemy" along two-thirds of the Western Front (a crime punishable by death in times of war). German troops held Christmas trees up out of the trenches with signs, "Merry Christmas."

"You no shoot, we no shoot." Thousands of troops streamed across a no-man's land strewn with rotting corpses. They sang Christmas carols, exchanged photographs of loved ones back home, shared rations, played football, even roasted some pigs. Soldiers embraced men they had been trying to kill a few short hours before. They agreed to warn each other if the top brass forced them to fire their weapons, and to aim high.

A shudder ran through the high command on either side. Here was disaster in the making: soldiers declaring their brotherhood with each other and refusing to fight. Generals on both sides declared this spontaneous peace-making to be treasonous and subject to court martial.

By March 1915 the fraternization movement had been eradicated and the killing machine put back in full operation. By the time of the armistice in 1918, fifteen million would be slaughtered.

Not many people have heard the story of the Christmas truce. On Christmas Day, 1988, a story in the *Boston Globe* mentioned that a local FM radio host played "Christmas in the Trenches," a ballad about the Christmas truce, several times and it became

the most requested recording during the holidays in Boston on several FM stations.

"Even more startling than the number of requests was the reaction to the ballad afterward by callers who hadn't heard it before," said the radio host. "They telephone me deeply moved, sometimes in tears, asking, 'What the hell did I just hear?'"

I think I know why the callers were in tears. The Christmas truce story goes against most of what we have been taught about people. It gives us a glimpse of the world as we wish it could be and says, "This really happened once." It reminds us of those thoughts we keep hidden away, out of range of the TV and newspaper stories that tell us how trivial and mean human life is. It is like hearing that our deepest wishes really are true: the world really could be different.

May what happened on that Christmas of 1914 inspire the peacemakers of today - for, now as always, the best time to make peace is long before the armies go to war.

To listen to this beautiful ballad, go to: www.personalgrowthcourses.net/audio/christmas_truce_in_the_Trenches



'An Historic Group: British and German soldiers photographed together': from the front page of The Daily Mirror.

From my family to yours, we wish you a blessed and peaceful Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year!

Submitted by Holly MacIntosh

NOTES FROM UCW

A note of thanks for all those who worked at our annual Christmas tea & Sale on November 19, 2011. The 'set-up-crew,' 'bread slicers,' those who worked on the 'sale tables,' and in the 'Tea Room,' 'bread room,' and the 'clean-up-crew.' You all did a fantastic job. We raised \$2,723.00.

Christmas Fruit Baskets will be made up and given to Archie Rasley (Berkley), Margaret Grant (Home), Judith Grant (Home), Joyce Langille (Berkley), Marjorie Macleod (Parkland), Frances Harvey (Northwood), Marie Clouter (Parkland), Patsy Dick - Flowers (Home) Joan Hyslop (Northwood-Ivany Place).

Our first fundraiser in 2012 is the 'Valentine Tea' on February 11th from 2 to 4 pm.

"Merry Christmas & Happy New Year!"

Submitted by Irene Parks

NAME THAT CHRISTMAS CAROL

1. Castaneous-colored Seed Vesicated in a Conflagration
2. Righteous Darkness
3. Arrival Time 2400 hrs - Weather Cloudless
4. Loyal Followers Advance
5. Bantam Male Percussionist
6. Frozen Precipitation Commence
7. Proceed and Enlighten on the Pinnacle
8. The Quadruped with the Vermilion Probiscis
9. Query Regarding Identity of Descendant
10. Give Attention to the Melodious Celestial Beings

(Answers on Page 3. NO PEEKING)

FROM THE MANSE - DECEMBER 2011

One of our Christmas traditions as a family is the Advent wreath in the centre of our kitchen table. Some years we have not been able to find it until mid-December when we can dig through the various Christmas boxes. This year we were organized (well, you can guess who was organized) and remembered to mark on the side of the box. We bought it years ago from the Canadian Bible Society for \$41.15. We know that because the price is still on the box - likely because it shocked us when we bought it. At the time that seemed like way too much to spend for a wreath when we did not have much for Christmas. But we decided to splurge knowing that we would never replace it and really liked it. Written around the wreath are the words *"The light shines in the darkness"*. Each year as we light the candles, we are grateful that we bought a wreath that we like and still use.

We meant to do the same with Christmas stockings. But our finances were even more stretched with small children and that never happened. Our stockings are better than those of our children. They are not fancy. But the felt stocking with "Linda" across the top was lovingly made by a family friend and it has endured. And the one with "Trent" was hand-made (by his

wife) to match the first year that we got married. None of the three children ever had a stocking with their name on it but when we finally thought about replacing them, they were not interested. Those were "their" stockings and part of the tradition.

Christmas is filled with a mixture of new and old traditions. We worked at blending traditions when we discovered that the Thompsons prefer the "get up at 5 a.m. and rip" tradition and the Cleveland's got stockings at a civilized hour, went to church and unwrapped slowly at about noon. You can imagine how much we enjoyed each other's methods the first few years.

One of the Christmas traditions which we now miss was the "parcel from Peg". Peg mailed a box each year from North Adams, Massachusetts to each Thompson family (that's 10 boxes!). That added up to a lot of boxes as the clan grew and expanded. Each box had a linen calendar for the following year, a gift for each person, and homemade marmalade, shortbread and peanut butter fudge. She shopped for months- holding up clothing items and asking a child walking by how old they were and to try it on if they looked about the right size. She had no relatives left in her part of the world and

those of us in this part of the world waited anxiously for the parcel each year. The marmalade was loved by a few and given to them by the rest of us. The shortbread was ok but not amazing. But the fudge- everyone missed the fudge.

A few years ago one of our nieces tried making the peanut butter fudge but without the secret ingredient not available in Canada, it was not quite the same. Last Christmas we finally perfected the recipe - after several tries. You could not follow the original recipe. It had changed over the years and Peg had not kept notes about that. But this year we will be ready to go- to send out batches of peanut butter fudge. It won't be quite the same as a parcel for Peg but it will become a tradition. And our stock of the secret ingredient is limited so no extra samples will be available.

As you begin your own set of traditions, those of us at the manse wish all of you a very Merry Christmas!



ANSWERS TO CAROL QUIZ

1. Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire
2. O Holy Night
3. It Came Upon a Midnight Clear
4. O Come, All Ye Faithful
5. Little Drummer Boy

6. Let it Snow
7. Go, Tell It on the Mountain
8. Rudolph, the Red-nosed Reindeer
9. What Child is This?
10. Hark! The Herald Angels Sing



PADRE PREMA JOSEPH'S COAT

The following is a story written by my father, the late Rev. Peter Stuart MacDonald, in a small compilation of stories entitled "Interesting Incidents in India", about a dear friend and colleague during his time as a missionary in India. Items in parentheses are my additions.

I record this to pay respect to a dedicated Indian colleague, Rev. Prema Joseph of Raoti (a village not far from Ratlam). Mr. Joseph was a man in his sixties when I was in my thirties. He was not one of the world's outstanding preachers, but he was a very sincere and dedicated individual as this little story will illustrate.

I went with him on a short "tour". That meant living in tents near some villages we wanted to visit. On this occasion there were only three of us, Mr. Joseph, Yohan our cook who prepared meals and looked after things at the tents while we were off to villages, and myself.

Our first evening Mr. Joseph and I went off to a village to meet the people and have a sort of "cottage prayer meetings" type of service with them. It was January and the weather was definitely chilly, perhaps about 50 degrees Fahrenheit. We returned to the tents and went to sleep in a pretty cool environment.

The next morning I heard Joseph and Yohan talking and finally dug myself out of the blankets. I got warmly dressed and went outside. Yohan had a fire going making breakfast chappaties (flat bread like pita). Mr. Joseph was standing warming his hands at the fire and obviously rather cold as he stood there in shirt sleeves. For a moment I felt rather ashamed,

here I was wearing a warm coat and my senior colleague was in shirt sleeves on such a cold morning.

Then I remembered that at the village last night Joseph was wearing a lovely warm coat. So I said, "Mr. Joseph, it is cold, you ought to have your warm coat on."

His reply was, "No. I don't want to wear it all the time. You see, much of the time I am talking with poor village people who cannot afford a warm coat. So I don't want to make myself soft because I don't like to wear a warm coat when they can't."

Rather a shining example of "identification", or "sitting where they sit."

Submitted by Ian MacDonald

A LITTLE WHITE LIE

Wendy was to bake a cake for the church Ladies' Group but forgot to do it until the last minute. She remembered it the morning of the bake sale and after rummaging through cabinets, found an angel food cake mix and quickly made it while drying her hair and dressing for work.

When she took the cake from the oven, the center had dropped flat and the cake looked horrible and there wasn't time to bake another cake! So, being inventive, she looked around the house for something to build up the center of the cake. She found it in the bathroom - a roll of toilet paper. She plunked it in and then covered it with icing. Not only did the finished product look beautiful, it looked perfect.

Before she left the house to drop the cake by the church and head for work, Wendy woke her

son and gave him money and specific instructions to be at the bake sale the moment it opened and to buy the cake and bring it home. When her son arrived at the sale, he found the perfect cake had already been sold. John grabbed his cell phone and called his mom. Wendy was horrified - she was beside herself! Everyone would know! What would they think? She would be ostracized, talked about, ridiculed! All night, Wendy lay awake thinking about people pointing fingers at her and talking about her behind her back.

The next day, Wendy promised herself she would try not to think about the cake and would attend the fancy luncheon at the home of a fellow church member and try to have a good time. She did not really want to attend because the hostess was a snob who more than once had looked down her nose at the fact that Wendy was not from the founding families, but having already RSVP'd, she couldn't think of a believable excuse to stay home.

The meal was elegant and to Wendy's horror, the cake in question was presented for dessert! Wendy felt the blood drain from her body when she saw it! She started out of her chair to tell the hostess all about it, but before she could get to her feet, the Pastor of the church who was present at the luncheon said, "What a beautiful cake!" Wendy, still stunned, sat back in her chair when she heard the hostess, a prominent church member, say, "Thank you, I baked it myself." Wendy smiled and thought to herself, "God is good!"

Submitted by Ruth MacKenzie

RATLAM SCHOOL APPEAL

Recently at Fort Massey United Church, during the children's time in the service we introduced the congregation to the project that the Sunday School was starting - collecting money to sponsor one child to attend Ratlam Mission School. This is going to be done through the Dr. Mina MacKenzie Memorial Trust Fund. As mentioned in the Fall FMC Newsletter, Dr. Mina MacKenzie was a Canadian missionary doctor from Pictou Nova Scotia who worked for many years in India. While there she adopted a number of children, one of whom is Mrs. Sarina Bayer and the person running the Trust Fund.

The amount needed to sponsor the education of one child at the Ratlam school is \$300. This covers tuition, room and board, and educational materials (including uniform, books, and note books, etc.).

To be eligible to receive sponsorship to the school a child must come from a family recommended by social workers in the villages. The family income must be less than 2000 Rupees per month (less than the equivalent of \$40/month). As explained to me by Sarina most of these children are not Christian, because Christian villagers tend to have better incomes because they tend to be better educated than the non-Christian villagers. As she says, "A child is a child and they all deserve an education." As Ratlam Mission School is a Christian school the children learn about the Christian faith and scriptures and so they come to understand the basics of Christian teachings.

To put this in the larger perspective of Indian society I

I would like to relate an experience from a trip that Linda and I took to India in the summer of 1976. While traveling in central India we were the guests of relatives of Hindu friends of our here in Halifax. The in-law held a high office in the state government of Madhya Pradesh (the large Central State) and so we were given priority treatment in much of our travels in the area. On a trip to the ancient Buddhist centre of Sanchi (northeast of Bhopal, which is famous for the Union Carbide chemical disaster) we were greeted by the Assistant District Magistrate and taken to his home for a formal breakfast (and not the home of the District Magistrate who was a bachelor). While sitting and chatting it became evident that practically all the guests invited to meet us had attended Christian mission schools and universities - Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and others.

The quality of the education at Ratlam Mission School is such that its graduates have gone on to study for advanced training in medical, financial, and church related fields. The man who was my best friend when we lived in Ratlam in the 1950's is retired from being the director of medical social services at the Ludhiana Christian Medical College Hospital (in the Punjab), his older sister went on to become a medical doctor specializing in obstetrics and gynecology, the granddaughter of the man who was our cook (a man who is still largely illiterate) has gone on to become a nurse. There are so many people that I know of that I could go on for a long time listing them and their accomplishments.

She also told me that even though there are government schools that children can attend, those schools charge students for many "small things" and this results in many families being unable to afford education for their children.

A young girl from one of the villages near Ratlam has been selected to be the one sponsored by the Fort Massey Sunday School. She will be able to start school in Ratlam at the beginning of the next school year at the beginning of July 2012.

If you are considering giving a Christmas gift in the form of a donation to a worthy charity, where you know that all your money reaches the needy, with an identifiable target, then I would like to suggest that you consider giving the gift of an education to a child at Ratlam Christian School. The specific costs for various potential gifts are listed below.

- \$300 - Full sponsorship of a child for one year
- \$100 - Medical treatments
- \$50 - Room and board for 2 months
- \$25 - School uniform

Tax-deductible receipts will be issued for donations of \$25 or more.

Donations can be mailed to:

Dr. Mina MacKenzie Memorial Trust Fund
3490 Cawthra Road
Mississauga, Ontario L5A 2Y1

Submitted by Ian MacDonald