



It would not come as a surprise to say that many of us can admit to feeling a little confused this Christmas. Some things may seem the same, the seasonal illuminations have been switched on in town, shops have reopened and their shelves are stocked with the usual ideas for gifts and decorations and, as always, the weather is getting noticeably chillier. But... it's not the same sharing our favourite festival with a pandemic. December is a special month with treasured memories, music and words, traditions secular and religious, but what will Christmas 2020 be like? There is little doubt it will be a more humble and modest one, stripped of many of the things associated with a festive season. Nevertheless an opportunity to take stock of our fragile lives and thank God for the simple moments we have in abundance, gifts which outweigh those of contrived extravagance.

Maria in the film version of 'The Sound of Music' reminds the children, in her care during a thunderstorm, that when she is unhappy and things look bleak, she tries to "think of nice things". Although 'Door bells and sleigh bells and schnitzel with noodles' were not listed, last month readers of this newsletter were asked to send in or 'tweet' some of their own 'favourite things' in that vein. Many thanks to those who took the time to share these treasured moments; below is a selection, every one a year-round Christmas present.



December shop window display
Boulogne



- ◆ Christmas Day ◆
- ◆ The smell of toast ◆
- ◆ Swimming in the sea ◆
- ◆ Travelling to faraway places ◆
- ◆ Cuddling a newborn grandchild ◆
- ◆ Roast Beef and Yorkshire pudding ◆
- ◆ Listening to birdsong in the garden ◆
- ◆ Cooking and eating out with friends ◆
- ◆ Watching the birds bathing in the birdbath ◆
- ◆ The challenge of painting a landscape or still life ◆
- ◆ Sitting in the garden with an *apero* on a summer's evening ◆
- ◆ Putting my feet into my sheepskin slippers on a winter's morning ◆
- ◆ The noise overheard of grandchildren playing hide and seek in our flat ◆
- ◆ A pint of real ale by a river whilst looking at my wife drinking her light and lime ◆
- ◆ Two boiled eggs with Marmite soldiers every Sunday morning since I was 1 year old ◆

**A PEACEFUL CHRISTMAS AND A
HAPPY NEW YEAR**



Forthcoming services in the Chaplaincy:

Monastère du Carmel, Rue du Denacre, Saint-Martin-Boulogne
Oratoire Notre Dame de la Misericorde, Rue Gaillard, Calais

No services in church - Zoom services will continue each Sunday at 10h30 until the end of the year

Salle de l'Arsenal, Rue de l'Arsenal, Hesdin

★ Sunday 6 December 2020 10h30 – Second Sunday in Advent

Please contact David Sergent for details of further services this month: dav.sergent@gmail.com

News from the Diocese and Chaplaincy

Canon Dr. Peter Hooper, currently priest-in-charge of seven rural churches near Melton

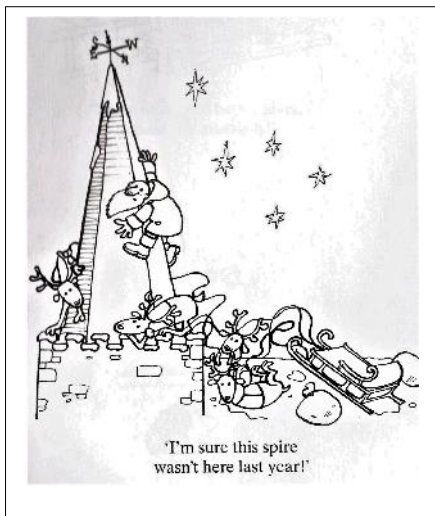


Mowbray and Area Dean of the Framland Deanery in the Leicester Diocese, has been appointed to be the next Archdeacon of France. No newcomer to this side of the Channel, prior to ordination Peter was managing director of a subsidiary of DuPont, based in Toulouse. A major part of his training took place at the *Institut Catholique de Toulouse* and whilst living in *la ville rose* he served as Warden in the Anglican Chaplaincy there. Peter will commence work with us on 15 February 2021 and be licensed initially as Acting Archdeacon, continuing to live in Leicestershire. Arrangements for his move to France will be made later, when he will be licensed as Archdeacon in full

title. Peter was sadly widowed last year with the sudden loss of his wife Suzanne; however, he has two grown up children, William and Catherine who are equally excited about his new international post in the church. We will, of course, look forward to meeting Peter at our Chaplaincy in the not too distant future and pray for his every success.

Christmas boxes to go to Maria Skobtsova House in Calais - Pauline Cecchin is once again organising the production of these and will ensure they arrive in time for Christmas. The list of contents is as follows: tooth paste; tooth brush; gant de toilette; note book; pencil and sharpener or ball point pen; packet of biscuits; socks (size 41/42); Smarties or similar (small boxes); folding shopping bag; warm hat; a tea spoon; a reusable plastic beaker and any other treats. Please wrap the boxes. Contact Pauline for more details: ☎ 03 21 92 14 70 or e-mail: cecchinp@wanadoo.fr
 PS: Pauline is also collecting postage stamps help fund the Girl Guides in Dominica

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Other News

Christmas cards and Christmas crackers are for sale in aid of our designated charities: l'Arche, Boulogne Lifeboats, Calais Lifeboats. Please contact Linda Pillière for any further details: linda.pilliere@free.fr

Scargill House Link

Members of our congregation, Vaughan and Hilary Johnson, have been involved with Scargill House in North Yorks for a considerable time and would like to draw your attention to a number of on-line events taking place in the coming month. Apart from various sessions there will also be a Carol Service streamed live from the chapel on 20th December. Go to: scargillmovement.org



Contact details: Any news, short articles, adverts or any form of announcement for inclusion, please send to: Malcolm Gale – malcolm.gale@dbmail.com - ☎ 03 21 31 83 57 Port: 06 99 09 60 44

"The Chaplaincy in the Pas de Calais upholds the principles of Safeguarding and works diligently to make all aspects of the Chaplaincy a safer place".

Christmas South of the Equator

Trish Answorth, shares some of her childhood memories of Christmas at Gatooma

(Kadoma), in former Rhodesia - present day Zimbabwe - during the late 40s and early 50s

It is in the hottest months, between September and October, when the beautiful Jacaranda trees bloom. The Msasa and Mopani trees also spring to life with their red, golden pink and copper leaves, which spread like carpets throughout the bushveld and over the hills. It is also the time when we, as small children, started preparations for the end-of-year celebrations with the learning of Christmas Carols. I never thought for one moment it was strange, but as time has passed I have come to realise just how peculiar it really was. Imagine singing Good King Wenceslas and other carols about snow and ice when very few of us had ever seen or felt either. When I questioned my mother on the subject, I was taken through to the kitchen and shown the inside of her fridge's tiny ice compartment; "This is ice" she explained and I wondered if perhaps people in England lived in fridges.



Two Christmas Puddings and a rather smug little brother-1948 Gatooma. Left to right : Trish, Mike, Barbara.

Nevertheless we sang our little hearts out and played our instruments roughly in tune with Mrs Flexmore, our schoolteacher, while she pounded out the melody on her upright. Classrooms became factories for making paper chains and decorations as well as rehearsals for 'The Play'. The play was usually one with a Christmas theme and after the principal parts had been handed out plans for costumes were drawn up. The outfits were usually made of crêpe paper, which upon reflection was not the most practical material to use in the hot and steamy climate of November and December –the 'Rainy Season' school term. The classroom would be decorated and a tree would be brought in. Oh the tree was a thing of beauty to behold! At the time we were living in a town called Gatooma, which was the centre of the cotton growing region so faux snow was readily available and for that reason our tree was liberally covered in it. Likewise 'snow' was glued onto the corners of windows and anywhere else we thought



Selukwe Methodist Church.

appropriate. The upright piano was also a perfect place for snow and decorations, which had to be cleaned before January.

The church celebration was entirely different. Once again principal players were chosen and rehearsed, while the rest of us dressed up and did what we were told to do. I seemed always to be a shepherd, maybe because my dressing gown was suitable. Kitchen towels and lengths of rope finished off the costumes, but one thing never changed; it was the manger with a baby Jesus. The job of dusting it off and replacing the straw was given to older children, which they did solemnly and with reverence. The mother of the girl playing Mary made her a blue outfit and Joseph wore his best dressing gown. The three wise men, bearing gifts, were quite frankly the leading lights of the show in their sparkling costumes and above all of us was a star, hanging from a beam catching the breeze and shining brightly as we sang: 'We will rock you'. Normally it all went well, although I remember one year my best friend Gillian and I, as rather large shepherds, falling off the back of the stage for lack of space.

The vicar of our church told us the story of the Christ child and why we celebrated Christmas. To us it was a revelation that we were celebrating a birthday without cake and candles. "Gifts are secondary although very welcome" he told us, "They represented generosity, kindness and sharing. All good things as long as the gift does not eclipse the reason for the celebration - *It is not the size of the present but the thought that counts.*"

The little nativity scenes at church were far more important than the school play because everyone crowded into the small place of worship to celebrate and witness, once again, the miracle of the birth of Christ. Family members in the audience perspired and fanned themselves with hymn sheets while the cicadas shrieked in the trees outside; the sun beat down and trees blossomed while birds sang. There was nothing 'deep and crisp and even' about our Rhodesian Christmases. It was vibrant, alive and warm but the message was clear.

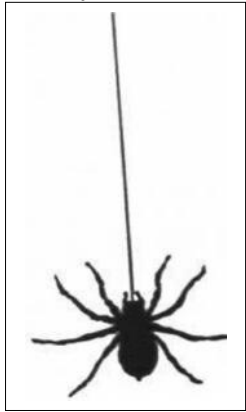
Later, after the bottom fell out of the cotton industry, we moved south 169 kilometres from Gatooma to Selukwe (now known as Shurugwi) in 1954, but wherever we lived and however we celebrated, the reason for it remained unchanged.

An Up-to-Date Dorothy Story

Dorothy was puzzled and more than a little alarmed. She hadn't seen Marcus for several days, but worse, she hadn't seen anyone else either. There hadn't been any human presence in church for weeks, and she couldn't understand it. Where was everybody? There were always days when the church was virtually deserted, but never for weeks on end like this. Although it was actually quite nice having the church to herself (it was her home after all), without human beings coming in chomping on biscuits after the service each week, there were no crumbs. And no crumbs meant no food for a little elderly mouse. Dorothy wondered whether God had moved out? Or whether she had done something to upset God? Wasn't God supposed to protect all creatures, particularly humans and church mice? Why had God forgotten her?



With no food, Dorothy barely had the energy to crawl over to her patch of sunlight on the church floor, but once there she felt something tickle her little pink ear. Marcus! Dorothy was so relieved she wanted to hug him, but it was difficult for a little elderly mouse to hug a spider with eight legs so she contented herself with saying crossly, 'Where have you been? Where is everyone?'



'Haven't you heard? They're all ill. Well, not all ill actually, but there's this horrible virus which is spread from human to human and some of them are dying, so they all have to stay away from each other. That's why the church has been closed and no one can come in.' Dorothy gasped. 'Is it a punishment from God, do you think? Have humans been so awful that God wants to wipe them from the earth?'

Marcus resisted an urge to laugh. It wasn't really fair to laugh at someone else's beliefs, however erroneous they might be. But hadn't Dorothy learned anything about God in all the years she'd been a church mouse? 'No, definitely not, Dorothy! You know God is love itself. Love couldn't possibly wish anything as horrible as this on anyone or anything. In fact, God is right now helping humans to come up with some answers to the problem. God has the scientists working on producing a vaccine to protect people, and God would rather God's house was shut than people getting ill through it.'

'But God isn't here!' Dorothy's voice rose to a wail. 'I'm so hungry and I feel abandoned by God.' Marcus snorted. 'You've been through many a winter with leaner times than this, Dorothy. And God doesn't live in church, God lives in people (and church mice and church spiders too) and all around. God is everywhere. You just need to trust God, make this little sacrifice and have patience. All will be well, you'll see. God never abandons anyone. Say a little prayer, keep the faith and just wait.' So Dorothy did, and do you know, Marcus was right.

Dorothy, normally with fat little legs and a noticeably plump belly, could now only be described as skinny. Marcus feared it was more than that, she was gaunt. With nobody in church for months now, there was no food at all. Nobody to drop crumbs, no broken biscuits, and even the candles were no longer around. Someone had slipped into church and hidden them away in boxes so Dorothy was unable to access them. She was literally starving and Marcus hated to see her wasting away like this. 'Why don't you pop outside, Dorothy? There may be something to scavenge outside in the churchyard, but if not, you could explore a few rubbish bins. And there must be seeds scattered about. Birds often drop seeds. Why don't you try?'

Dorothy was frightened. She had only been outside the church on a couple of occasions before, and that for just a few minutes before she scurried back into safety. She knew her town and country cousins existed in the great outdoors, but she was alone and elderly, and the thought of venturing beyond the church terrified her. 'Is this how refugees feel?' she asked Marcus. 'So hungry that they'd do anything to find food, but at the same time too scared to leave the only place of safety they know?' 'I think it must be,' Marcus replied gravely. 'But it's not only refugees. Since lockdown lots of people aren't allowed to work so they have no money, and although the government gives them an allowance, it takes a while to come through. Food banks have been overwhelmed with people needing food.' 'Are there food banks for mice?' Dorothy asked hopefully.

Marcus grinned as best a spider could. 'No Dorothy, you'll have to find your own food. So be brave and go out into the churchyard. You're so thin now you'll easily squeeze under the big oak door. Ask God to help.' So Dorothy sent up a heartfelt prayer, asking God to give her the strength and courage she needed. Then she took a deep breath, staggered over to the door as she was too weak to scurry, squeezed underneath and was soon out in the churchyard. There she immediately found some seeds on the gravel path, and lots of delicious plants to nibble. Quite forgetting her fear she ate until she was full before going back into the church.

'If only I hadn't given into my fear,' she sighed, 'I could have eaten like that every day. How strange it is that when I reach the end of my tether and am forced to rely solely on God, things eventually work out okay. From now on I'm going to try and rely more on God than on myself.'

And with that she found her little patch of sunlight on the church floor, curled her long tail around herself and fell contentedly asleep.

With many grateful thanks to Janice B. Scott for this touching story.