

DIOCESAN EPOST

Celebrating the Diocese of Islands and Inlets

A Section of the ANGLICAN JOURNAL

DECEMBER 2021

Ezekiel in the garden

*St. Peter, Comox,
reclaims Halloween*

BY NAOMI RACZ

Sulin Milne, incumbent at St. Peter, Comox, wanted to reclaim Halloween, or All Hallows Eve, as part of the triduum along with All Saints and All Souls. “It’s become a secular event,” says Sulin, “But people don’t realise that ‘hallow’ means ‘holy.’ The Bible is rich in images of the otherworldly, of life and death, good and evil. There’s a need to engage in these themes, but I wanted to do it without glorifying evil.”

Sulin’s son Freddie knew the perfect Bible chapter: Ezekiel 1, in which Ezekiel has a vision of four “living creatures”:

This was their appearance: they were of human form. Each had four faces, and each of them had four wings. Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf’s foot; and they sparkled like burnished bronze. Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands... As for the appearance of their faces: the four had the face of a human being, the face of a lion on the right side, the face of an ox on the left side, and the face of an eagle...

“The passages in Ezekiel are very descriptive, it’s very fruitful imagery,” says Freddie, 20, who is completing a fine art diploma at North Island College. “It feels creepy reading it. You’re immersed

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Ezekiel’s vision of the four living creatures was brought to life by Freddie Milne and Alison Knowles. Photo by Naomi Racz.

The truth within the story

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Read the full story on page 3

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Read the full story on page 5



Watching for the light

FROM THE BISHOP'S CHAIR

THE RIGHT REVEREND
ANNA GREENWOOD-LEE

In 1944 on the first Sunday in Advent, Alfred Delp, a Jesuit priest incarcerated in a Nazi prison on charges of high treason against the Third Reich, offered the following reflection on the gospel text:

“There is perhaps nothing we modern people need more than being genuinely shaken up. Where life is firm we need to sense its firmness; and where it is unstable and uncertain and has no basis, no foundation, we need to know this too and endure it.”

He goes on to talk about how, from where he sits on death row, it seems to him that “[w]e have stood on this earth in false paths, in false security ...”

“[I]n our own spiritual insanity we really believed we could, with the power of our own hand and arm, bring the stars down from heaven and kindle flames of eternity in the world. We believed that with our own forces we could avert the dangers and banish night, switch off and halt the internal quaking of the universe. We believed we could harness everything and fit it into a final order that would stand.”

But, of course, this did not work out. “The hope of Advent,” he writes, “is that we will, well and truly, be shaken up.”

“Advent is a time when we ought to be shaken and brought to the realization of ourselves. The necessary condition for the fulfillment of Advent is the renunciation of the presumptuous attitudes and alluring dreams in which and by means of which we always build ourselves imaginary worlds. In this way we force reality to take us to itself by force — by force, in much pain and suffering.”

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Bishop's Calendar

December

- 1 Archdeacon's Meeting
- 2 Provincial House of Bishops (via Zoom)
- 5 Preaching at Church of the Advent, Colwood (in-person)
- 12 Preaching at St. Michael & All Angels, Royal Oak (pre-recorded)
- 14 Christ Church Cathedral Buildings Ltd. Board Meeting (via Zoom)
- 16 Finance Committee (via Zoom)
- 19 Preaching at St. Peter, Quamichan (in-person)
- 24 Preaching Christmas Eve Eucharist at Christ Church Cathedral, Victoria (in-person)

Please check www.bc.anglican.ca/bishop/schedule for an up-to-date listing.

The synod office will close for Christmas break at 4 p.m. on December 23, 2021. It will re-open on January 3, 2022.

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Volume 55, No 10

The truth within the story

St. Christopher, Saturna Island, replaces its outdoor nativity

BY JEANETTE AMUNDSON

St. Christopher, Saturna Island, is small in size but rich in sacred imagination. Christmas 2020 was approaching, and the island was in COVID-19 lockdown. Like most churches during the pandemic, the lights were out and the doors were locked, and late autumn leaves and pine needles had hidden the walkway. Added to that, our more than 40-year-old outdoor nativity set was beyond repair. Still, Christmas was coming.

We decided to create a new nativity from the old, working individually from our places of isolation. One person gathered paint samples while another collected leftover colours from the recycling depot. The old nativity pieces were almost good enough to trace, so a third person drew new pieces that were then cut and given a base coat of paint. Hay and lights for the surrounding were in wait. We had to imagine the rest. Trusting ourselves and the story, we leaned on sacred imagination and from this beautiful and courageous story of the birth of Jesus, a new story began to emerge.

As a story painter, I felt the heaviness of a tradition that portrayed a young woman, Mary, birthing a baby in less

than desirable circumstances — a stable, surrounded by men: Joseph, shepherds, wisemen, an innkeeper, not to mention all the animals. A bit much! At least one sheep could be an expectant ewe.

My search continued. It became reasonable to think that an innkeeper could be a woman who, even when there was no room in the inn, would not turn away a young mother ready to give birth. We aren't told who provided the swaddling clothes, but if they had not come with Mary and Joseph, we could imagine that a sympathetic female innkeeper knew exactly where to find swaddling clothes for a new baby.

We know Bethlehem of Judea to be the traditional home of King David, whose son Solomon was a king who forged political alliances across the Middle East and North Africa. Needless to say, Black women could be considered part of the story. So, this nativity was set to imagine a Black woman as the capable innkeeper in Bethlehem. There may have been no room at the inn, but this woman would make do with whatever she could find to help a young woman in labour.

And who are the wise men? Were they wise? Were they men? Does it matter whether we call them wise men or magi? Many significant supporting persons in scripture are nameless. I wanted more for such an amazing story as the birth of Immanuel, God with us. After much

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The innkeeper. Photo by Jeanette Amundson.



A wise woman. Photo by Jeanette Amundson.



Jeanette Amundson and her fellow parishioners at St. Christopher, Saturna Island, replaced the church's aging nativity scene during the Christmas 2020 COVID-19 lockdown. Photo by Jeanette Amundson.

Bishop Anna sets out six diocesan priorities

In her remarks to the recent meetings with synod office staff, archdeacons and the diocesan council, Bishop Anna set out six current priorities as a way of focusing the efforts (as they relate to the vision) of diocesan leadership in the coming months.

1. Faith in Foundation

Current ministries: post-pandemic re-opening

Support our churches in the work of re-opening. As we transition to a post-pandemic reality, this is an opportunity to consider carefully what needs to be done in-person and what we can/should continue to do online (e.g., worship, workshops, meetings, conferences).

2. Faith in Action

Reconciliation and Beyond: racism and decolonization

We need to be awake to the racial reckoning that is going on in the world and do our own work, including learning more about our colonial history. This is work we will each need to actively undertake in a life-long practice, as part of our labour to live into our baptismal covenant by respecting the dignity of every human being.

3. Faith in Action

Engaging God's World: climate catastrophe

We are being called to the work of addressing the climate catastrophe. How will we collectively do this as the body of Christ? Discerning what is ours to do will be a focus of our work.

4. Faith in Foundation

Current Ministries: personnel

Our people are our most valuable treasure. Diocesan council has created a human resource (HR) working group, chaired by vice-chancellor Isabel Weeks, to update our HR policies and procedures and develop an HR manual.

Some of our recruitment and retention challenges:

- The number of parishes served by part-time and retired clergy, clergy who are

close to retirement

- How our compensation package aligns with the cost of living in this part of the world
- Reduced number of clergy available to take positions

5. Faith in Foundation

Current Ministries: governance

The pandemic has forever altered how we are Church in many ways. We need to identify systems and ways of being that will work for us as we move forward post-pandemic. We also need a governance system that balances transparency and accountability with flexibility and adaptability.

6. Faith in Action/Faith in Foundation: Stewardship

As we develop a 2022 budget, we will be transparent and conscious that we have a culture in this diocese that has yet to embrace a robust financial stewardship ethos. At the parish level this means that many parishes are overly reliant on rental income. At the synod level apportionment and investment income may not be enough to cover expenses. Difficult decisions will have to be made to adjust for this reality. ■

Ezekiel in the garden

Continued from cover

in the historical detail and then these creatures appear. You can tell that Ezekiel is shocked.”

Freddie put his artistic skills to use and, along with Alison Knowles, who is involved in youth ministry at St. Peter, constructed a life-size model of one of Ezekiel's living creatures to hang in the church garden on All Hallows Eve.

He constructed the body of the creature using chicken wire, while Alison used papier-mâché to form the head. The frame was then covered in cloth and the creature was hung from a tree, with lighting and a dramatic soundtrack to complete the effect. The soundtrack features recordings of the wind and sea, as well as synth. The Ezekiel passages are read aloud by parishioner Jonathan Hocking.

Freddie hopes the creature in the garden will create a similar sense of unease for passers-by and trick-or-treaters to the

one he felt when first reading the verses in Ezekiel. Designing the creature has lessened the eeriness of those passages for Freddie, but late at night, as he works in his studio in the rectory, the creature swinging from the tree still catches him off guard. “I've seen it down there and had to look again before I realised ‘Oh, it's the creature.’”

Freddie and Alison's creation hung in the church garden for the three days of the triduum this year, and you can see a video of the creature on the St. Peter YouTube channel. ■

RENEWED **HEARTS** RENEWED **SPIRITS** RENEWED **PEOPLE**



God wishes us small

Reflections on the nature of God

BY TARA SARACUSE

This reflection was originally published on the diocesan website in December 2020, but the Post's editor felt that the themes explored are still relevant as we head into the 2021 Christmas season.

God must be huge, or at least, that's what I thought when I was a child. I understood that God was all-powerful and knew all there was to know — so surely, God is huge. God, I imagined, is so big that the galaxy is cradled in God's arms. Big things are always powerful.

That is, until you learn about how the smallest of living things can be so powerful that every human on Earth is affected by it. I have come to believe that our current fellowship with a tiny virus offers us this: God wishes us small.

We, as humans, spend so much time trying to be big — like God — and we've done a fair job. We've built sprawling cities dotted with skyscrapers, and tankships longer than 18 blue whales lined nose to tail, and a machine that drills 40,604 feet deep into the Earth's crust — which, by the way, is 15 times deeper than the height of the world's tallest building. We go big in all directions: up and down, side to side.

Our use of the Earth for farming food now subsumes over half of the planet's available land. And we need a lot of food to satisfy our big need to celebrate, too. In Canada, many families host annual Christmas gatherings that feature a table laden with food and wine, presents for everyone, and a tree loaded with lights and tinsel. It feels good, too; these big celebrations are a reminder that we are fortunate enough to have food to spare. Big celebrations make us feel safe.

I prefer Advent to Christmas. I remember, when I was small, the first time my family was invited to light a candle on the Advent wreath at our church. My father explained to me that we were waiting for a baby, but we were waiting quietly with

candlelight and tree boughs and the smell of apple cider wafting into the sanctuary from the hall's kitchen. That made sense. Babies need quiet. Babies need to be cradled and sung to. So, Advent always made sense to me: we light a candle, and we make our hearts quiet and ready for when the baby comes. These feel like small things, but small things make a big difference to a baby.

As I grew older, Christmas transformed into a time that I associate with big stress. Every year, I hustled about town on my lunch hours and in the dying light after work to find the perfect gift for my loved ones, and it had to be big: physically big or expensively big or emotionally big. Every year, my family planned a meal that resulted in days of leftovers, or waste. Every year, I was invited to more parties, that were scheduled earlier and earlier in December to fit them all in, until I was attending my first Christmas parties in November — in rooms alight with plastic garlands.

One year, I found myself shopping for Christmas gifts and party dresses in September, and I applauded myself for thinking ahead. As I grew, the Christmas season also grew until it was so big that two things happened: first, Advent had been diminished amongst the hustle of Christmas preparations; and second, Christmas no longer made me feel safe. Instead, Christmas Day was simply a day of relief — relief that it was over.

Some things can get so big, they are no longer safe.

Viruses are small, but powerful. I don't need to remind you how the arrival of COVID-19 has shaped this year for all of humanity, but I invite you to take a moment to marvel at how something we cannot even see without a microscope has made such a big impact. Small things are just as powerful as big things.

What if there is an opportunity this Advent and Christmas to be powerfully small?

What if we spent some of our December remembering the ants and honeybees? To remember that the Earth depends on the ants to aerate the soil and the bees to pollinate the fruit. Or to remember bacteria — a mindless organism that consumes everything it encounters? To remember how bacteria decomposes the deadfall to feed the trees. What if we remember all the good viruses, like the phages in our body that kill harmful bacteria in our digestive and respiratory tracts?

Instead of focusing on what is diminished in our celebrations this year, maybe God is inviting us to consider the power in the small things in our lives.

I will share with you my grandmother's Christmas Eve tradition, which was quickly scrapped by the family upon her death. My Oma claimed that our family's Romanian heritage stipulated that on Christmas Eve

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Photo by Naomi Racz.



Seeing Christmas through Herod's eyes

Diocesan Theologian

BY JOHN THATAMANIL

Menacing danger sets the tone in Matthew's telling of the Christmas story. Why? Might the danger inherent in the Messiah's birth be worth remembering lest we forget it amidst the light-filled cuddle fest of Christmas? Immediately after Matthew presents Jesus' genealogy and the story of Jesus' miraculous conception, Herod looms large.

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him...

When a king is frightened, violence draws near. The reason for Herod's fear is obvious: the wise men speak of a coming king, and kings do not cede power lightly. The prospect of another king marks a threat to Herod's reign, which is why one wonders about the wisdom of the wise men in our narrative. Why do they herald a coming king to the current one? Why do they appear to take Herod at his word when he expresses his wish to offer the child

homage? Doesn't seem too wise to me.

Contemporary readers regard Herod as murderously misguided. Jesus posed no threat to Herod as our Lord's kingdom is "not of this world." We accept that Jesus did not aspire to conventional political power. So, the tragedy of Herod — and what comes next, namely the Massacre of the Innocents — is especially grievous because unnecessary. Jesus does not want Herod's throne.

But what if there's more to the story? True, Jesus does not seek to rule, but Jesus' message was anything but apolitical. Far from it. To proclaim the good news that folks on the underside — the poor, the marginalized, the mourners, and the meek — matter to God is profoundly political. God's commitment to the oppressed has always threatened conventional top-down power configurations. It is no accident of history that life expectancy among prophets — ancient and modern — tends to be very low.

Prophets do not desire political power, but they threaten its very foundations. They do so by proclaiming that God judges societies by how the most vulnerable in those societies are faring. Sadly, even in our putatively democratic nations, financial and corporate elites still dictate policy. According to the *Carbon Majors Report*, 100 companies are responsible for 71% of the world's greenhouse gas

emissions since 1988. These companies are responsible for the grave state of the health of the planet and its inhabitants, human and non-human alike.

Those who seek political power accept such top-down power configurations in the name of "realpolitik" — prioritizing practical matters over ethics or ideology. By contrast, God esteems the power of love over the love of power. God refuses to regard any hierarchy as fixed and immovable. That refusal threatens those who wield political power because it upends our very understanding of power itself. Power is not finally about coercion; authentic power lies in love's capacities for persuasion.

Christmas turns the world upside down. God rules not from heaven on high but has entered into the muck and fragile glory of creaturely life through Mary's womb. God is not up there, nearer to those who sit on their elevated thrones, but down here among the lowly. That remains, as ever, the radical message of the Christmas season.

As strange as it may seem to say this, Herod understood the topsy-turvy implications of the Messiah's birth better than many would-be Jesus followers who are caught up in the consumerist frenzy that is, even now, nipping at our heels. May we, with Herod, learn once again to see Christmas as the dangerous and disturbing holiday it truly is. ■

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CYNTHIA MOE-LOBEDA

Thought-provoking fiction adds to a very familiar Bible account

Book Review

BY GARY DAVIES

The Book of Longings by Sue Monk Kidd. New York, Viking, 2020.

“Tell me the stories of Jesus I love to hear” goes the old children’s hymn. We Anglicans are so familiar with Bible stories from the New Testament; we hear them year after year in the Sunday readings of our liturgical seasons — accounts of the anticipation, birth, life, temptation, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of our Lord.

The title of Kidd’s novel suggests yet another possible addition to the Bible. It is apparent from the outset, however, that this is no ordinary New Testament story. In fact, the main character is not Jesus, but Ana, whose many longings are central to the novel’s theme.

The Book of Longings begins in the early years of the first century. Ana, a talented member of a wealthy family, is fourteen and, according to the customs of the time, is expected to marry the man her father chooses. She adamantly refuses his choice, but the necessary paperwork is completed and the marriage takes place. Ana has already had an unexpected encounter with Jesus. When her “husband” dies, the blossoming love Ana has for Jesus unfolds, Ana’s father relents and her marriage to Jesus occurs. For Jesus this fulfills a duty under first-century Jewish law. The couple relocate to Nazareth and Ana finds it challenging to adapt to a lower economic status. In the

novel, Jesus is cast as a stonemason, not a carpenter, and is often away from home seeking work, while Ana longs for him to be present. She is ambivalent about having children and experiences complications in pregnancy. She leans on her aunt for support while living with the mother and brothers of Jesus — Mary, James and Simon.

Ana faces many trials and tribulations, such as the Roman occupation of Israel, but her greatest challenges are coping with Jesus’ increasing role in religious affairs and his connection to John the Baptist, called John the Immerser in the novel. She also longs to have Jesus more present in her life. Ana attempts to protect a former friend and escapes with her aunt to Egypt to avoid capture. During their time there, Ana’s aunt reconnects with her estranged daughter, leading to yet another move by Ana and her aunt, this time to a monastic community. At various times in the novel, we read of Ana’s talents as a scribe and writer, which she puts to good use, recording the stories of women who have been forgotten in old stories in the scriptures of the day.

Ana eventually returns to Jerusalem when Jesus’ life is threatened and the familiar events of Holy Week unfold. At this point the life of Jesus in the novel ends, while Ana’s life and her longings continue as she adjusts to a new life without Jesus.

The Book of Longings contains many reminders of Biblical events and the communities familiar to us in the Bible come alive. Kidd also uses some of the language contained in the Bible. John the Immerser

is referred to as “the voice of him that crieth in the wilderness” (Isaiah 40:3); there is a reference to the lilies of the field (Matthew 6:28); and Kidd uses the archaic verb “to know” that we see in Luke’s

account of the annunciation, where Mary says, “How shall this be, seeing I know not a man” (Luke 1:34).

The Book of Longings not only contains many of the Biblical accounts we all remember, but it also very carefully tracks the life of Jesus, his increasing role in the religious affairs of his time — something which Ana finds hard to understand, especially after the death of his human father — and the increasingly important role God plays in his life, while cleverly interweaving the fictional elements of Ana and her life, which has much turmoil along with some tender moments.

This novel is a thought-provoking, careful and well-crafted look at a life that might have been, with love, angst and drama added to the stories we usually “love to hear” — an excellent challenge to our familiar Anglican mindset. ■

Gary Davies is chair of the communications committee and deputy people’s warden at St. Andrew, Sidney.



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The night the stars sang

Reflections

BY HERBERT O'DRISCOLL

Hollywood loves the word “apocalypse.” To them it means “dollars.” It means a big-screen disaster movie, complete with toppling high-rises, mile-high tsunamis engulfing cities and terrified humans running in all directions.

Nobody has told these people that the term “apocalypse” has a meaning other than “disaster.” It means an event that comes to reveal something of worldwide significance.

Here are four apocalyptic moments that have no falling high-rises, mile-high tsunamis or screaming people. But every one of them reveals a great truth on a planetary scale.

In 1378 a vicious virus held the world in its grip. Because one gifted woman wrote down her experiences, we have a window into that terrible century. Her name is Julian.

On May 3 of that year, she writes that she has just experienced repeated visions of our Lord. In one of those visions Jesus comes to her and holds out a hazelnut in his hand. Puzzled, Julian asks what it means. Jesus replies: “This is all that I have made, Julian, and of this creation I am the Maker and the Lover and the Keeper. Therefore I tell you this. All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.” That single beautiful sentence sounds through time like the ringing of a bell in our own shadowed COVID-19 world.

We leave the Middle Ages and come to 1924. A young Jesuit priest and palaeontologist named Pierre Teilhard de

Chardin is a member of an international scientific expedition. They're camped out on the Mongolian Plateau of Northern China, and de Chardin is in the habit of offering Mass each morning outside the camp.

On this morning, he realizes he has left behind the elements for Mass. After a moment of self-reproach, he gathers himself. He decides to offer what will forever after be known as “The Mass on the World.” De Chardin positions himself on the barren ground and, making the Earth itself his altar, he begins to pray:

“Lord, since here on the steppes of Asia I have neither Bread nor Wine nor altar... I, your priest, will make the whole Earth my altar and on it I will offer you all the labours and sufferings of the world... I call before me the whole vast army of living humanity: those in office, factory and laboratory who today will take up their impassioned pursuit of the Light...”

All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.

— Julian of Norwich

Pierre de Chardin has made an act of liturgy encompass the whole planet.

On December 24, 1968, we were given our third apocalyptic moment. The spacecraft Apollo 8 is circling the moon. As it comes around for the fourth time, one of the crew, William Anders, sees the blue and white ball of Earth rising beyond the horizon of the moon against the blackness of space.

That image was apocalyptic because, as never before, it revealed the fragile reality of humanity's home. That breathtaking image became *Earthrise*, which has been called “the most influential environmental photograph ever taken.”

As we look at Anders's image of that tiny ball floating against the vast ocean of space, you could say that after more than 700 years humanity has become aware of planet Earth as Julian's hazelnut, and we hear again the promise, “All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.”

For the fourth apocalyptic moment we meet a young Syrian doctor named Luke, who has recently become Christian and has decided to write a book about Jesus' life. As we meet him, he has just told us of the pathetically humble journey of Mary and Joseph, the small hillside village they came to, the stable they found for shelter, the manger for their child. He's even recalled the ragtag group of shepherds that arrived on the scene.

But Luke has a problem. He himself knows who this child is — nothing less than the light of the world. But that knowledge is so vast that Luke feels he can't find words.

Suddenly he knows what he needs. As a man of his culture, he would have been familiar with the classical myth of the music of the spheres. From the Jewish scriptures he would recall the author of Job referring to “when the morning stars sang together.” Taking his manuscript Luke reaches for the stars that have nightly poured their blazing light over the planet since time began and will do so until time ends. He gives them a song: for the Creator, Glory, for the Earth, Peace. In doing so he makes this humble birth an event of apocalyptic hope for the whole planet.

Four images for the word “apocalypse” that enlarge human vision, strengthen human resolve and expand human hope.

May you know Advent hope and Christmas joy. ■

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We are one

My Journey

BY ALASTAIR HUNTING

I started in full-time ministry at the age of 22. I had the opportunity to work for a faith-based organization in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, that was engaging children and youth who were struggling to survive on the streets of that city. Many of the young people ended up in the notorious city prison Palmasola.

Part of my regular work was to visit and provide support to incarcerated youth. Palmasola has a reputation for being one of the most violent prisons in South America. Pope Francis visited the prison in 2015 during a papal visit to Bolivia, listening to and praying with prisoners, of whom 90% haven't had a formal trial. A big highlight for me during my time in Santa Cruz was

starting up a street soccer club with the youth.

In June of 2000, I moved back to Canada and started theological studies at Tyndale University in Toronto. While at Tyndale, I got connected to the Salvation Army Gateway, a downtown shelter for men experiencing homelessness, and I worked frontline on the graveyard shift while studying.

My future wife, Alison, who was studying at the University of Toronto, for some reason put up with my crazy work and study schedules. We ended up getting married at her grandparent's farm in Orillia. During our first year of marriage I continued to work at Gateway, and then we moved to Japan to teach English for three years in Osaka.

During that time, I started to attend chapel services at Poole Gakuin University, a local Anglican university. This was my first initiation to Anglicanism. While at Poole, I started to do a lot of reading and research about exploring Christian faith and theology from non-Western perspectives.

Alison and I moved back to Canada, and I began a Master of Theological Studies at Huron College in London, Ontario (my hometown). While at Huron I continued to work in street outreach and refugee support and settlement.

We moved to Vancouver Island in the summer of 2011. I transferred to the

Vancouver School of Theology (VST) and was fortunate to work on my MDiv in the Indigenous Studies Program, which enrolled Indigenous and a few non-Indigenous people from all over Turtle Island, as well as internationally.

Most of my studies were done remotely while I worked at a local homeless shelter in Courtenay. The highlight of my time at VST has to be the two week in-person Indigenous Studies Program Summer School (crowned with an annual summer school salmon barbeque).

Thanks to VST I've formed lifelong friendships with people from all over the world. I graduated from VST in 2015. I was ordained the following year to the diaconate by Bishop Logan.

Alison and I moved to Port Hardy and served communities on the North Island. The Sacred Journey lay at the centre of our ministry there. We were warmly embraced by the community and were deeply transformed by the time we spent there. My Chief and Elder, Spruce Wamiss, would often share the Kwak'waka phrase O'man's 'Nam'a (which means "we are one"). It is this teaching and wisdom that guides my way and spurs me on in our shared faith and ministry here at St. John the Divine in Courtenay. ■

Alastair Hunting is the incumbent at St. John the Divine, Courtenay.

Watching for the light

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While there is no comparison between 1944 and 2021, we are, once again, at a time in history when we need to be shaken up. We need to see the false security and spiritual insanity that has infected our world, and to ask, once again, for God to break in, to wake us up, and to become incarnate in us and in the world.

Being shattered (being awakened) is a prerequisite for Advent. It's a prerequisite to recognizing and incarnating the presence of God in the world — for

recognizing God, who is always and everywhere birthing something new.

"I see Advent this year with greater intensity and anticipation than ever before. Walking up and down in my cell, three paces this way and three paces that way, with my hands in irons and ahead of me an uncertain fate, I have a new and different understanding of God's promise of redemption and release."

Delp goes on to write that as he marked Advent in his cell, it became clear to him that Advent is about listening for angels. Not the loud angels of rejoicing that will overcome the shepherds at Christmas, but the quiet angels of annunciation "speaking their message

of blessing into the midst of anguish..."

"[S]cattering their seed of blessing that will one day spring up amid the night, calling us to hope.... Quiet, inconspicuous, they come into rooms and before hearts as they did then. Quietly they bring God's questions and proclaim to us the wonders of God, for whom nothing is impossible."

May your journey through this Advent season knowing that for God, nothing is impossible.

Alfred Delp's full Advent reflection, "The Shaking Reality of Advent," can be found in the book Watch for the Light: Readings for Advent and Christmas (Plough Publishing House, 2001). ■

Darkness and light



Lighting the Advent candles at St. John the Divine, Victoria. Photo by Alastair Singh-McCollum

Christmas at St John the Divine, Victoria

BY ALASTAIR SINGH-MCCOLLUM

We are all familiar with the recurring images of light that we use around Christmas time: festive lights on the Christmas tree, “Carols by Candlelight”, the celebration of the Word of God in Christ from John’s gospel chapter one — *shining a light in the darkness which the darkness cannot extinguish, or understand, or cover.*

Over the past couple of years, however, we at St. John, Victoria, have been questioning our approach to this darkness and light contrast. We have heard from people of different cultures about how giving the impression that dark is bad and light is good has often been behind prejudice against racialized

people, and about how colonial images of “the darker nations” have often led to people dismissing Indigenous peoples as savages or those in need of saving by those who are “enlightened.”

In an effort to rethink our colonized mindset and to wrestle with this journey of how we think about these images we at St. John, Victoria, have been thinking of how we view light and darkness, and recognizing that our scriptures, whilst holding positive images of light and the need for light, also say that the darkness is a place where God is found. An excellent book by Episcopal priest Barbara Brown Taylor called *Learning to Walk in the Dark* made us think again about seeking to embrace and learn from the ideas of darkness, and about creating a healthy balance of images used in our teaching and worship.

We have intentionally thought about our use of images of light and dark, and

though we haven’t changed the heart of the liturgies offered by the Church, we have sought to create prayers, opening liturgies and additions that offer another way of thinking.

Before the pandemic, for Advent 2019, we created an opening liturgy for the lighting of our Advent candles that included the theme from Psalm 139 where it says of God: *Darkness and light are both alike to you.*

Lighting of the Advent Candle

Blessed are you, loving God, creator of the Universe,

All: For you have made all things, and love your creation.

Gracious God, you have made light and dark, day and night, we give thanks for the wholeness of your life. We remember that in light things are clearer, and in darkness we may learn to trust in you and celebrate your mystery,

All: For darkness and light are the same to you

As these Advent lights remind us of the light brought to us from our history, and our welcome into your Church in baptism, we pray that we too may be people of light and life.

You are God through all time — God of our forebears in faith, Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam — Patriarchs and Matriarchs of old upon whom our story is founded. May we know you in this time and in this place as the God of now and of always, God of promise, and God of hope.

Blessed are you, loving God, creator of the Universe,

All: For you have made all things, and love your creation.

As we approach Christmas this year, we will continue to think about how to weave in these positive images of light and dark, as we continue to try and address and dismantle ideas that cause division or exclusion, learning to decolonize our thought processes and to think again how to be church in this time and in this place. ■

The truth within the story

Continued from page 3

thought and reading, I came to the conclusion that the magi could quite possibly have been Zoroastrian priests with their worship of one supreme God, Wise Lord. The symbolic fire of their rituals and prayers is kept alight with sandalwood and frankincense.

Zoroastrians believed in personal free will and an equality between men and women in all endeavors — philosophy, religion, medicine, war and astrology. Zoroastrianism was known throughout the Middle East as a wisdom religion. Again, it seemed possible that Christian tradition named these astrologers and

visitors of the infant Christ for their wisdom tradition, and not necessarily their gender. So, I imagined the possibility that these visitors from the East, spoken of in the gospel narrative, could have included women as well.

Finally, the story began to feel whole again — the infant Christ surrounded and worshipped by all of creation. It is the hope and prayer of St. Christopher, Saturna Island, that all who visit the nativity scene will see and know that they have a place in the humble gospel story of an infant born in a stable and laid in a manger. The paintings are as imperfect as the painters but reflect a desire to see beyond the tradition to the truth within the story that God so loved *the world*. ■

**THE DIOCESAN POST
IS GOING DIGITAL
FOLLOWING A POSITIVE
RESPONSE TO THE
DIGITAL FORMAT,
FROM JANUARY 2022
THE DIOCESAN POST
WILL BE FULLY DIGITAL.**

God wishes us small

Continued from page 5

we eat a meal of 12 dishes, with just 12 ingredients in total, each to represent the journey of 12 days that the Three Kings would make that first Christmas.

It was the simplest of meals served out on the fine china: boiled wheatberries, a dish of honey, borscht (this counted for four ingredients), white fish, lima beans... you get it. The funny part is, I think my Oma had mistakenly merged the Christian Orthodox tradition of a 12-course meal in honour of Christ's Apostles and given it her own (bland) spin. It was not a meal that any of us looked forward to, but it was an act of love that we came to the table and ate flavourless wheatberries together that night, because being together was more important than the food.

My Oma grew up poor, so I wonder now if, when she was small, gathering with her family to share 12 dishes felt very big indeed. Even though my grandparents had done well for themselves and could have put on multiple exorbitant meals over the Christmas week (and trust me, they did this too), I always thought of this one meal as Oma's Christmas. The night that nothing was louder than the love in the room — not

food nor music, not a pile of presents, not blinking lights on a tree. That night was just about being together and waiting for a baby, undiminished by the sparseness of the meal.

This is what my small Advent and my small Christmas will look like in 2020: I will light a candle for a few minutes each night and I will pray. I will attend Zoom-church on Sundays. I will tidy my house and decorate it with fresh greens from my yard. I will walk in the mornings when the light is fresh. I will make apple cider on the stove every night.

On Christmas Day, I will gather with as few as I can without leaving anyone alone. We will not exchange gifts. We will walk in the forest in the afternoon and collect pinecones. We will smear those pinecones in peanut butter and roll them in seed and tie them with scraps of fabric, and then we'll hang them in the trees for the birds. We will cook together and share a simple meal, made from food grown and caught close to my home. We will welcome a baby, but we will do it quietly, because babies like quiet.

I wish you the smallest Advent and the smallest Christmas. May you cherish the power and safety in the smallness you discover this year. ■

Tara Saracuse is an author and creative spirit who also works as the executive assistant to the bishop.

Cathedral Christmas Schedule



December 24, 4:00 pm to 7:00 pm:
Christmas Re-imagined
(30-minute outdoor illumination by and for children on the south tower with music on a continuous loop)

December 24, 7:30 pm to 8:30 pm:
Christmas Eucharist
(livestreamed and in person, ticketed to a maximum of 350 attendees)

December 24, 10 pm to 11 pm:
**Christmas Eucharist:
Bishop Anna Greenwood-
Lee preaching**
(livestreamed and in person, ticketed to a maximum of 350 attendees)

December 25, 10:30 to 11:30 am:
Christmas Eucharist
(livestreamed and in person, no tickets will be required to attend)