

Blackbraes and Shieldhill
Parish Church
linked with
Muiravonside Parish Church
Winter 2017



www.bsandm-church.org.uk

Registered Charity

Blackbraes and Shieldhill SC 002512

Muiravonside SC 007571



Welcome

Dear Friends,

**“Because he lives, I can face tomorrow.”
(Mission Praise - 52)**

Welcome to the Winter edition of our magazine. Isn't it amazing how fast time passes by? Here we are, almost at Christmas time again and yet to me, it seems like only yesterday we were welcoming in the New Year of 2017! I happened to mention this to a friend and she told me in her own inimitable way with her usual true tact:

“It's because you're getting old!”

I had to smile because after a bit of self denial, I realised just how right she was. When you're young, time seems to go by at a snail's pace. Each birthday seems to take an eternity to come round. Christmas seems to come even slower! But advance the clock round to middle age and all of a sudden, just like the old saying about buses, four or five Christmases seem to come along at the same time!

I've got a confession to make though -I love it!

Christmas is a time of great joy celebrating the wonderful joyous news of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is also a time of reflection as we think ahead to the New Year and what it might have in store.

At a recent meeting of the Bible Study Group , we were studying the Holy Spirit and after a wonderful session, we had our usual cup of coffee and enjoyed some great home baking. During this fellowship, the conversation got round to favourite hymns and one of the group happened to mention that she had always taken great comfort from the hymn “Because he lives, I can face tomorrow.”

This hymn had provided such hope during times of worry and it could be seen that it was a foundation of her faith.

These beautiful words that are so loaded with hope for what tomorrow has in store have never left me since that evening and I was thinking just how apt they are just now for our two churches as we search for our new Minister.

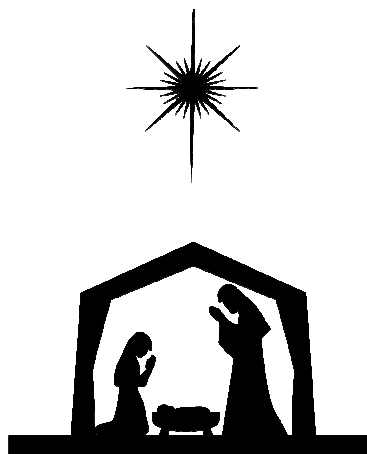
“Because he lives,” as churches we can not only face tomorrow, but “Because he lives,” we can *embrace* tomorrow and look forward to what God has in store for us, not just at Christmas time but for the New Year as well.

During our sessions studying the Holy Spirit, as an exercise which was fascinating as well as great fun, we decided to try and spot when the Holy Spirit was among us, or was at work as we went about our everyday lives. It was so wonderful that evening to discover that the Holy Spirit had stayed on with us as we enjoyed our coffee and fellowship and had inspired this member of the group to tell us about this beautiful hymn and how much it meant to her.

Have a wonderful Christmas and every blessing for the New Year.

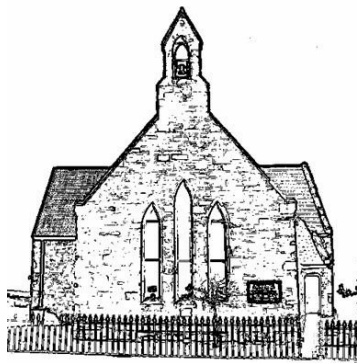
Best Wishes and Blessings

from Drew



Baptisms

***‘Whoever welcomes a little child like this in
my name, welcomes me.’***



Blackbraes and Shieldhill Parish

Finlay Bruce Ogg
Infant son of David Ogg and Laura Bruce
on 22nd October

Weddings

***‘Meanwhile these three remain -
faith, hope and love.
But the greatest of these is love.’***

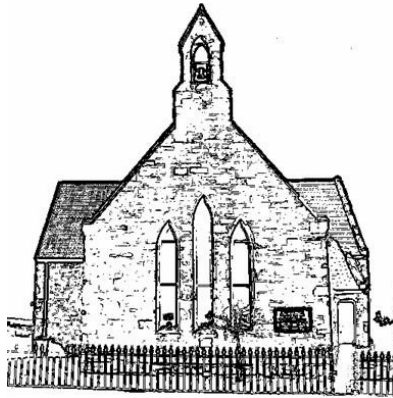


Muiravonside Parish

Coral Cameron and Robert Samuels
at Muiravonside Parish Church
on 19th August

Funerals

‘The Lord will protect you as you come and go, both now and forevermore’.



Blackbraes and Shieldhill Parish

Scott Heeps

Jim Penman

Billy Duncan

Jessie Mitchell

Janet Pearce

Funerals

'The Lord will protect you as you come and go, both now and forevermore'.



Muiravonside Parish

James Smith

Daniel Cox

Margaret Wallace

Nominating Committee News

As the Nominating Committee of Blackbraes and Shieldhill linked with Muiravonside start seeking a new Minister for our Parish, we encourage you as a congregation to pray thoughtfully and be with us along this journey.

Like the chorus of that well known hymn:

“And it’s from the old we travel to the new, keep me travelling along with you.”

May God’s Blessing be with you at this time

John Robertson

On behalf of the Nominating Committee

Let us come together in prayer. Let us pray.

May the guidance of the Holy Spirit, be with us at this time of new beginnings, as we journey through many avenues in seeking a new Minister for our congregation.

Please send us hope and courage, Lord, to keep these dreams alive and when problems crowd around, may our faith and strength revive.

Be with us now and forever more.

Amen

John Robertson and all at the Nominating Committee.



The following poem was recently in the Falkirk Trinity Church Magazine and it seems very apt as we search for our new Minister :

The Power of One

One song can spark a moment
One flower can wake the dream
One tree can start a forest
One bird can herald spring

One smile begins a friendship
One handclasp lifts a soul
One star can guide a ship at sea
One word can frame a goal

One vote can change a nation
One sunbeam lights a room
One candle wipes out darkness
One laugh will conquer gloom

One step must start each journey
One word must start each prayer
One hope will raise our spirits
One touch can show you care

One voice can speak with wisdom
One heart can know what's true
One life can make the difference
You see, it's up to you!
(Author Unknown)

Submitted by: John Robertson



When visiting the Du Pont Chemical Site on the outskirts of Londonderry Northern Ireland, in 1991, I was struck by how totally committed the workers were when safety was involved.

Du Pont operated a world wide company policy in safety called "STOP." It was known as "Safety Training Observation Programme." Other companies seeked to learn from this.

During a presentation from a leading trainer of "STOP" the difference between "Commitment" and "Total Commitment" was given. If you were a hen, you could lay an egg and walk away, but if you were a pig, you were bacon and totally committed!

Food for thought.

John Robertson

Muiravonside



**Safety
Training
Observation
Program™**

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TAKE NOTICE

At the door of Ballintoy Church, County Antrim is the following notice:-

*Pause ere thou enter, Traveller,
And bethink thee,
How holy, yet homelike is this place,
Time that thou spendest humbly here will link thee,
With men unknown who once were of this race.
This is the Fathers house, to him address thee,
Whom here his children worship face to face,
He at thy coming in this place will bless thee.
Thy going out make joyful with his grace.*

Submitted by Jim Currie



Website

Our magazines are now available on our website :

www.bsandm-church.org.uk.

If anyone would prefer to access them this way, instead of paper format, please let your Church Elder know.

As well as saving paper, and trees, you would receive the magazine in colour. It could also be enlarged if you need to see it in large print.

Remarkable Restorations...and Rainy Days!

My friends and I, (one of whom works part-time, just to add to the complexity of matters!) always try to have a day out, usually following the changing Seasons. Four times a year, we always try to come up with different ideas of where to go, what to see and what to do!

Not to be deterred in our ventures, for our Autumn 'Day Oot', we visited Dumfries House, near Cumnock in Ayrshire. With a tour booked, we set off on a very rainy day, just after 9.30am to avoid the Glasgow traffic. After stopping for sustenance- a scone and cup of tea in Hayes Garden Centre, Symington, just off the A77 and signposted - highly recommended if you're around that area - we reached our destination, just in time for our pre-organised tour.

Even in the rain, the grounds of Dumfries House are lovely. The house itself is a lovely example of the 18th Century Palladian-style mansion with an impressive facade, but equally impressive are the interiors, in the style in the Scottish Enlightenment period. The tour began with a short video - message from HRH Prince Charles who 'stepped in' literally at the last minute to save the house and its contents from being lost to the nation. AND, after visiting the House, you can understand why!

Our tour proper then commenced. The original building, was extended by William Crichton - Dalrymple, the Earl of Dumfries, from 1754, after commissioning John, Robert and James Adams, the famous architects of the era, to submit their plans for the house. Room after room was equally impressive. Furnished to the highest specification for the time, the Earl sought out the most exquisite and beautiful furniture to impress. More than a 'good few' pieces came from the renowned furniture-maker, Thomas Chippendale, his workshop in London where the Earl visited many times to purchase these remarkable pieces of furniture. One such piece to be bought was the bookcase, now housed in one of the rooms, the Blue Room. A unique piece of Chippendale furniture, its worth is beyond most of the present-day Lottery winners!

Our guide was wonderful, explaining and pointing out the important features of each room. There's even a link to Hopetoun House, but I'll leave that one for you to find out, when you visit the house for yourself ! What is impressive, however, is the restoration, carried out by the Trust and still headed up by Prince Charles, has regenerated

an area which, like so many others in our former mining towns, had been economically-challenged. With a working farm, Education centre, workshops, hospitality training Centre, amongst others, and of course, the land and the House itself, the Estate offers the employment and skills-development for many, including the youth on the Princes' Trust programme. In addition, the good folk of Ayrshire, use the grounds to walk, cycle and enjoy the peaceful surroundings - yes, even in the rain!

So... after a visit to their excellent Cafe (there is a restaurant open at the weekends, during the day and evenings), we left to return home. We all agreed that the tour price was the best £9 we'd spent in a long time! Well worth a visit and even more stunning I'm sure on a sunny day!

I wonder what will come next for our Winter 'Day Out'?

Rita Braes

Used Stamps

Please collect your used stamps for church charities -

World Mission 2017 Appeal Books for Presbyterian Church South Sudan.

Crossreach Church Homes in Scotland

Cut out stamps leaving one and a quarter inch margin if possible. Damaged stamps have no value.

Box in Vestibule.

Rita Braes

Nativity Scene

A Nativity Scene was erected in a church yard and during the night, someone came across this scene.



An abandoned dog was looking for a comfortable, protected place to sleep. He chose baby Jesus as his comfort. No one had the heart to send him away so he was there all night.

We should all have the good sense of this dog and curl up in Jesus' lap from time to time. This is too sweet not to share. No one mentioned that the dog breed is a "shepherd!"

Submitted by: Lorna Coulter

The following poem was written by the late Christine McCrae and was submitted by Etta Napier.

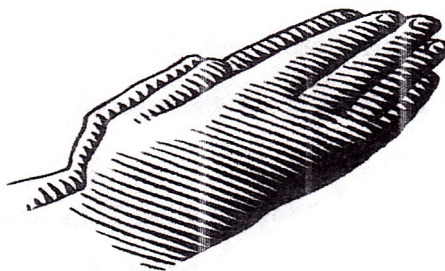
HANDS

Old hands lay limply on her lap,
worn out, wrinkled and red.
Those hands had worked so very hard
from when she first had wed.

Pale and slender, and though quite thin,
strong and willing to learn.
They darned and tended, all with care.
Children's love they earned.

So much those loving hands could do,
they cared, they healed, they prayed.
They helped the new into the world
And the dying gently laid.

Christine McCrae



“Tales From a Shieldhill Garden.”



Robin

Robin: *Erithacus Rubecula*.

Little brown birds that have orange/red breasts.

Wingspan: 20-22cm; Length 14cm

The robin was number six in Scotland in the RSPB Big Garden Bird watch; but more than that, it was chosen recently by a countrywide vote as Britain's favourite bird. When one thinks about it, this is a good choice for the country's favourite bird. Our Robin is quite different from robins that are found in other parts of Europe. Some of them are blue and they spend much of their time in woodlands, rarely coming into gardens.

Many of our robins have left their woodland homes, moving into our gardens and frequently follow gardeners around, gobbling up juicy grubs as the ground is disturbed by gardening activities. As we planted hedges, and shrubs in our gardens, robins found gardens to be attractive places to live. Those of you who feed the birds will no doubt have noticed that robins don't visit the bird table with the other birds.

They are often there early, before the rabble of sparrows and starlings arrive. You will never see a flock of robins. In fact a fierce battle will break out should one robin stray into another robin's patch. For a while we had two robins in our garden, one the top garden and one in the bottom garden. When they met there was much posturing and puffing out of red breasts.

Robins have been in stories from the earliest times.

One fable says that there was a warm fire burning in the stable to keep the family and Baby Jesus, warm. The innkeeper's wife distracted Mary. The robin placed himself between the fire and the baby, fluffing out his feathers, protecting the little baby from the heat of the flames. However, the robin was singed and the redness was passed on to all the other robins.

It was said that a robin was there when Jesus was crucified. Some people say that he tried to pull thorns out of the thorn crown and got drops of blood on him. Another story says that it was a drop of blood

from the cut on Jesus' side as he tried to stem the flow of blood and so his feathers were stained red. Other sources say that he sang in Jesus' ear when a drop of blood landed on him. Swallows and goldfinches have also been associated with the resurrection.

It is a robin; the bird that never flew, that is on Glasgow's coat of arms. It's said that St, Surf of Kinross was befriended by a robin. When he was praying, the robin would sit on his shoulder or on his head. Some of the other monks in the abbey became jealous and killed the robin. St Surf was very upset, but St Kentigern, Glasgow's Patron Saint, prayed over the bird and it was restored to life.

Another legend says that the robin got scorched taking drops of water to relieve the suffering of the tortured souls in purgatory.

One ancient tale states that the wren stole fire from heaven. Although she was very careful, she caught fire. The other birds each gave her a feather to replace the burnt feathers but the robin went too close and his front was scorched.

It is said that, should there be a dead bird, the Robin and Wren work together to bury the bird under twigs and leaves.

The well known nursery rhyme: "Who Killed Cock Robin?" dates from medieval times.

Robins are part of Christmas, appearing on cards and decorations. Like many of our Christmas decoration, the choice of a robin as a Christmas bird began in Victorian times. The first postmen wore red coats and were known as 'robins'. These early postmen delivered Christmas cards and messages and the bird began to appear on cards.

Although robins are with us all year round, they are easier to see in gardens in the wintertime. They visit bird tables, having a particular liking for cheese and mealworms; some will even take mealworms out of your hand.

For a number of years I accompanied Primary 7 classes on their annual holiday to the Garelochhead Centre. (This excellent activity centre is now closed.) One of the activities was "bouldering". This was an introduction to cave holing. These enormous boulders had been piled one on top of the other during the last ice age, at the time when The Arrochar Alps were formed. We climbed to the top of the hill and then scrambled through spaces, tunnels and caverns as we descended the hill. We always saw a robin at the top of the hill and a robin at the bottom of the hill. I felt that this wee bird was the eye of

Jesus, counting our precious group in and counting them out.

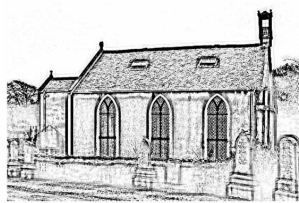
I frequently prayed during these expeditions into the Arrochar Alps, as some of the children were nervous, and some were over confident and had to be reminded to wait and to listen. The little robins reminded me that God was with there and His son, Jesus was with us as we squeezed and wriggled through some tiny rock corridors.

Rena

Tea, coffee and a chat are always available in the hall after services. Please stay if you can.



What's On - Muiravonside



Muiravonside Choral Society

Choir meets in Muiravonside Kirk on Tuesdays at 2:30pm

Choir Christmas Carol Concert on Sunday 10th December at 3:30pm

Come along and enjoy.

Keep Fit Class - Monday evenings at 8:00pm in Maddiston Salvation Army Hall.

Muiravonside Women's Group – alternate Wednesdays at 7:30pm in Salvation Army Hall.

Santa Drive on Thursday 7th December in Chapel Hall Rumford at 7:00pm



Beatitudes for the Aged

Blessed are they who understand
My faltering step and my shaking hand.
Blessed, who know that my ears today
May strain to catch the things they say.
Blessed are they who seem to know
My eyes are dim and my mind is slow.
Blessed are they who looked away
When tea spilt on the cloth that day.
Blessed are they with a cheery smile
Who stopped to chat for a little while.
Blessed are they who never say -
"You've told that story twice today."
Blessed are they who make it known
That I am loved, respected and not alone.
And blessed are those who ease the days
Of my journey home in loving ways.

From a poem by Esther Mary Walker





Guild Update Nov 2017



The Guild members at the opening of the new session were saddened by the death of Mrs Jessie Mitchell, our honorary member. Reaching the age of 99 years, she had been a member of the Guild, formerly Woman's Guild, since arriving in the village in 1955 and had regularly attended meetings until last session. She gave many years of service to an organisation she loved and of which she was very proud. Her friendly smile and happy chat will be truly missed.

A fundraising evening not to be missed is on Wednesday 29 November when Jess Smith, a popular Scots author visits the Guild. Tickets which are £5 include a supper.

As the Christmas season approaches, we look forward to the Falkirk Town Hall panto "Peter Pan" and the traditional Christmas party.

After a short break, the session resumes in January and hopefully there will be a topic of interest to you in the Guild diary. Both men and women, all are welcome to come to Shieldhill church hall where the Guild meets fortnightly at 7.30pm.

Diary

2018

24 Jan	Topic/Theme night	
7 Feb	God's purpose for the Holy Land	Rev Joyce Keyes
21 Feb	Feed the Minds Project	Sam Cook
7 Mar	Abbey Church Dunfermline	Mary Welsh
21 Mar	ABM and supper	
5 April	Forth Bridges Accordion Band	Fundraising





The Easter Appeal raised the sum of £247.00 and was donated to Caledonian Care Home and presented to the manager Mr Meme by one of our most senior elders Mrs Belle Sneddon seen here with Mr Meme.

The monies will be used to enhance the lives of the residents.

Thanks to all who donated.

Moir Sharp - Treasurer



Unitary Constitution

The change to Unitary Constitution to most members will mean very little other than where Session and Congregational board met as two separate meetings we now have one meeting, the Kirk Session.

The disappearance of the Congregational Board means the post as clerk disappears as well. This post some may recall was filled faithfully in the past by Hugh Baird, Jean Butcher and Janet Pearce before the appointment of Robert Thompson. Not only was Robert the last Clerk, he was the last clerk to present a hand-written record of these proceedings as the minutes are all now computer based.

It is thanks to Robert and those who have gone before for their diligence over the years recording vital church business. Robert has now been released from those responsibilities but will hopefully continue to make a valued contribution to the Kirk Session in his own inimitable way.

Jim Currie

It is with sadness that we learned recently of the death of Janet Pearce. Her administrative skills were greatly appreciated.

Our prayers are with John and family in their time of sorrow.

All at Blackbraes and Shieldhill Church

Muiravonside Treasurer Report

When the final accounts were completed for 2016 Muiravonside finished with a deficit, the final accounts for 2017 have yet to be completed, it is hoped we will finish in the black, thankfully we have received one legacy and the remainder of a previous legacy which is great news.

We have several members who give their offerings by Standing Order monthly if you would wish to do the same just speak to me and I shall be more than happy to give you bank details.

As we move forward to a new year and hopefully a new minister I would urge everyone to look at their givings and if possible put a few extra pence in your envelope.

Best wishes to all for 2018

Moira Sharp Treasurer

Muiravonside Church Facebook Page

Muiravonside Parish Church now has a Facebook page which gives all the latest news of events and can be viewed at:

<https://www.facebook.com/muiravonsideparishchurch/>



A Sortie in Europe

Europe from my earliest years has always fascinated me and even today is still my favourite holiday destination. In the early spring of this year, I was delighted to sail on the waters of the Netherlands and Belgium. Joining the ship at Amsterdam, I visited picturesque places, ancient Hoorne formerly a seaport but now famous for cheeses and Kinderdijk renowned for the conservation of historic Dutch windmills. I admired the architecture of churches and Royal Palaces. The Cathedral of our Lady in Antwerp, birthplace of the painter Reubens had many of his paintings on display.

The highlight of the holiday was a visit to the Keukenhof Gardens, the largest flower garden in the world. Open only from the end of March until mid May, the whole area is transformed into a sea of colour displaying a wide selection of spring flowers.

Countries in Europe have been involved in two world wars and despite the image of tranquillity which can be experienced in the delightful villages, I often think of the devastation of the land ravaged by war and the frightened, homeless refugees fleeing from bombs and bullets.

Arnhem was a stopping place on the trip. From 17 to 26 September 1944 Arnhem and its surrounds was the site of one of the most well known battles in World War Two. A battlefield tour included stories at various points of the bravery of civilians, British, Polish and German soldiers and the nearby cemetery where so many young men lie. The museum itself is based in a villa which was the headquarters of the British Airborne division during the battle. Code named "Market Garden", the operation was an attempt by the allies to secure a bridgehead over the river Rhine and the action is portrayed in the very popular film "A Bridge too Far".

An interesting side line in the museum display was a reference to the successful film star from the nineteen fifties to the nineteen seventies Audrey Hepburn. She had returned to Arnhem in 1938 with her Dutch mother, having lived in London and remained in occupied Holland during the war. She did train in a dance academy at that time and is reported to have raised money for the Dutch Underground giving dance displays. She suffered as others did in the war zone. One of her brothers went into hiding to avoid being sent to a German labour camp and the other was deported to Germany. In the winter of 1944/1945 20 000 people died from starvation. After her film career she settled in Switzerland and was an ambassador for UNICEF, a well

known children's charity.

Many of my fellow travellers were American who showed a keen interest in World War Two. Some of them had relatives who had fought in Europe and some wanted to visit various war locations. One of the most popular places of interest was the Ann Frank house in Amsterdam. Ann was born in Frankfurt Germany on 12 June 1929 but the family being Jewish when the Nazis came to power moved to Holland in 1933. When Holland was invaded the Jews were subjected to discriminatory laws and when conditions worsened, the family with others moved into hiding in an annexe above Otto Frank's business premises. In her diary dated from 12 June 1942 to 4 August 1944, Ann describes life in close confinement. A Dutch informer disclosed the details of the annexe to the authorities and it was raided. The occupants were imprisoned in camps. Ann and Margot, her sister, died of typhoid in Bergen Belsen in 1945. The diary, which was found and kept by a family friend was published by Otto Frank, Ann's father, the only family survivor, in 1947. The diary is still one of the most widely read books in the world and the annexe in Amsterdam still a popular tourist attraction.

Many interesting topics were discussed and ideas exchanged with the holidaymakers and one evening I just happened to mention one of my favourite life stories was that of Corrie ten Boom who was perhaps lesser known than Ann Frank. To my surprise a quiet spoken gentleman from New Orleans said, "Oh I met the lady. After the war she settled in America." After my many questions, he explained that many years previously, he had been a teenager in school where she had been invited to give a talk. He remembered a small grey haired, plump lady with a delightful smile who had made an impression on him. Obviously deeply religious, the message after so many years, she had left him was "Be thankful for something every day" Corrie had even been thankful for the bedbugs in Ravensbrück concentration camp.

Corrie ten Boom grew up in Haarlem and being a trained watchmaker worked with her father Wilhelm in their shop. Being truly committed Christians and putting their faith into practice, from their shop the family offered food, shelter and money to all in need. Despite the restrictions placed on the Jews the family recognised the Jews as a people in need and built a hiding place behind a false wall in their shop. Before being betrayed, they had saved the lives of almost 800 Jews. Her father and sister both died in camps but Corrie survived, wrote many books and shared her Christian faith world wide.

Corrie ten Boom was an inspiring Christian woman. In a book to be recommended, "The Hiding Place" Corrie ten Boom writes her own story and that of her family. Her simple trust in God and her daily walk with God has influenced my Christian journey. To meet a gentleman who had actually shaken hands with her was the icing on the cake. My spring venture, sailing the waterways of Holland and Belgium, besides being interesting and enjoyable was one of my most memorable.

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High,
who abides in the shadow of the Almighty,
will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress,
my God in whom I trust."

Psalm 91

Thank you Jesus, that you will be our hiding place whatever happens.
(Each New Day Corrie ten Boom)

Lorna Coulter



There is a list of folks I know, all written in a book
and every year at Christmas time I go and take a look.
And that is when I realise that these names are a part
not of the book they're written in, but of my very heart.
For once you've met somebody, the years cannot erase,
the memory of a pleasant word or of a loving face.
Never think my Christmas cards are just a mere routine,
of names upon a Christmas list, forgotten in between.
For, be you relative or friend or just someone that I've met,
you happen to be one of those I'd rather not forget.
And whether I have known you for many years or few,
in some way you have had a part in shaping things I do.
So, as you read this message that I send at Christmas time,
know that I send you all my love while you are on my mind.

Submitted by: Jessie McArthur



THE BIBLE

What does the Bible say?
Has it a message for today?
Is it true what I Read,
That I'm in great need
Of deliverance from sin's Penalty?

What does the Bible say?
Has it a message for today?
Is It true what I See,
That Christ died for me,
To take all my sins away?

What does the Bible say?
Has it a message for today?
Is it true what I find,
That God is so kind,
He gave us his son as the way.

See what the Bible says,
It's message pertains to our days,
Indeed it is true,
That God still loves you,
So bow to His will and His ways'

SCRIPTURE PASSAGES.

MATH ch 24 v 35 ; 1PETER ch 1 v's 24-25'

Robert S Thompson



Drew's
view

The Joys of Christmas Lights

There are probably many people who feel the same way as I do, but there is something magical about Christmas lights when they first appear in towns at this time of year.

Despite having witnessed this spectacle for more years than I care to remember, I never cease to be thrilled as I witness what was last week, a rather dull and unremarkable looking shopping street suddenly transformed into an enchanted kingdom aglow in a myriad of colours. The wonderful thing about it as well is that at this time of year, when it gets dark so early, these beautiful lights seem to make the very long nights a bit easier to bear and they never fail to cheer me up.

This enchantment goes right back to my early childhood when my mum and dad and sometimes my aunt and uncle used to take me to Glasgow every Christmas to see the lights in George Square. We would then go to one of the huge cinemas which they had back then before the multiplex cinemas became fashionable and I remember seeing "Mary Poppins" as well as "Dr Doolittle" as a Christmas treat. They even had a large model of one of the more remarkable creatures in the film ("The Pushmepullyou") on display in the foyer!

Of course, even better, nowadays these Christmas light displays extend to individual homes and some of them can be quite spectacular! There are just so many lights available to buy in the shops - everything from a small string of them that can be draped around a Christmas tree - right up to a megabox of epic proportions that can bedeck and illuminate the exterior of an entire house!

You can guess what my favourite pastime is at this time of year! Yes - right first time! Touring around all the shops and checking out this vast selection of lights!

A few years ago I bought some new lights to drape along the house just below the roof, but there was just one drawback. I'm not very good with ladders! Even though the house is a bungalow and has quite a low roof, I always manage to fall off the ladder more than once!

When the neighbours spot me walking up the drive complete with a ladder on one side and a long string of lights on the other, I'm sure

they must settle themselves down behind the curtains to witness one of the best slapstick comedy shows in years!

We are talking a comedy show of absolute epic proportions which would be worthy of "Mr Bean!" In fact, he would love watching my antics and would probably try to give me a hand with hilarious results!

In the neighbours' houses, video cameras will probably be hastily produced and I can almost hear them all whirring as I prop the ladder against the front of the house. The ground there is a bit uneven and no matter how I try to stabilise the ladder, it still starts to shoogle even when I am on the first rung!

That may be bad enough, but as I climb further up the ladder, it begins to rock a little with each upward step. I am always sure that I can hear the gasps from behind the various curtains! They are almost like the sort of gasps you would hear from an audience watching a tightrope walker trying to cross a seemingly bottomless gorge, when all of a sudden, he or she stumbles and teeters a little on the brink.

While all of this is going on, the string of lights I'm clinging to like grim death starts to unravel down the ladder and I usually end up standing on one or two! Even worse, once I finally make it to within touching distance of where I'm going to insert them, I realise I've forgotten to bring the little pack of gutter clips for securing the lights and then the whole process starts again!

Somehow, someway, I always finally succeed in securing the lights and as I descend the ladder, I can almost hear the collective sigh of relief from all of the neighbouring houses, together with muffled applause. I imagine they must say to each other,

"Drew has lived to do this another year!"

Last year, however, this little spectacle came to an end. I teetered on the brink just one time too many and actually managed to fall right from the top of the ladder to ground level! I was very lucky because I happened to land in a large bush we have on the front lawn and was totally unharmed. I realised though, that I was now on borrowed time as far as "getting away with it" was concerned and the Patron Saint or Guardian Angel who was protecting me from all of this was about to go on strike!

I now had 1000 Christmas lights with nowhere to go, but that didn't deter me. I had just literally landed on the solution to my problem and wasted no time in draping them around every single inch of the large

bush which was perfectly circular in shape!

Once it got dark, when I pressed the little switch to put them on, the glow was so great, that you could quite comfortably read a newspaper inside the house! Not only that, as well as being visible along the whole street, my bush in the front garden was probably the only one on earth that was visible from space!

It was such a success that I knew I had found a new hobby and I've become a sort of connoisseur of all the different Christmas decorations you can buy to put at ground level on your front lawn.

This year, my quest for something different took me on a tour of the local garden centres which had just got some really awesome decorations in. I marvelled at Santas and their sleighs which glowed in the dark, as well as a giant Santa that you could suspend from your upstairs window if you had one.

However, the *pièce de résistance* appeared in one local garden centre. Even as I stepped in through the front door, I could see the top of a Snowman's head which was visible from away over the other side of the shop no less! I knew I just had to investigate and sure enough, once I arrived at the other side of the garden centre, I came upon a giant inflatable snowman which was about seven feet high with a big grin on his face. He was also lit up! He was so big that I noticed the supply of air needed to keep him inflated was so great that he had a small compressor type machine unobtrusively fitted at the back, just like the ones you would see on a bouncy castle!

That would be fine but even better, there was also a similar sized giant reindeer which had a really appealing dopey look on its face and it too was powered by a small motor which was supplying it with air. For one fine moment, I visualised them in my front garden, but I soon knew they would be too big to comfortably fit.

I thought too about the high winds we get here at Shieldhill and if my skills at tethering them to the ground were anything like my skills with ladders, the Snowman and his companion would probably end up in Scandinavia one morning, although they would almost certainly generate one or two UFO reports as they flew across!

I also had a feeling they would break from their moorings even if it wasn't windy and I imagined opening the blinds one morning to be confronted with huge face peering in with a dopey expression!

It was so nice though to see such a wonderful choice of Christmas items on display and this year my 1000 lights will soon be lit again, not only lighting up my front garden, but also giving passengers on aircraft flying overhead a real Christmas treat!

Christmas lights mean so much to everyone. For me, they invoke childhood memories such as the trips to Glasgow to see the lights in the Square and then a visit to a cinema which seemed huge to me at the time. They also come along at a time of year when everything is so dark and gloomy. Then suddenly, these lights bring such hope and anticipation that defeats the darkness.

I love Christmas lights because every time I see them they remind me of one very special light at this time of year that outshines even the best and most ambitious display of Christmas lights that we could create in this world. This light is eternal. John Chapter 1, verse 5 describes it very aptly. "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has never put it out."

This light is of course Jesus the "Light of the World."

There are thousands of Christmas lights burning all over the world just now and every single one reminds me of the birth of Jesus and the fact that from that moment on, a light of hope came and would go on to illuminate the world forever, when before, there was only darkness.

On our church website, near the bottom of the Homepage, there is a little candle that burns eternally. It was put up on the website in early 2010, not long after the site opened. If you look closely, it is just possible to make out the words "Jesus, Our Light," written on it. It has never been extinguished and never will be. I often look at this little candle when I need hope or inspiration. I feel too that it being there symbolises that Jesus is always with us. There is a feeling of deep reassurance as the little candle burns. I also rejoice and celebrate that with Jesus as our Light, I know that we can embrace the future not just as churches, but as individuals as well.

"I am the light of the world," he said. "Whoever follows me will have the light of life and will never walk in darkness." John 8:12

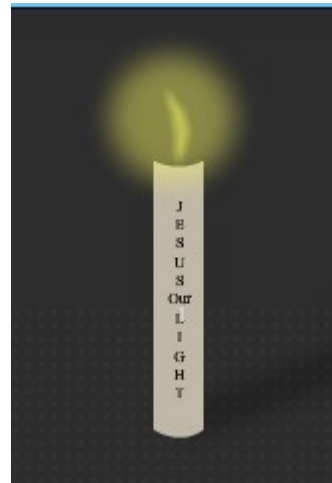
He will never, ever let us down and we can rejoice as we walk in his footsteps with this very special light illuminating the way ahead, not just at Christmas time, but all through the year as well.

Christmas Lights

Christmas lights bring such joy.
Heralding great excitement.
Reminding us it is almost time.
Inviting everyone to anticipate.
Such a special time of the year.
Touching and enchanting us.
Merging some good emotions.
As we anticipate this month.
Setting the scene for Advent.

Lighting up our lives forever.
Is the "Light of the World."
God's Son, the Lord Jesus.
Heavenly light that is eternal.
That the dark will never defeat.
So let us rejoice at Christmas.

Drew Robertson



THE PERFECT DRUG

No moving parts, no batteries
No monthly payments and no fees
Inflation proof, non taxable
In fact it's quite relaxable
It can't be stolen and won't pollute
One size fits all, do not dilute
It uses little energy
But yields results enormously
Relieves your tension and your stress
Invigorates your happiness
Combats depression, makes you beam
And elevates your self esteem
Your circulation it corrects
Without unpleasant side effects
It is I think the perfect Drug
May I prescribe my friend....
The HUG!!!!

Submitted by: Norma Jack



A Quick Message from the Editor



Just a quick note to thank everyone for their magazine articles. We have had a wonderful response, both from Blackbraes and Shieldhill and Muiravonside.

I think this is the first time we have ever had a 36 page magazine and it is all down to you!

It has been an absolute pleasure receiving these articles and compiling them and seeing the magazine take shape.

I look forward to the next magazine around Easter time.

Drew

