

Bournville, Cotteridge, Kings Norton & Stirchley



Point



The bi-monthly mini-magazine of Churches Together in Birmingham 30

Is Christmas Cancelled?



1843 illustration of 'The Ghost of Christmas Present' by John Leech

All Change For Christmas

Last Christmas I told you how Christmas changed forever for the Tolkien children, and how it changed forever for me as a little boy: Father Christmas wrote the children his last letter, and my uncle fed and watered the reindeer for the last time. Father Christmas never came to see me again...

It's been a dramatic year and it's not over yet. We are destined for yet another 'once in a lifetime change' – a Christmas like we have not experienced before. Many people are worried whether they will be allowed to gather together with their families – will they be able to attend their usual church services – will they be able to book their Christmas supermarket delivery slot?

The way we celebrate Christmas has changed many times over the years. Midwinter Celebrations predate the time when, according to Luke, Jesus was born in a stable, about 2000 years ago. The Gospel gives no indication of the exact date, but the first recorded Christmas celebration was in Rome 25th December, in the year 336. December 25th coincides with the date of the winter solstice on the Roman calendar. That is nine months after March 25th, the date of the vernal equinox, which is linked to the annunciation of Jesus.

After that, there is little evidence of how Christmas was celebrated, until 1223 when St Francis is said to have created the first live nativity scene in a cave near Greccio, central Italy. Local villagers and animals were cast in Biblical roles, but these were soon replaced by models. St Francis' objective was to emphasise that Christmas should be about worshipping Christ.

In England we have the Anglo-saxon word Wassail, which dates back to the 5th century. It means 'be healthy'. By the 12th century it had become an important event in a community or village often as a celebration of Christmas and Twelfth Night. The wassail bowl, filled with beer or cider, was taken door-to-door and people were invited to drink. Amongst other things, this was part of an ancient tradition to ward off evil spirits and a way of avoiding paying taxes on leftover alcohol. In the southern counties wassailing drank to the health of the trees, a good harvest, and the health of humans and animals. The most famous wassailing song being 'Here We Come A-Wassailing'.

During the 16th century Christmas was still a religious festival, but with a lot of wassailing overtones. It was celebrated in Inns and halls, with carols, dancing, excess food and drink, drunkenness, debauchery, promiscuity and other forms of excess. Towns and villages would appoint a Temporary King: The Lord of Misrule, The Abbot of Unreason, The Christmas Lord, The Master of Merry Disports. It was all getting out of hand, and far too frivolous for the Puritans. In September 1642 the Long Parliament outlawed the performance of plays, including Christmas pageants. Eventually, all stage players were declared rogues punishable by a public whipping.

Oliver Cromwell was the main protagonist of the legislation that followed. This included the abolishment of: Musical accompaniment, Archbishops, Bishops, Vicars Choral, and choristers. Organs were removed from many churches. Children's Christmas toys were outlawed and so were Christmas sports. This

effectively 'killed off Christmas' as a joyous festival. The people ('Dissenters') were not happy! There were widespread riots and civil disobedience. It was a time of satire against unpopular legislation.

In December 1648, the following rhyme appeared:

For as long as I do live
And have a jovial crew
I'll sit and rhat
And be fat
And give Christmas his due.

Banning Christmas was a big mistake based on several misconceptions about the roots of Christmas festivities. Very slowly carols and hymns returned to the churches, market places, homes and inns. In 1689, 'The Act of Toleration' restored some civil rights to 'Dissenters', but recovery was slow. Eventually, at the beginning of the nineteenth century 'The Golden Age of Christmas Carols' began.

And so to end where I began: Father Christmas is said to be based on St Nicholas, a fourth century Bishop who lived in Myra (now Turkey). His custom of secretly giving gifts gave rise to the traditional image of Santa Claus. The legend developed in various ways over the centuries.

I would like to pick up the story in 1843 when Charles Dickens wrote A Christmas Carol. John Leech's famous image of 'The Ghost of Christmas Present' is thought to be, though not specifically named, Father Christmas. It includes all the traditional trimmings of the time: He wears a holly wreath, is shown sitting among food, drink and a wassail bowl, and is dressed in a loose fur-trimmed gown, but green rather than the now familiar red.

The first appearance of 'the modern Santa Claus', complete with red Santa outfit was drawn by Thomas Nast in 1881. This change is often wrongly attributed to the work of Haddon Sundblom, who redrew Nast's Santa for the Coca-Cola advertising campaigns of the 1930s. This captured the public imagination and Santa has worn the same red outfit ever since.

The way we celebrate Christmas this year will be outside our control because of Covid-19. Please don't take unnecessary risks.

We may not be able to celebrate Christmas the way we like, but for the sake of your loved ones, yourself, and the wider community – follow the guidelines and stay safe.
Mowgli



The True Meaning of Christmas?

Christmas started as a religious tradition, but in our *post* post-modern world it has slowly been secularised. This progressive shift has been so noticeable since the 1800s that the Christian world began to fight back. It was then, in the mid-nineteenth century, that the phrase “the true meaning of Christmas” appeared. It was born as an effort to move away from the general secularisation of society and back towards focusing on the Advent of the Christ and the celebrations of God’s son.

Many Christians will tell you that the true meaning of Christmas lies in celebrating and commemorating Jesus’ birth, the coming of Christ. They will argue that the use of evergreen plants in the tree and the advent wreaths are meant to represent the everlasting life brought through Jesus; that their circular shapes represent God’s infinity.

If we’re being honest, in the end the Christmas we know and love has again become less about Christ. Not only was Jesus of Nazareth almost certainly born on a different date, but most of what we’ve come to appreciate about the season (the tree, the lights, the gifts, the joy, and even Santa Claus) has nothing to do with him.

Whenever we talk about “true meanings,” we run the risk of generalising in absolute terms. Christmas means different things for different people, and that’s okay. It’s great, in fact. What we should avoid, however, is projecting our rather particular source of meaning onto the holiday in itself and imposing it on others. Whatever significance we find in Christmas, whatever set of meanings it may have, one thing’s for certain: it goes far beyond religion. Oliver Alvar

LOGOS – THE WORD

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us,

Pitching His tent in our daily life.

The Word is our light, enabling us in the darkness.

The Word helps us to perceive the straight and narrow way,

The spiralling way that leads to that mystery beyond telling.

The Word is the door of the sheepfold,

Enabling us to move freely as we are guided to vital sustenance.

The Word is ever present with compassionate love.

The Word ever holds for us the energy of prayer,

That vital essence of all that is,

Enlightening, encouraging, enabling and spiritually enriching

As we are gently transformed on our earthly journey from now to eternity.

Ros Murphy

Earth's Christmas Present

"I saw more plastic bags than fish," says Boyan Slat who as a 16-year-old went scuba diving in Greece. Curious, he explored and discovered that there are over 5 trillion pieces of plastic in our oceans. The plastic is carried by currents and congregates in five revolving water systems, called gyres, in the major oceans, the most infamous being the huge Pacific Garbage Patch is now twice the size of Texas. Boyan now knew this was a big problem, but he was shocked and surprised that there was no apparent solution. "Everyone said to me: 'Oh there's nothing you can do about plastic once it gets into the oceans' and I wondered whether that was true." thankfully he refused to believe there was no solution. Today his innovations are removing 1.5 million kilograms of plastic from waterways every month and his ultimate quest is to reduce 90% of the floating plastic pollution by 2040. How can we better look after God's earth this Christmas?



The Interceptor - one of Boyan Slat's boats, used to clean up rivers

How do we cope with Christmas this year?

Carry on as usual and prepare ourselves for Christmas. We still have cards to write and presents to buy. We just do not know how many people we can have in our homes to celebrate.

We should all appreciate our Priests who have to decide whether we can be in Church or Zoom for the Services. There is a lot of thought that goes into the preparation of the services.

Whatever we do at Christmas we will still remember what Christmas is all about . We should remember all those that will not be here to celebrate this year. Also people who will be on their own this year.

Gill Broadhead.

Santa - Key Worker

“It has come to my attention,” Santa posted on *Elf on a Shelf's* Facebook page, “that children around the world are being told by their older siblings, parents, and other adults, and even friends, that Christmas is not coming this year due to the COVID pandemic. This is simply not true.”

Not only has St. Nick been practicing social distancing like everyone else, he has been named a “key” worker by the Scottish First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon. Even though many holiday festivities will be observed by people who are six-feet apart, Santa has been given the ‘all-clear’ to carry out his Christmas Eve delivery duties as scheduled.

“Santa will not be prevented from delivering your presents on Christmas Eve,” Sturgeon declared in a speech, “Santa is a key worker and he has got lots of magic powers that make him safe to do that. Santa will be delivering presents across the world as normal.”

Now, perhaps more than ever, the world needs comfort and joy, and for children, that means a visit from Santa. One Scottish mum who shared her plan for encouraging the jolly old soul on a night that might seem darker than in years past has since seen her idea go viral.

“On Christmas Eve at 6 p.m. we are asking everyone to come outside and ring a bell for 2 minutes to spread Christmas spirit and to help Santa fly that sleigh,” Kathryn Stubbs penned in a Facebook post. “After a tough year, it would be an amazing memory for the everyone and communities to end 2020 with a bit of magic, hope, and togetherness.

A Thought for Christmas

At Christmas we think of the Angels, the shepherds, and the Kings who came to show homage to Jesus.

Spare a thought for the Innkeeper who showed compassion and gave two homeless and very exhausted people a comfortable place warmed by the animals to lay their weary heads.

Is there a small way we can celebrate this particular event? Perhaps we can support a local homeless charity? Or donate Food to the Foodbank?

John Slevin

Christmas night

On crisp midwinter nights the liberated sky is throbbing with stars,
Like flickering pinheads on a velvet cushion,
Mocking the far away earth trapped in its crusty tomb of brittle ice –
Its creatures now withdrawn to hedgerow, house or burrow.

On balmy summer nights those starry kingdoms look out inscrutably
To our far distant faintly glowing fragile planet,
Reflecting the strange magical beauty through the still clear
atmosphere,
As feather, fur and flesh respond to stretch and wander.

On Christmas night the harmony of the glittering heavens and earth
Should surely cause the glad ringing of uncounted bells,
Enough to inspire humankind to banish poverty and famine,
War and tyranny, from earth's fertile hills and valleys.

Jack Finch

The Scottish Presbyterian Church embraced the Reformation's ban on Christmas so much that it discouraged festivities around the 25 December well into the 20th century. Christmas was always a very low-key event and celebrated behind closed doors until 1958 when Christmas Day became a national holiday in Scotland.



in Japan. KFC has become a Christmas tradition in Japan. This is largely thanks to Takeshi Okawara, who managed the first KFC restaurant in Japan. These days, Japanese people could end up waiting in long lines if they don't pre-order their Christmas meals from KFC.

From Saturnalia to Christmas

Like many of the festivities of its time, Saturnalias were all about hedonism. There was plenty of food and wine, while all social norms and order vanished momentarily. This feast was passed on by the Greeks. The cult of Saturn became a very popular Roman celebration in which a massive party was believed to guarantee a year of good crops and fertile soil to keep the most powerful civilization of the time, and its colonies, afloat.

Despite the Empire's attempts to reduce it to a few days with a law specifying the festivity should only last from the 17th to the 23rd of December, during the first century the excitement over this celebration ensured a longer duration each year. This was happening at the same time as a small community of Early Christians was separating itself from Jewish traditions and converting the marginalized to their faith.

Christians began to be persecuted, even more so during the rule of Nero. During the second century the upper classes began to view the refusal of Christians to celebrate Roman deities as a threat to the Empire.

Although persecution continued throughout the second century, Christianity continued to gain followers and believers throughout the Empire and eventually, in the third century, it became the official religion of Rome. In 313 Constantine decreed freedom of religion and this new law ended the persecution and led to a period of great change in the Empire.

A couple of years later, Christian motifs had become part of battle armour, coins, and most of Roman life; the Latin Cross became the emblem of the Empire. Only one thing was missing: the celebration of the origin of the faith, that is, Christmas. Roman traditions went from pagan polytheism to Christian belief in just a few centuries.

It was in 330 AD, under the rule of Constantine, that Jesus' birthday, began to be officially celebrated

Traditionally Saturnalia concluded with a rite relating to the arrival of the Winter Solstice, bringing the end of shorter days and the birth of an invincible sun embodied by Mithras, a Persian God worshiped by the upper class and Roman legions.

Gradually celebrations for crops, wine, and the start of winter began to take on Christian values. The "Birth of the Sun God" was replaced by a stronger following of Jesus, early Christians who saw the king star as a representation of the King of the Jews. Christmas is the feast that survived the decadence of Rome, took hold during the Feudal days of the Middle Ages, and eventually reached every corner of the globe as the important Christian celebration that it is today.

Adapted from María Suárez



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Do you know anyone w...



Coronavirus update

NHS
University Hospitals Birmingham
NHS Foundation Trust

Do you know anyone who would like be part of the COVID-19 vaccine delivery programme?

Dear Colleague,

As you know, Birmingham and Solihull has been one of the hardest hit areas in the country during the ongoing pandemic, with COVID-19 having a devastating impact on lives, health and the economy. Scientific and clinical experts have clearly stated that a large-scale vaccination programme, the likes of which have never been seen before, is our best defence alongside effective social distancing, wearing a mask and washing your hands.

To ensure the programme is as effective as possible, as quickly as possible, a workforce dedicated to delivering vaccinations is being recruited.

You will have seen in the news that safe and effective vaccines will soon be available. In order to deliver as many vaccinations to as many people in priority groups as possible, we are seeking people with appropriate experience to join our team.

These paid jobs include clinical and non-clinical roles, and we would encourage you to share these job opportunities with any friends or family you feel may be interested in helping us.

A variety of job roles will be needed, which include:

- Vaccinators
- Drivers
- Security
- Administrators
- First-aiders
- Coordinators
- Organisers
- Care workers
- Marshalls
- Logistical movers and handlers

We will be providing full training and induction so we are initially asking for your commitment to working with us. We will discuss with you how your skills and experience can best be used. We can then talk with you about the pay and conditions. All roles have been risk assessed as low risk roles so you can be assured that you will be enabled to work safely. Those interested will be employed by University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust, the workforce lead for the Birmingham and Solihull programme.

We need to fill these roles, and fast, so we would be grateful to know as soon as possible whether you will be able to support us. All you, your friends or family members need to do is email the vaccine workforce team expressing your interest and providing a contact telephone number. We will then make contact to progress the conversation.

- covidvaccineworkforce@uhb.nhs.uk

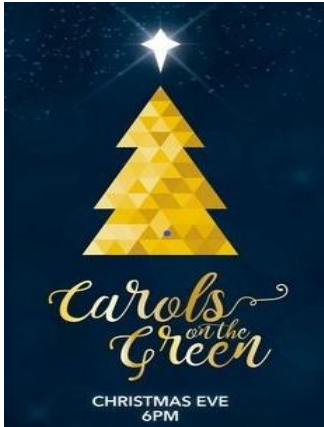
Vaccinations are hopefully going to begin next month (December 2020). If you can't help then but might be able to in the future, please don't let that stop you getting in touch, as you will still be very welcome to join us in 2021.

Please do continue to keep safe and well. We hope you come to join us.

COVID-19 Vaccination Workforce Team

Carols on the Green to Your Screen

Each year CTB30 supported by Bournville Village Trust, The Carillon and Bournville Village Council put together Carols on the Green. This year due to Covid restrictions we cannot physically gather on The Green in Bournville for our annual event Carols on the Green. However, we will be coming LIVE from The Green to you screen via YouTube for us to gather virtually.



As part of this event we are inviting you at the appropriate point in the service to gather on your doorstep with your lantern as we fill the evening air with our voices singing Silent Night.

Each year we raise money for some wonderful charities, this year we be doing this with online donations this year. Please do give as you can.

To join us live just click this link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjDwsXOQcQc>

For regular updates on Carols on the Green: from the Green to your Screen please go to CTB30 Facebook page. This can be found here:

<https://www.facebook.com/Churches-Together-B30-101991451638076>

Blue Christmas Service Sunday 6th December 6.00 pm

2020 has been a really tough year for everyone so we want to encourage you to check up on a friend this Christmas who you may not have seen for a while. Maybe it's a work colleague who lives alone and is working from home? Or a relative who lives far away from you? If you, or someone you know, is struggling Rowheath Pavilion Church is holding a special service this Sunday (6th) for anyone who is feeling a sense of loss, isolation or anxiety. Zoom link below.

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81175895398>

Meeting ID: 811 7589 5398



Click on the different links below to find out what's happening in your church this Christmas

(Ctrl + click on link)

<https://www.facebook.com/rowheath.pavilion/>

<https://www.facebook.com/St-Joseph-and-St-Helens>

<https://bournvilleparishchurch.org.uk/>

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

www.ascensionstirchley.com

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

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Religious-Organization/Bournville-Quaker-Meeting/>

<https://www.facebook.com/Cotteridge-Quaker>

<https://cotteridgequakers.org.uk/>

<https://www.thecotteridgechurch.org.uk/>

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

<https://www.birminghammethodistcircuit.org.uk/church-page/st-andrews-b30>

<https://www.weoleyhillchurch.org.uk/links.php>

<https://www.birminghamvineyard.com/>

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

<https://b30.foodbank.org.uk/>

<https://www.birminghamchurches.org.uk/news/>



Merry Christmas From Churches Together in B30

CHURCH CONTACTS

For further details of worship and/or activities at any of the churches please contact the people below:

- St. Andrew's Methodist Church
Revd. Nick Jones - 453 9497
- Bournville United Reformed Church
Revd Leonora Jagessar - 472 0730
- Society of Friends, Bournville
Claire Bowman - 07753 635438
Room Hire, 471 2155
annegiles57@gmail.com
- St. Francis Church, Bournville
Interregnum - phone Church Office -
472 7215
- Rowheath Pavilion Church
Revd. Matt Wilson - 433 3912
Office - 458 1711.
- Society of Friends, Cotteridge
Chris Martin- 475 2088
- The Cotteridge Church
Revd. Mike Claridge - 433 5176
Revd. Roger Collins - 459 4009
or Church Office - 433 5518
- Ascension Stirchley
Revd. Catherine Grylls - 443 1371
- Birmingham Vineyard
Jeff & Becky Stamps - 622 1230
- Catholic Church of Ss Joseph and
Helen
- Catholic Church of St Pauls
Father David Barry - 458 1236

“Points” is published by Churches Together in Birmingham 30 for the exchange of ideas and news. Opinions do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the churches as a group or individually.

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Next Issue's Focus will be

Show Me The Evidence