

THE RECORD

Why the Cross Doesn't Belong at Christmas

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I passed a church sign that proclaimed Christmas was the story of a baby born to die. It seemed a macabre, odd way to wish passers-by a merry Christmas. Apparently, though, quite a few Christians root the story of Jesus' birth in his death, as if they are determined to nestle the cross into the manger's hay, right next to Jesus.

But Jesus was not born to die. He was born to live (John 10:10).

At first, I thought I was angry at the theological ineptness of this trend of making Christmas about the cross and its fundamental misunderstanding of the point of the incarnation.

But then I realised I wasn't feeling anger. Rather it was sadness. I was sad that anyone could look at the infant Jesus and see only his death. I was sad that anyone could read the radical story of a baby in a manger and think only of a cross. I was sad that anyone could reduce the mystery of incarnation to the tragedy of crucifixion. I was sad because of what it said about who people think Jesus is. It says that Jesus was a dumb lamb, carefully cultivated as pure and blameless, so that God might have him slaughtered to set things right in the world.

But it wasn't his death and crucifixion that set things right in the world. Rather it was his incarnated life that shows us what a world set right might look like.

It looks like the kingdom of God — the hungry fed, the wealthy and powerful doing violence for their own sake toppled with nonviolence and solidarity, the oppressed raised up, the outsider welcomed, the end of condemnation and guilt pressed upon us by religious elites, the end of a life absent of hope, full of death.

It looks like shalom — like Jubilee — like life lived eternally.

And Jesus proclaims that this eternal life begins now, not when we die, and that heaven is a place called earth, if only we have the eyes to see it and the courage to live it.

So how is it that we can trade three decades of a redemptive, tragic and revolutionary life for the final three days? How can we reduce the transfiguring life of Jesus to a transactional death?

Because we don't understand salvation. The salvation Jesus offers is his life, not his death.

The point isn't the crucifixion — or the resurrection for that matter. Rather it's the incarnation. Our creed proclaims as much: "for us and for our salvation, he came down ... and became incarnate." That's why the cross doesn't belong in the Christmas story. That's why Jesus wasn't born to die. The cross wasn't predestined so sinless human sacrifice would eventually allow an angry God to forgive sinful humanity. Rather the cross was a human reaction of powerful oppressors to Jesus' radical

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message of liberation and justice.

So, the point isn't that Jesus died for us. It's that he lived for us.

Dying for others isn't nearly as hard as living for them. Remember there is no greater love than the one who lays down his life for others. But this verse from John's gospel isn't about the crucifixion and martyrdom. It's about how we live our lives outside the grips of petty selfishness and into the wholeness of community. It's about relinquishing our claims to care only for ourselves and our own well-being, about giving up our right to retaliation in favour of reconciliation, about forgiving others, about forgiving ourselves.

It's about seeing others as brothers and sisters to join hands with rather than as competitors and enemies to wrestle with. It is about opening our clenched fists so that all have enough and so that none have too much.

The salvation of Jesus is in the Way

he lived. It's in his proclaiming and incarnating – living! – the good news that God loves us, that God is with us, that a better world is possible, that there is hope when all hope fails.

And that hope is here on earth, in us and with us.

Christmas reminds us that hope can come anywhere and in the most unlikely of places. And wherever that hope comes from — a baby born among beasts of burden to an unwelcomed, suspect girl perhaps — we hold on to it during dark, cold nights, refusing to let the spectre of death diminish the beauty of this moment of life.

This hope is the star, the spark of divinity, that pierces the pitch black.

Death is inevitable, but this is the hope of the incarnation: that life happens, that eternal life happens, and that it happens right now.

Wishing all a merry Christmas,

Chris, Elaine, Grant, and Amy

Brownies Urgent Appeal

Orchardhill's Monday Brownies are in desperate need of new leaders since the departure of Brown Owl earlier this session.

There is the possibility the unit cannot continue unless we find someone (aged between 18 and 64) to fill this

role. Lots of support is available, and previous experience is not essential – just a willingness to take on a rewarding challenge with some delightful Brownies.

Contact Susan Taylor
(smtaylor@ntlworld.com or 0141 577 7065) for more info and/or to discuss.

A Dickens of a Christmas

On Monday 2 December at 2pm in the Fellowship Room, Mrs Valerie Reilly will speak to the Guild about "A Dickens of a Christmas" and the way in which the writing of Charles

Dickens has influenced our Christmas customs. We look forward to welcoming everyone interested in this talk.



Collection Rota

The Collection Rota for January is still being finalised, and those members covering that month will be notified as soon as possible. Rotas will be distributed to all helpers before the end of December. Many thanks to everyone who assisted this year.

1	Hilary Kennedy 638 6114; Dorothy Cartlidge 571 7153; Jim Blair 638 1901 Dave Thomson 638 3289
8	Fiona Bissett 638 6394; Richard Park 638 0273; Andrew Flockhart 586 8867; Dave Thomson
15	Fiona Bissett; Richard Park; Andrew Flockhart; Dave Thomson
22	Fiona Bissett; Richard Park; Andrew Flockhart; Anne Anderson 638 0689
29	Fiona Bissett; Richard Park; Andrew Flockhart; Anne Anderson

New Moderator



Rev Dr Angus Morrison, Minister of Orwell and Portmoak Church in Perth Presbytery, has been elected Moderator Designate of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. He will take up the office of Moderator at the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in May.

Dr Morrison was born in Glencoe in 1953. As his father worked for the Northern Lighthouse Service, the young Angus went to school in Oban, Stromness, and Edinburgh before progressing to Glasgow University. He undertook further studies at Pisa University and London University before a PhD at Edinburgh University (New College).

Dr Morrison's church career began when he was ordained in the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland in 1979 but after ministries in Oban and Edinburgh he transferred into the Church of Scotland, became the minister of St Columba's Old Parish Church in Stornoway, and is now Minister at Orwell and Portmoak Parish Church.

During his time in the Church of Scotland he has made a significant mark, serving as a member of the Church and Nation Committee (latterly on the Europe Group), member and then vice-convenor of Panel on Doctrine, Moderator of the Presbytery of Lewis, convenor of the Mission and Discipleship Council, member of the Special Commission on Same-sex relationships and the Ministry, chaplain in 2005 and 2006 to Lord Mackay of Clashfern (Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly), and Chaplain to the Queen.

Dr Morrison, who has a degree in Classics and speaks Italian and Gaelic, said after his selection: "It is my great desire to encourage the Church in its vital God-given mission to the people of Scotland and beyond. In these troubled times the peace and unity of the Church are dear to me, and I shall endeavour to promote them in every way I can."

Join the Prayer Chain



One of the frequently misused teachings of Jesus involves his instruction to ask, seek, and knock (Luke 11:9–13). There are those who treat this as something magical like a genie in a bottle or mechanistic like putting money in a vending machine. They think that if they say the right words or use the right formula or if they believe with all their hearts then the answer will be granted.

The section on prayer in Luke's Gospel where this teaching is found begins with the disciples asking Jesus how to pray. Jesus starts with the model prayer: When you pray, say . . . (11:1–4). This model prayer orients and frames the rest of his teaching on prayer. This is a prayer that teaches us how to be in relationship with God, how to be God's friends and partners in the mission of God.

When we pray this prayer we are learning how to work with God for the common good. We are learning how to participate in the realisation of God's rule of peace: justice for the poor, liberation for the oppressed, and the redemption of all creation. We are learning how to trust God's provision to sustain us on our spiritual journey and empower us in our struggle against the powers that be. We are learning how to give and receive forgiveness and work for the reconciliation of all that is estranged and at odds. We are learning how to bring healing and hope to others and to enhance life on this planet in whatever ways we can.

At the end of this section on prayer Jesus draws an analogy with a loving parent. If a loving father or mother with all their imperfections knows how to give good things to their children, how much more does our Father/Mother in heaven?

It's all about a growing, dynamic relationship with God through which we participate with God in the redemption and transformation of our world. In Luke's sequel, the book of Acts, the filling of the Spirit is always connected to empowerment for mission, witness, and service.

Being in relationship with God means that our circles of interest, compassion, and engagement will always be expanding. As I have grown in faith and understanding so my concern and involvement have expanded.

If I have weeds in my garden I need not ask God to remove them for me. If I want them out of my garden then I best go pull the weeds or find someone to do it for me. All of this is within my power and authority to do. On the other hand, let's suppose I have a friend who is an alcoholic and his alcoholism is ravaging his family. I love them and hurt for them and want desperately to "fix" the problem and make life better for them, but it is not within my power to fix. If I try to demand or force a "fix" on them or if I resort to conniving and manipulating I will end up making things worse.

So what can I do? I can ask my friend to get help. If he doesn't listen the first time I can keep asking at appropriate times. I can ask his wife and children to refrain from enabling his behaviour and to get the help they need. Asking is the way to genuinely help them. I can also ask God to give me wisdom in relating to them and to create within my friend and his family a desire to seek help. So asking is a very crucial aspect of any relationship, and this is certainly true in our relationship with God.

In a dynamic relationship with God not only do we ask, seek, and knock, God does too. Sometimes our minds are

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closed and our hearts are hard, but the Spirit is persistent. The Spirit is "the hound from heaven" who constantly pursues us.

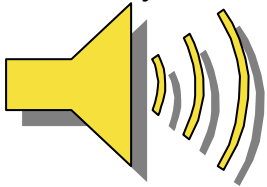
We can only start where we are, and that's exactly where God wants us to start. We can decide right now to cultivate a spiritual life: a life of listening, asking, and partnering with God in God's healing, restoring, reconciling work.

The invitation to prayer is an invitation to a life of intimacy and partnership with the Sustainer of all things, who indwells us all and is active in bringing healing and harmony to our relationships, communities, and our global village.

By joining the Prayer Chain you are participating in this important work within our community. For more details contact Irene Kinniburgh or sign up through the church office on 0141 638 3604 or secretary@orchardhill.org.uk.

Christmas with SoundWaves

SoundWaves have started well this session with 20 boys and girls attending regularly on Tuesday evenings. Our first event, a short performance for parents (pictured), was a success.



Come along and "Celebrate Christmas" with SoundWaves on Sunday 15 December at 6.30pm in the church. We look forward to as many people as possible supporting us at this event. SoundWaves also sang at the Church Fayre last month.





Giffnock Churches and Christian Unity

There's a line in a popular Christian song that makes me cry every time: "We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord. And we pray that all unity may one day be restored." It makes me question the labels we use to define our position.

I began my early church life in the Episcopal Church and then moved after an absence of a number of years to the Presbyterian. I cannot say that I can recall one church putting down another.

It was in the early 1980's as the HIV/ Aids epidemic began to take hold, and it was closely linked to the gay community that I finally understood how much taking sides meant to Christianity. Of course, I knew I disagreed with some Christians on certain social issues and the way a service might run, but I also knew people within each faith who carried these struggles simultaneously. It was different watching my own denomination splinter and falter.

The church was split along Conservative/Traditional/Charismatic/ Liberal understandings and, in South Africa, race lines. As a young person I had been naively unaware of these divisions.

I believe that people will know that we

are Christians by our caring for the poor, words of kindness, and acts of love. Simple!

I realise that I'd rather include everyone than make people prove their Christian merit at the door. I am happy to journey with those who differ from me, but I am not sure that they are comfortable. What human would I trust to judge me anyway? I don't know what makes or breaks a Christian's inherent belief system. But I know what it feels like to have my own Christianity questioned when I'm seeking to do what is right by God.

The rest of the song lyrics are: "They will know we are Christian by our love." Embracing those who wish to be Christian is what I believe Jesus would do, and is the only chance that, someday, it won't be right and left: it will just be Christian.

Why this focus on Christian Unity? Sunday 19 January is the beginning of the week of Christian Unity, and that evening we will be joining with the three other Giffnock churches to sign a Declaration of Intent. This service will be conducted by Rev Sheilagh Kesting, former Moderator of the Church of Scotland. The service will be in Giffnock United Reformed Church.

This is an opportunity to celebrate our common task of serving our community. So I urge you to put this date in your diaries.

Chris



Giffnock Churches and Christian Unity

The Church in Giffnock

Comprising:

*Giffnock South Parish Church
Giffnock United Reformed Church
Orchardhill Parish Church
The Park Parish Church*

We are united in Christian faith. We believe in one God in whose love we pray, celebrate and worship together.

We are all special. We rejoice in our individual strengths and seek to learn positively from our respective traditions.

We serve the same community and encounter the same problems. We

commit ourselves to working together to establish a united and positive Christian presence in Giffnock. We will respond to the challenges of the future with determination.

Focusing on the love which binds us together, we pledge to continue to develop our worship, study and work together.

Looking forward together, we recognise the uncertainty of the journey, the challenges we might face, and the changes that will unfold. We stand mindful of God's call to move forward in faith.

May God grant us grace, Jesus Christ insight and the Holy Spirit strength to grow in this shared vision.

Lodging House Mission Donations



The Lodging House Mission have been considering the position regarding the annual Christmas shoe-box appeal. Many more boxes have been received than are needed, and it has become very difficult to organise the whole operation because of lack of space and resources. The LHM have advised that if we have already filled a box for this year they will be pleased to accept it: so please just bring it along to the church. As an alternative, they ask us to consider putting equivalent money into an envelope as a donation which would be used to meet the significant cost of Christmas meals at the mission.

Envelopes are available at the church door or from Archie Hunter. Collection boxes will also be placed at the church door.

In the longer term, LHM hope to come forward with ideas for personalised individual gifts from these donations, but in the meantime the Christmas meals will be the priority.

The LHM annual report also is available in the church vestibule. Alongside are order forms for the LHM Christmas cards. As in recent years, cards will also be on sale at the Orchardhill Café. If we run out of forms please contact Archie Hunter on 0141 571 8985.

Bishop Jack Spong in Glasgow



(A personal view by Andrew Wale, Session Clerk, Campsie Parish Church)

Orchardhill and Cairns were both well-filled for October's much anticipated return visit of Bishop Jack Spong, who was speaking on the Gospel of John (the subject of his latest book).

Jack began both lectures by saying that he was delighted to be back in Scotland; then he warned us that he would be saying things that might surprise or shock us. For instance, scholars now believe that the Gospel had between three and five authors and none of them was John, son of Zebedee.

However, his aim was not to shock or scare us but, in both lectures, to lead us through the Gospel so that we might see how it was infused with a deeply Jewish mode of thought; to see it "though a different lens." He contended that the ignorance of early Gentile Christians, from about 150 CE onwards, had led to misunderstandings and misinterpretation, all tending towards that great Spong error, biblical literalism.

At Orchardhill he described how John leaves out or changes stories found in the other Gospels (no birth narrative, different placing of the

cleansing of the Temple); how he doesn't show Jesus telling parables or using short pithy sayings; and how he refers not to miracles but signs.

He introduced (I suspect for the first time for most of us) the Jewish literary technique of exaggeration - for example the miracle at Cana would have produced 160 gallons of top-class wine (over 900 bottles!) This would have warned his contemporaries that the story was not literally true, but contained a meaning which transcended the apparent facts. Furthermore, he suggested that in some parts of the Gospel there is humour which we don't immediately spot; for example, John was making fun of Nicodemus and his "born again" problems in order to highlight the dangers of literalism.

Most controversially, perhaps, Jack suggested that the roles played by the mother of Jesus (never named as Mary in John) and the beloved disciple (who wasn't John and probably never existed) were introduced by the writer(s) as a symbolic way of demonstrating the move from the Judaism of earlier days to the Christianity of the future, already begun when the Gospel was written.

At Cairns he recapitulated some of this before concentrating on John's description of the Crucifixion, which he holds to be more important for the Gospel writer than the Resurrection (a point made several times, but not elaborated - a pity, because for me the Johannine Resurrection stories have always seemed particularly significant). Instead he spent some time demolishing the idea of substitutionary atonement, which he

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Bishop Jack Spong in Glasgow

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believes to be a Gentile misunderstanding of the phrase Lamb of God. He then described the three Lambs from Jewish culture – the Passover Lamb, the Lamb of atonement (closely associated with the Scapegoat at Yon Kippur), and the Lamb from Second Isaiah, who is led to the slaughter without resistance.

John, it was suggested, was using the Isaiah image in his portrayal of Jesus, and the lack of understanding of later, non-Jewish writers led to the confusion of this with the other two “lambs”.

In both lectures Jack brought all his insights and suggestions together to support his central thesis – that Jesus was a man so deeply imbued with the love of God that he was able to love

his torturers and killers whose example points us towards the only way each of us can know God, by loving our fellow human beings completely and “wastefully”.

This final theme was elaborated in his answers to the various questions from his audiences on both nights and became the main image to be taken away from a superb couple of evenings of provocative and enlivening discourse.

In his vote of thanks at Cairns, Alistair Richmond spoke movingly of the impact Jack Spong, his writings and his lectures had on him. I’m sure that many, if not all, of those who heard him will echo that view with gratitude and respect for a truly remarkable follower of Christ.

Life and Work



This month's Life and Work, the Church of Scotland magazine, highlights the role of a Fife Sunday School teacher in a high-profile award for M a l a l a

Yousafzai, the teenager who was shot by the Taliban for campaigning for girls' education in Pakistan.

Also featured are Christmas reflections by Right Rev Lorna Hood, the Church of Scotland Moderator, and one of her predecessors, Very Rev Dr James Simpson.

Other articles include:

“God Can Do Miracles”: The work of HIV/AIDS charities in Scotland and Africa.

A Safe Place: The challenges facing an adult with autism.

Saving Lives and Preventing Misery: The role of the Church of Scotland in the fight against TB.

A Musical Leap of Faith: Rev Dr Robin Hill, founder of the Heart and Soul Swing Band, explains how a plan to jazz up old hymns became a swinging reality.

Flower Donations



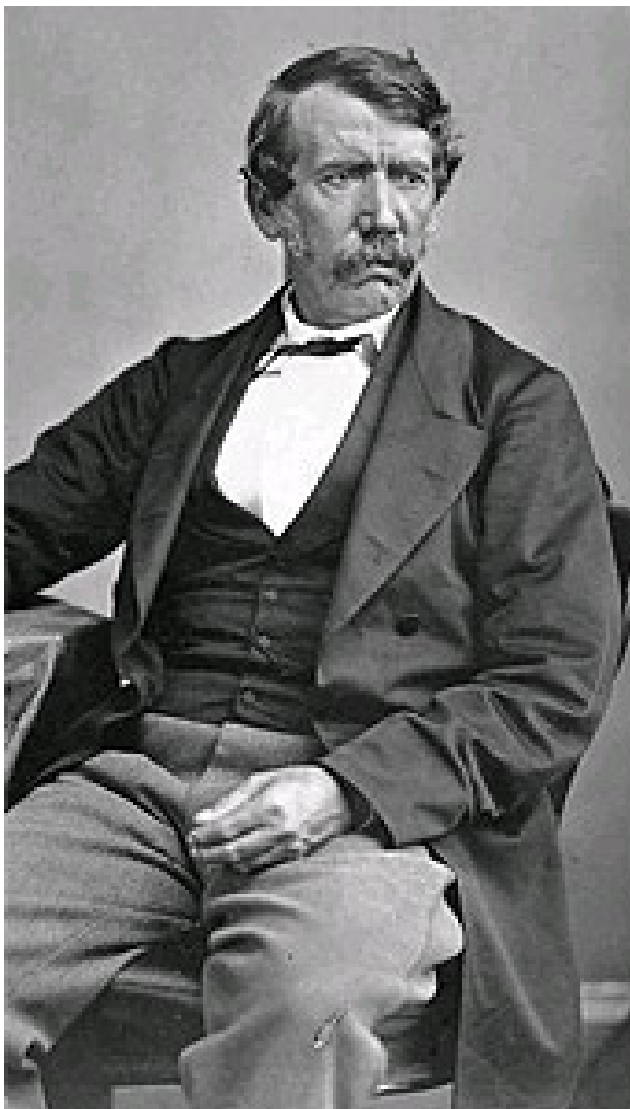
Last year we started a flower-donation book, which sits on the table to the left of the chancel. Unfortunately, we've not had as many donations as we had hoped for: so we are just sending out a reminder.

It's a lovely opportunity to remember a special date or a loved one while providing flowers for the congregation

to enjoy. After the service the flowers are taken to folk in the congregation to whom, for a variety of reasons, we particularly want to show our love.

The flowers cost about £20 each week, but it is not necessary to donate the full amount. Any contribution would be most welcome.

Honouring David Livingstone



The Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Right Reverend Lorna Hood, has said that the greatest way to honour the legacy of David Livingstone is to

continue the fight against human trafficking.

Speaking at the 200th anniversary celebrations in Glasgow Cathedral for the birth of Scotland's most famous explorer, Mrs Hood said: "There could be no greater commemoration of his life and work than in the continued fight against the evils of the modern day slave trade, the human trafficking of people particularly women and girls. If he were alive today, Livingstone would urge us to continue the fight."

Mrs Hood said that in modern times Livingstone could be viewed as a flawed character but he had many strong virtues not least of which was the courage of his convictions. She explained: "Angry at the slave trade which he saw as the open sore of Africa, he sought to stimulate a new economy in central and southern Africa which would render the slave trade redundant. Indeed, his campaign against the slave trade became an unstoppable force. He was truly a man who had the courage of his convictions. David Livingstone lived up to his calling spreading the good news to the ends of the earth, loving his neighbour and being a true 'bearer of hope' for the people of Africa."

COMMUNION ROLL

New Members

We welcome into our Fellowship and Service:

Gillian Edward, 9 Laggan Road, Newlands, Glasgow G43 2SY (district 46)

Donald Waterson, 65 Greystone Avenue, Rutherglen, Glasgow G73 3SW

Disjunction

Dr Andrea Caldwell, 33 Belmont Drive, Giffnock G46 7NZ (district 47)

CONGREGATIONAL REGISTER

Baptism

On 24 November 2013 Eilidh Carol Coupar, daughter of Fiona and Philip Coupar, 12 Orchard Park, Giffnock G46 6JJ (district 28)

Orchardhill Record Deadline

Beginning with the February edition next year, each edition of the *Orchardhill Record* will be published on the last Sunday of the previous month.

In the past each issue has been published on the first Sunday of the relevant month. However, that has meant that events in the first few days of a month cannot be published in that month's *Orchardhill Record*. The change will allow any month's events to be promoted in that month's edition regardless of the date. The February edition will thus be published on Sunday 26 January.

January's edition will follow the traditional dates, with a deadline on 22 December and publication on 5 January.

Contributions for the January edition should be either sent by email to record-editor@orchardhill.org.uk before 1.00pm on 22 December or left in the relevant slot in the rack in the church corridor no later than 10.30am. We prefer contributions to be sent by email, and we cannot accept any handwritten or typed item that does not identify the source.

Please submit all contributions as soon as possible. Do not wait until the deadline date. The editor acknowledges every contribution: please contact him before the deadline if he does not advise that he has received your contribution.

December

Sun	1	10.30am	First Sunday in Advent: Sacrament of the Lord's Supper	Rev Chris Vermeulen
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Sun	8	10.30am	Second Sunday in Advent: Worship led by CrossWords ("Expecting Jesus")
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Sat	14	10.00am-noon	The Big Christmas Sing (Christian Aid) at Sainsbury's (Darnley)
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Sun	15	10.30am	Third Sunday in Advent: Choir Christmas Cantata
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		6.30pm	Celebrate Christmas with SoundWaves
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Fri	20	1.20pm	Giffnock Primary School's Christmas Service with Nativity
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Sun	22	10.30am	Fourth Sunday in Advent: Nativity Service
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Tue	24	6.30pm	Family Christingle Service
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		11.00pm	Mulled wine and mince pies followed at 11.30 by Watchnight Service
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Wed	25	10.00am	Christmas Family Service
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Sun	29	10.30pm	Family Service	Rev Chris Vermeulen
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January

Sun	5	10.30pm	Family Service with Communion	Rev Chris Vermeulen
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