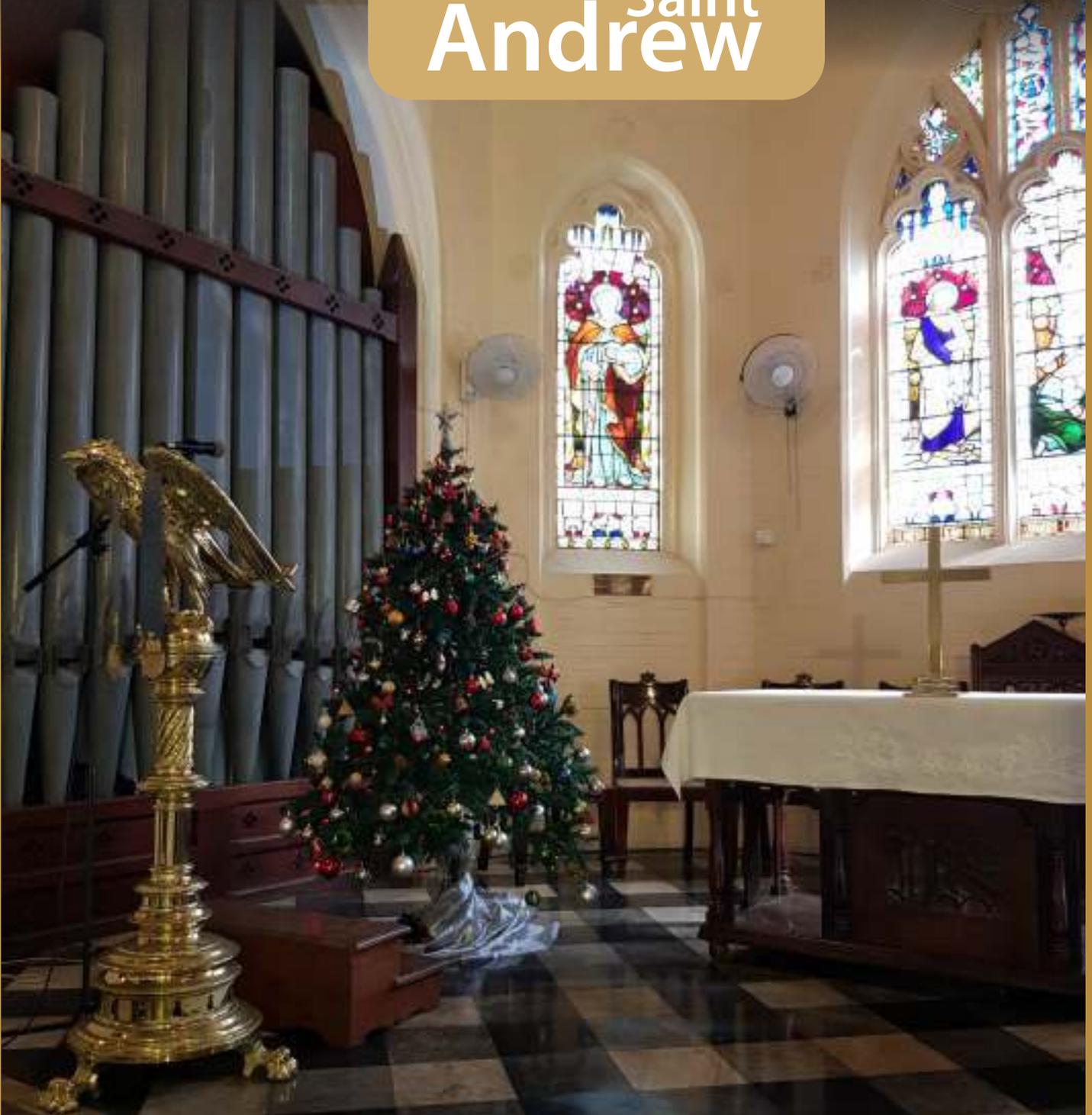


Christmas 2020

Issue 17

the Saint  
**Andrew**



Church of Scotland – Presbyterian

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# Letter from the Minister

*The starving poor sat down to a banquet;  
the callous rich were left out in the cold."*

Luke Chapter 1 (The Message)

This song and the heart of the whole story are all beautifully captured within the Christmas carols. So my suggestion through the season of Advent is to listen with extra care to the words of the seasonal hymns, which we hear on Radio, TV and in the world wherever we are. This is for three reasons:

- 1) Each hymn is a poetic interpretation of scripture
- 2) Those selected for our hymnbook have been well sung, considered and even debated over many years
- 3) You will be inspired by them.

In a sense these carols have trickled down to us through the centuries and as we appreciate them fully, we reconnect with a great crowd of Christians who have penned the words, created the melodies, sung them, played them or taught them to a new generation. In our services we only sing each hymn once because there is such a treasury of Advent and Christmas delights.

I wonder about splitting the work heart into two sections as we listen to the hymns afresh – the sections would be HEAR and ART. Hymns are poetry and poetry can be sublime art. To fully appreciate the artistic merit of a hymn you have to listen to it, even as you sing!

So let's take all our opportunities, as we sing verses of -

***"How silently, how silently***

***The wondrous gift is given!***

***So God imparts to human hearts***

***The blessings of His heaven.***

***No ear may his His coming,***

***But in this world of sin,***

***Where meek souls will receive him still,***

***The dear Christ enters in.'***

It would be powerful for each of us to take the time this Advent to share with someone the heart of Christmas for you, as we journey together towards celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ.

Let us sing together as we listen, learn and ultimately explore the generous heart of God through the Christmas story in Colombo and beyond.

Every blessing on you and yours,

**Revd Ian**



## What is the Heart of Christmas in Colombo?

Charles Dickens shared the importance of Christmas for him, "*I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all year.*"

Helen Keller said it more powerfully, "*The only blind person at Christmas time is he who has not Christmas in his heart.*"

However, they do not give a clear answer to my question,

## What is the heart of Christmas?

If you undertook a poll as I have tried to do among some friends you would come up with some familiar ideas - warm relationships, good food with good friends, the giving and receiving of love.

Peg Bracken puts it this way, "*Gifts of time and love are surely the basic ingredients of a truly merry Christmas.*"

However, as Christians in Colombo, we should take into account that around the world at the end of a difficult year, there may be less physical fellowship, fewer gifts and less food, but it is still possible to connect with God and to enjoy the season. It has been said to me, "It can be striking how happy some are with very little, in terms of material wealth." The Christian faith invites us to revisit the old and familiar story every December and to listen to what it has to say to us. It is a story which is full of surprises for the humble and the wise. Even kings bow down and worship. Please recall the most powerful song of all that comes straight from the lips of the young Mary, and yet gets to the heart of the matter between rich and poor,

*"I'm the most fortunate woman on earth!  
What God has done for me will never be forgotten,  
the God whose very name is holy, set apart from all others.  
His mercy flows in wave after wave  
on those who are in awe before him.  
He bared his arm and showed his strength,  
scattered the bluffing braggarts.  
He knocked tyrants off their high horses,  
pulled victims out of the mud.*



# Making God the Center of our Universe

The year has been one of chaos but it also has been a time of reflection for the world. While nations yet remain in a state of flux, we have all been forced to look inwards and outwards and make changes to the way we live, work and play. The Church too has faced challenges, with congregations restricted, fellowship non-existent and preachers using multi-tech platforms to get their messages to their flocks.



Dr Dhanan Senathirajah



Pastor Abby Schaffter



Revd. Roshan Mendis

Below are three SASK preachers, Dr Dhanan Senathirajah, Pastor Abby Schaffter and Revd. Roshan Mendis who shared some of their thoughts of the year past, Christmas in COVID and moving into 2021.

## Q - What is the biggest lesson we as people, have learned this year?

**Dhanan Senathirajah:** We have often forgotten how fragile life is. We are like the "dew which soon disappears," (Hosea 13:3). We have put our hope on the transient things of the world and have become independent from God. The events this year have shown us that we do not and cannot control our circumstances. COVID-19 came out of the blue and the arrogant world was ill-prepared to face such a powerful foe. Thus, the biggest lesson for humanity is that for all our achievements, we are, yet, still frail.

**Abby Schaffter:** This year has taught me that life is beyond my control and it has made me realize how vulnerable I am. It has also opened my eyes to the fact that I surround myself and fill my life with lots of inconsequential things that take up my time and my effort. Being in lockdown taught me to prioritize and appreciate the most important things in life. When all is stripped away, you learn to have a greater appreciation for things you sometimes take for granted.

**Revd. Roshan Mendis:** COVID-19 has definitely taught us numerous lessons from the importance of hygiene, to finding alternative ways of doing things like online learning, that building 'Towers of Babel' will not succeed as God stalls those plans that are independent of Him and the importance of relationships. However, the biggest lesson to me is the fact that life could end tomorrow or even today. Hence, we must make the most of every opportunity as the Bible says, not only in terms of our work, but also in terms of our relationships with our spouse and children and in loving our neighbor. We have been to centered as, "Me, myself and I" people.

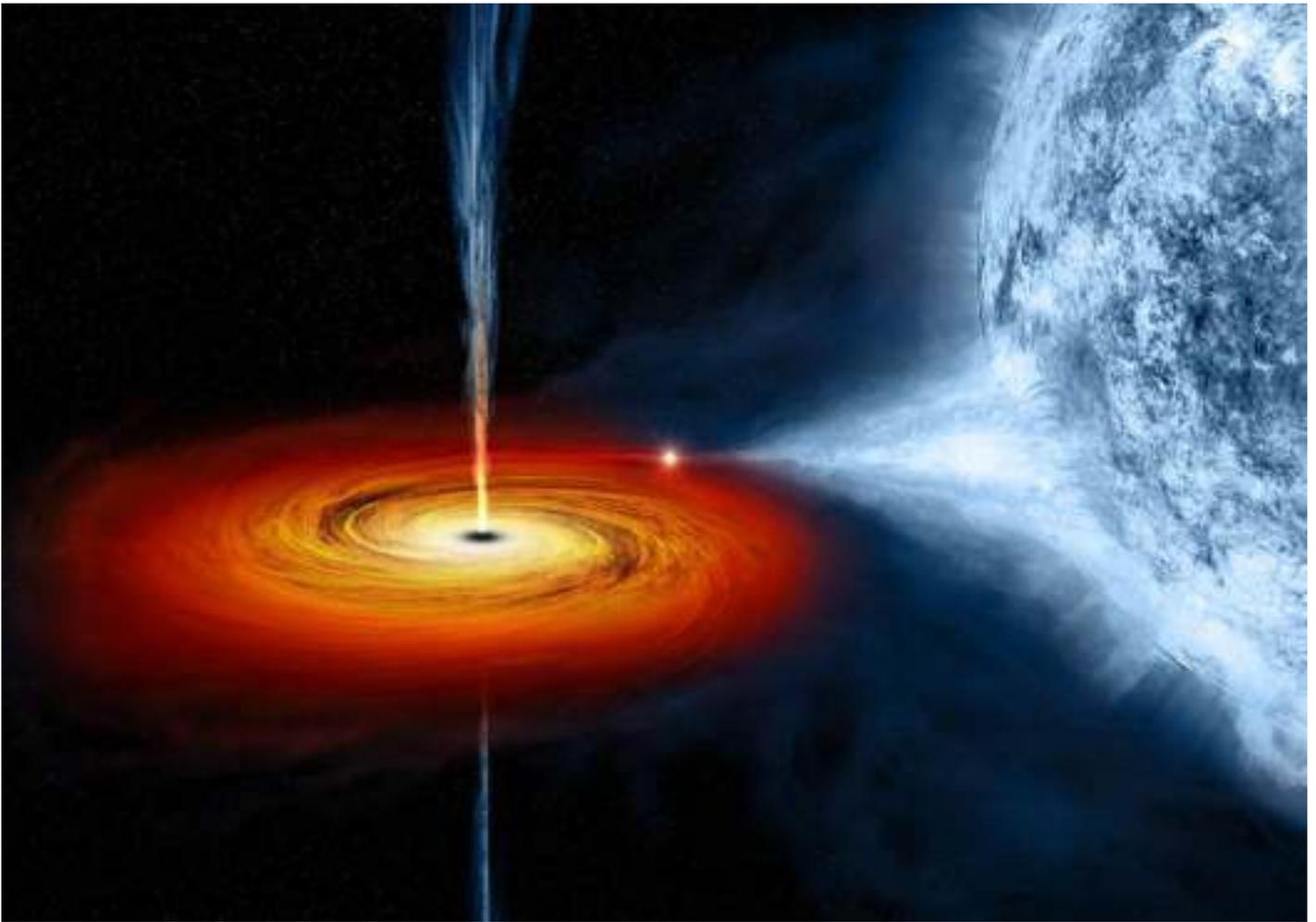
## Q - What must we remember this Christmas, given everything that has happened?

**DS:** We must remember that God became man in order to deliver humanity from the terrible plight we were in. Therefore, through our words and deeds, we must make Christ known among those who don't believe in Him. Christmas is a time when people are receptive to the Gospel. Especially this Christmas, we must help those who are affected physically, materially and mentally COVID-19.

**AS:** Christmas should remind us that God loves us and wants us to have eternal life beyond this temporary life on earth. We must first understand that love and then share that love with others around us. The joy of Christmas transcends the parties and bright lights to a baby in a manger, born in humility to bring joy to the world.

**RM:** Almost every year, Christmas is so commercialized that even we Christians have often lost the spiritual meaning of Christmas, celebrating the epicurean philosophy of Christmas, 'Eat, drink and be merry'. Not that eating breudheur, turkey and cheese is wrong; not that red wine, white wine or other spirits is wrong, (Jesus never said, "Do not drink but that drunkards will not inherit the Kingdom of God) and not that having a good time is wrong. But this Christmas, I hope we will focus on Jesus who is the reason for the season and the purpose of his arrival on planet earth – to save us from our sins. As COVID has reminded us, life is fragile. Let us make peace with our Maker through the Prince of Peace by singing with the carol writers of old, "Oh come to my heart Lord Jesus, there is room in my heart for Thee" and "Case out my sin and enter in, O Lord Emmanuel."

# Making God the Center of our Universe (cont...)



**Q** ■ What should we draw on, as individuals, as we move into 2021?

**DS:** God uses suffering to purify us and to prepare us for greater ministry. We have all suffered because of COVID-19 which has impacted us all in varying degrees, but it has also made our faith stronger. We have become more resilient in our homes, workplaces and in our churches. We must draw on the experiences of 2020 to make a greater impact on our society in 2021.

**AS:** We should learn from the lessons of 2020. We should focus on what is important and be thankful for what we have. We should also appreciate that whatever challenges we are facing, there are so many facing much worse. We should look around us and be that neighbour that we are called to be.

**RM:** We often forget the lessons we learn. But we must not forget what we learned this year, 2020. Let's get our priorities right in the New Year. God first; family second and work third. Let's get our work-life balance right. Let's practice good hygiene, just as in Leviticus God gave many rules on hygiene to His people who were going through a desert. Let's learn to live with less and be content in every situation, as materialism due to commercialism has made us love the things of the world more than loving God, heart, soul, mind and strength.

## loving God



## four gifts

SEEKING SELF CARE FOR  
HEART, SOUL, MIND AND STRENGTH



# The Story Behind the Christmas Carol –



This much loved carol probably began life as a song that was passed along orally and sung in streets outside churches as Christian congregations didn't participate in Catholic masses. The term Noël in the French version is derived from the Latin word for news and hence, the song speaks about a crier, an angel in this case, spreading the good news that Jesus was born.



While The First Noel gained popularity in the 18th century, the structure of the song resembles medieval French epic poems, similar to La Chanson de Roland memorializing the Charlemagne legends. The unique characteristic of these poems is they were not written down. The song was not transcribed until 1823 when it was published in London as part of the early anthology, Some Ancient Christmas Carols. The English title appears in The Cornish Songbook in 1929, which could also mean "The First Noel" originated in Cornwall, situated across the Channel from France.



1 The first Noel the angel did say  
 was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;  
 in fields where they lay keeping their sheep,  
 on a cold winter's night that was so deep.  
 Refrain:  
 Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel,  
 born is the King of Israel.

2 They looked up and saw a star  
 shining in the east, beyond them far;  
 and to the earth it gave great light,  
 and so it continued both day and night. [Refrain]

3 And by the light of that same star  
 three Wise Men came from country far;  
 to seek for a king was their intent,  
 and to follow the star wherever it went. [Refrain]

4 This star drew nigh to the northwest,  
 o'er Bethlehem it took its rest;  
 and there it did both stop and stay,  
 right over the place where Jesus lay. [Refrain]

5 Then entered in those Wise Men three,  
 full reverently upon the knee,  
 and offered there, in his presence,  
 their gold and myrrh and frankincense. [Refrain]





# Through the lens

## Mission Work and Events at SASK

### Church services through COVID Times

St. Andrew's has continued to hold its services during COVID-19 times under strict health and safety regulations. While numbers remain at 25 as per these regulations, each Sunday, the sermons and singing have progressively got better, with an impromptu choir and even a Pastor's daughter and minister joining in the singing. Neranjan de Silva has been responsible for the amazing quality of music and the preachers, Pastor Abby Schaffter, Dr Dhanan Senathirajah, Revd. Roshan Mendis, Revd. Chrishantha

Mendis and on occasion Ivor and Viranga Wickramaratne have come into St. Andrew's and conducted extraordinary services.

The sermons have ranged from Judge Not, Bread of Heaven, Beware of separating from God in your garden, Spiritual warfare, The Perfect Church, facing COVID-19 as Christians and is Jesus asleep during the storm?

Below is a pictorial round up of what's been happening at St. Andrew's these last few months:

### Preachers in the Church



Revd. Roshan Mendis



Pastor Abby Schaffter



Dr Dhanan Senathirajah



Revd. Chrishantha Mendis

# Through the lens (cont...)

## Mission Work and Events at SASK

### Music in the Church



The choir stall is full



St. Andrew's Choir Director Sanjeev Niles and Music Director Neranjan de Silva



Shrimantha Senanayake



Eshantha de Andrado with Neranjan de Silva on the Makin organ



Father and daughter duo, Neranjan and Anila de Silva

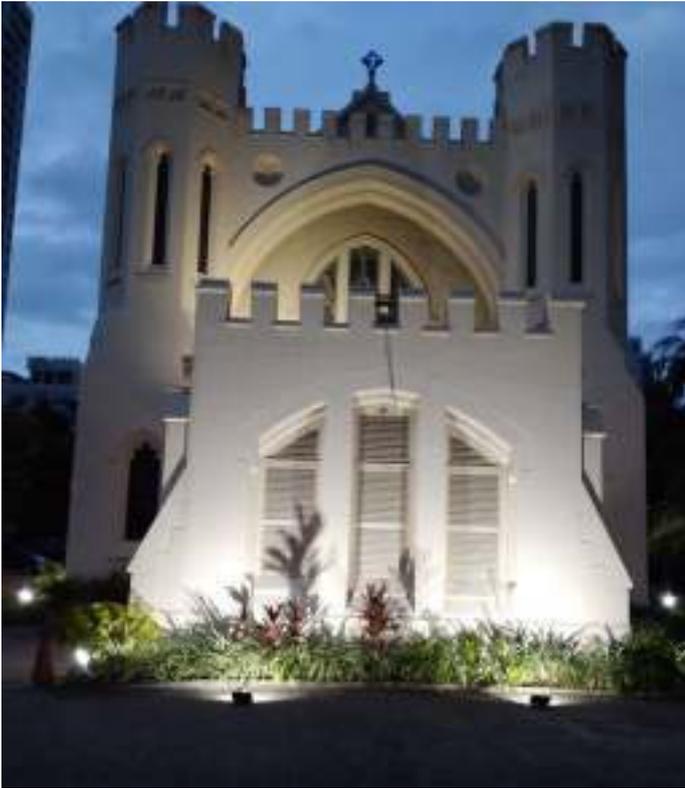


Anila de Silva and Revd. Roshan Mendis

# Through the lens (cont...)

## Mission Work and Events at SASK

It's December and traditions are strong at St. Andrew's



St. Andrew's floodlit for Christmas



The finished Christmas tree



The Advent wreath ready for lighting



Rev. Chrishantha Mendis lights the first Advent candle



Our Church Helper Roy Kingsly Saga Cruse puts the finishing touches on the tree



Preacher Viranga Wickramaratne lights the third Advent candle



Rev. Roshan Mendis lights the second Advent candle

# Through the lens (cont...)

## Mission Work and Events at SASK

### The Team that keeps us safe at St. Andrew's



Church Officer Kanapathy Sandrakumaran,  
Church Helper Roy Kinsly Saga Cruse and Security Officer  
Pitchai Kathragamanathan

### Netherlee Cottage



The team responsible for this Mission Project have embraced the subject of Mental Health in Sri Lanka with great depth. There is a reluctance to rely only on the use of medication and to instead, take the time to research the history of each patient, as this often leads to the root cause of the problem. Understanding the patients, even meeting with their families or guardians where possible has helped us design the approach necessary for each patient.

The sign language classes have improved communication with our resident who cannot hear or speak. She is now more relaxed, less stressed and able to contribute more to life at the Cottage. She works two days of the week cleaning for a neighbour. We believe her difficulties in life have been the result of her lack of hearing and speaking, and her mental health questions are a result of this. Her family did not learn to communicate with her and that created frustration and tension which led to aggression.

Another of our residents is epileptic and does not suffer from mental health issues. But she was placed in the mental health hospital by foster parents, resulting in her not having a stable childhood. A third resident has some hand-eye control challenges which have been interpreted as learning difficulties. However, she has a phenomenal memory for facts together with numerous other qualities which allow her to participate fully in life at the Cottage. She too helps clean for a neighbour. We do however, see examples of attention seeking from time to time which is probably the result of living

in an institution for several decades and is the only way they get noticed.

In all these cases, after understanding our patients' history and learning how to emphasise the good points, we have been able to reduce their mental health medication which in turn has allowed them to concentrate better, become more interactive and to develop their own conversational points. We can see big improvements to the residents at Netherlee Cottage.

We are delayed in moving three more ladies to the Community House to begin the next stage of rehabilitation due to the increase in those affected by COVID-19 in the area of the hospital and the Community House. The new ladies at the Community House will be working as cleaners, doing their own shopping and cooking and be responsible for keeping their house clean and tidy. They will be paying for their own rent, utilities, food and general shopping. While, the Netherlee Cottage team have arranged start-up costs for the new Community House from the Claremont Trust in Scotland, the ongoing project is the responsibility of Mulleriyawa Hospital and they will be responsible for the daily support of the Community House.

We await new residents at Netherlee Cottage to start their process of training.

Netherlee Parish Church in Glasgow donated the main financial contribution towards the funding of the Netherlee Cottage Mission Project, to rehabilitate patients from the main Mental Health Hospital in Colombo.

### -Netherlee team



# Through the lens (cont...)

## Mission Work and Events at SASK

### A Permanent Minister for SASK

St Andrew's Scots Kirk have been without a permanent Minister since 2015. We were given the authority by the International Presbytery of the Church of Scotland to call a Minister in 2018 for an "unrestricted call" and the nomination committee was formed.



Unfortunately, the Committee have had many hurdles to climb as our advertisement in Life and Work did not bear fruit. So we cast our net across the world to other Presbyterian communities and we have had some favourable response. However, the interested Ministers are not from the Church of Scotland and the planned introduction into the Church of Scotland Ministry was expected to take over 1 year which is not practical for an experienced Minister who was only planning to move congregations.

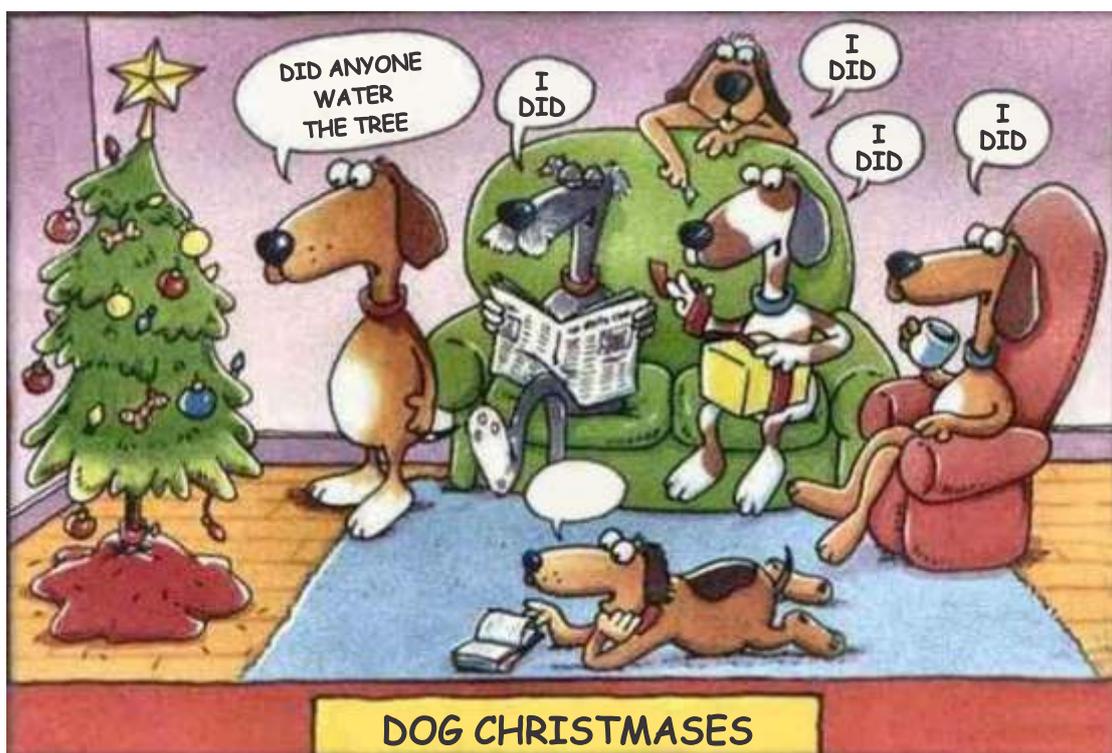
The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland normally held in May each year was cancelled this year due to COVID-

19 restrictions, but a mini version was held virtually in October this year. We have been granted a reduction of approximately 75% of the acclimatisation programme to introduce Ministers from other denominations into Churches in the International Presbytery although they will be restricted to a 5 year term.

The SASK Kirk Session continues to support the work of the Nomination Committee and the International Presbytery have supported SASK within the terms as proposed by the General Assembly.

We therefore can finally start to think about interviews.

-Nomination Committee





# Across the miles in COVID times ...

Charlotte and I arrived for my locum at St. Andrew's just about two years ago from when I am writing this – just in time for St. Andrew's Day, and then Advent, 2018. We had of course visited Colombo many times for family reasons, so it was a comfortable arrival, followed by months of good fellowship, fine music, and participation in SASK's many mission efforts. And then, of course, came Easter Sunday, and the tragedy that befell Sri Lanka and continues to echo through today and beyond. That should have been enough for any country to manage. But, after things seemed somewhat back to normal, came the pandemic and its consequences, more comprehensive and long-lasting, it seems, than even those of the bombings. It's been a difficult time for Sri Lanka, and SASK, and all of us who love both.

Sri Lanka has in most respects managed COVID-19 better than the United States. It's been at considerable cost, psychological, emotional and financial, of course. And let's not forget spiritual. While we can – we should – all have our practices of private devotion, prayer, Bible reading – human life isn't meant to be lived in isolation, much less our spiritual life. Even our Christian understanding of God, the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, tells us that life exists in community, in relationships, in connections one with another. So it has been difficult for all of us to be apart.

Now surely that has been overcome, to some degree, at least, through the marvels of modern technology. Rev. Ian has been able to be locum not only when he was in Colombo but even from Edinburgh! What an accomplishment – and service to SASK. I've enjoyed being part of your worship, stretching across three continents. Truly we belong to a global church! And for that we give thanks.

The impact of COVID on society as well as the church continues to draw so much of our attention – along with the political controversies and changes both Sri Lanka and the United States have experienced. We find ourselves called both to attend to basic human needs when many are out of work, shopping is difficult, and more, while also functioning in the public square, for we are also called to be concerned

for the public life of the nations in which God has placed us. And, we try to be healthy by staying largely apart from our usual patterns of living! It's no wonder so many people feel exhausted, discouraged, drained, frustrated.



Again, technology has helped a bit, for those of us fortunate to have computers and smartphones and such. But as a grandparent, I know that seeing across the miles, welcome as that is, does not replace a hug, or a bedtime story. There's no simple solution to this, but we can and do strive to find ways to sustain our connections, and save our sanity. While I've never been terribly good at contemplative prayer, I suspect there are good lessons from the monks of old who spent hours, if not months and years, living largely sole and silent lives! Not our modern style, but there must be lessons there!

After leaving Colombo, Charlotte and I spent several months back and forth between Minneapolis and Washington, DC, where our daughter and grandchildren were, first for security, and then medical reasons. It wasn't until fall that we settled back into our previous patterns of life in Minnesota. That, of course, lasted only a few months until stories of a new virus began to make news, and soon thereafter our plans to visit Colombo once again – well, to visit anywhere, actually! – came to a screeching halt. We've been mostly at home since apart from some time in Washington, DC, when our family departed Sri Lanka and moved back to the States. We hope to be in Washington, DC again for Christmas, although the increasing number of



# Across the miles in COVID times (cont...)

virus cases across the U.S. is making travel planning ever more uncertain. Most everything else we do – church, book clubs, coffee gatherings – happens 'virtually', on our computers. I've gotten accustomed to preaching to an empty sanctuary, when I do preach, and I must say it's a very strange experience compared to having real faces out there to look at!

The newsletter you are reading this in, is one great service to SASK, that keeps those in Colombo and St. Andrew's many friends across the continents in touch, and Gillian and Savithri merit our thanks for making this happen. As this service continues, may we all find ways to serve the Church and the lands in which we live. The call to build the Kingdom of God of earth remains even in these stressed times. The prophet's cry to do justice, and love kindness, and walk humbly rings on. The hope that sustains us even when all about us seems selfish and power-hungry and mean still lives.

May this Advent prepare us once again to welcome Christmas, and the great message of that Day – that God is with us in our lives, and calls us to serve even as we have been served.

Rev'd Bill and Charlotte



The tree all decorated for Christmas



It's a white Christmas in Minnesota



Charlotte braves the cold



Charlotte's crocheted Christmas tree decoration



Charlotte's handiwork – crocheted Christmas stockings



Granddaughters and friends busy making gingerbread houses



The cookie tree



# Christmas Reflections

## 'And the Word became flesh and lived among us ...

### Prayers

Lord God, we admit that we do close our ears to your Word,  
To the messages of the prophets,  
And to the cries of the poor.

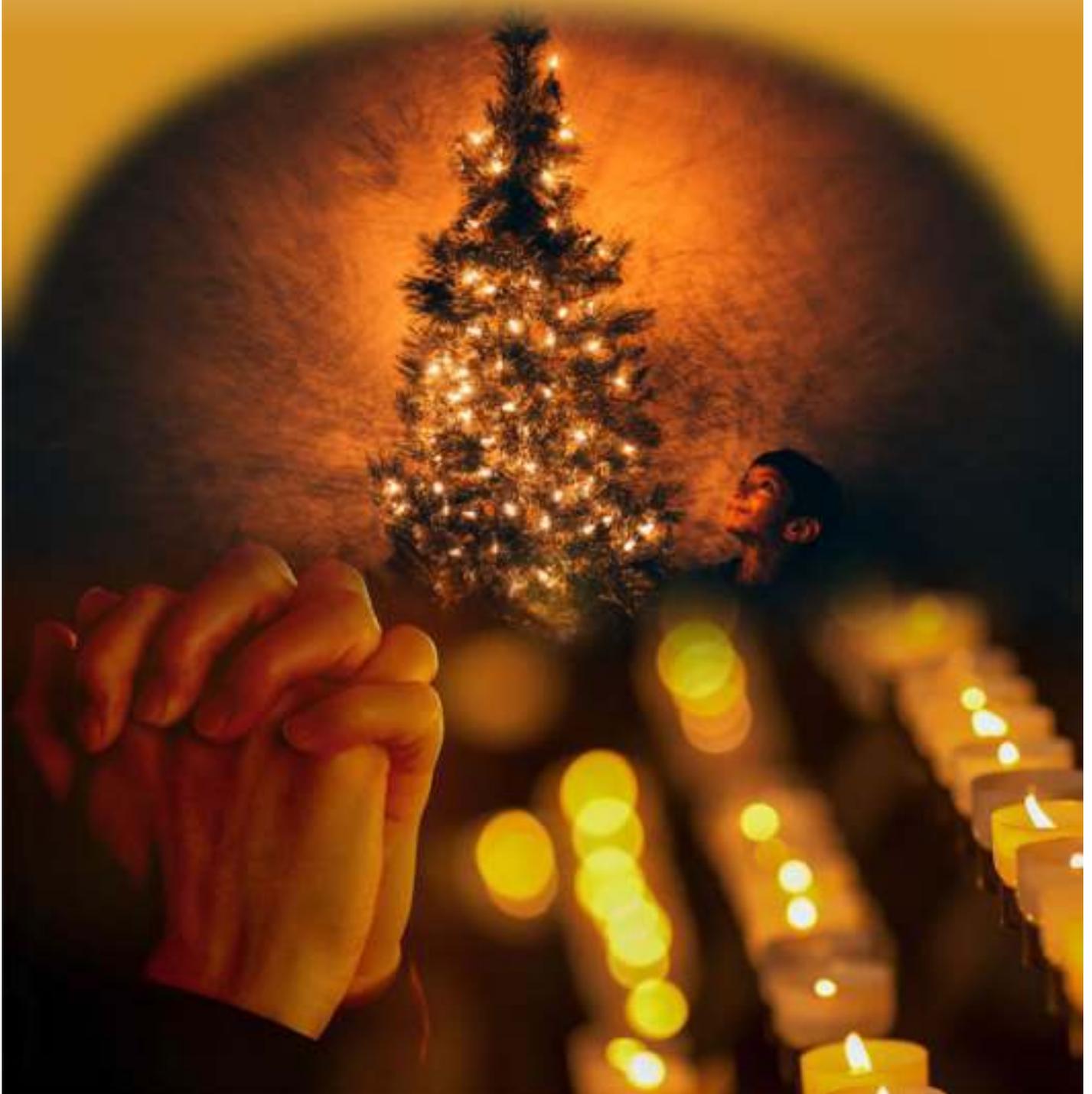
Open our hearts to our neighbours  
and help us to love them as Jesus taught us.

Lord God, help us to hear your voice through the babble  
of this world

Where words are used to confuse, distract, manipulate,  
sell illusion, buy power;

Help us to be still and receptive to your healing,

Encouraging,  
Inspiring,  
Enduring,  
life-giving  
Word...



# Christmas Past, Christmas Present, Christmas Future

It is music that adds that final touch of wondrous amazement to the story of Christmas. A story that began with angels singing to shepherds, the tradition of Christmas music has long been integral to everything about Christmas. Both our Music Director Neranjan de Silva and Choir Director Sanjeev Niles celebrate Christmas with even more music than during the rest of the year, as Christmas is a time they really let their notes get into the groove to celebrate the birth of Christ. Here, they talk about their Christmases – past, present and future.

**Q: What have Christmases past been like for the family and you?**

**Neranjan de Silva:** In the past years, Christmas has been a time where I part company with my family. By around the 2nd week in November, I start rehearsals for the numerous events I play for, and consequently get back home after the family has gone to bed. Once Christmas services are done – both midnight mass and morning service, I have lunch and dinner with my family, and then start the wedding run from the 26th till the end of the year. I meet my family in the New Year.

**Sanjeev Niles:** On Christmas day it's been going to church at midnight or on Christmas morning coming home and being with Family for lunch and dinner. Since the birth of my son nine years ago, Christmas has been more animated with having to do stuff he enjoys.

**Q: What has been special about those Christmases?**

**Nds:** There's loads of music for me. I have no idea what the family does as I rarely meet them from mid-November until Christmas lunch. The other special is that since I have a health condition triggered by stress, quite often I spend around a week in hospital early January – and that is a time to de-stress, relax in isolation and return home to follow a similar routine in the new year.

**SN:** There's a lot of Christmas music at home in the lead up to Christmas. On Christmas day, we would often sing carols together, especially when I was a child.

**Q: How do you see Christmas panning out this year?**

**Nds:** This year will be stressful too - with many online and pre-recorded events. However, the difference will be that I will be busy working from the recording studio at home rather than being out in the field. Work is more spaced out too. I have already started recordings for Christmas – so it's just a shift in the way I do things. Nonetheless my diary is still full in December.

**SN:** It will be toned down and that would probably mean less shopping and spending less time personally with friends and family. This will be hard but the hope is that it will be just this one time.

**Q: What do you think we should all be aware of this Christmas?**

**Nds:** We should all be aware that there is a nasty virus lurking around, just waiting to scamper up our nostrils and then take our breath away. Reflecting on the true meaning of Christmas may be a worthwhile and practical thing to do this Christmas season.

**SN:** I think we have to be aware of the difficulty the world is facing with the pandemic. Both people who have been impacted with their health and the loss of a loved one and people who are hurting financially due to loss of income who face a lot of insecurity.

**Q: How will you be celebrating this Christmas?**

**Nds:** I usually don't 'celebrate' Christmas as it is usually a time of work overload and I am always tired. This year, I will be with my family at home. Quite looking forward to that!

**SN:** It's different as the planning for church music and carol services is limited. But I will be working on making some music that can be enjoyed virtually. With the family, the plans will be close to the usual.

**Q: Has the concept of what Christmas is all about changed for you in any way, given the past year?**

**Nds:** It has indeed, in many ways. The lockdowns have brought out the introvert in me and I enjoy my time in the studio. Now I wonder why I used to stress out lugging keyboards and sound equipment around from one venue to the next for the entire last six weeks of every year. I also feel the time has come to slow down on live performances – especially concerts, and do more work in the studio. The NEW NORMAL has many positive aspects to look forward to.

**SN:** In our country, we have been through many years of trials and tribulations. So this will be likely another one of those years. We hope and pray that we would find the strength to get through it together and come out a better and stronger community.



**Neranjan with his wife Dayani and from left to right, son Surekha, daughter in law Umeshini, daughter Anila, with granddaughter Scheneli and Dog the doggy**



**Sanjeev with wife Mariangela and son Andreo**



# Myths that surround Christmas

## Christ was not born on December 25th

The Bible does not refer to any actual date of Christ's birth and the current calendar was not used in Christ's time. The Bible says shepherds watched their flocks in fields when Jesus was born and this could only be possible if He was born in the spring or fall. Ancient scholars have debated on the calculations of Christ's birth date with many suggesting sometime in June. It is believed that the Church adopted December 25th as Christmas to replace the pagan solstice Yule.



## Three Wise Men

The Bible does not say there were three of wise men. In fact, Matthew 2:1-12 speaks of the visit of the Magi, which is in the plural and which means there were at least two but could have been three or even more. And the Magi came to see baby Jesus a few days after he was born, and not at the manger because they first sought Herod's help in locating the "king" and were delayed.



## The birth of Rudolph

Rudolph, Santa Claus' famous and beloved red-nosed reindeer is an all-American creation, which in 1939, was immortalized in a poem by Robert L May at the Montgomery Ward department store. He wanted to attract shoppers to the store and described a shy reindeer with a large red nose assuming the lead in Santa's sleigh. The poem sold about two and half million copies in 1939 and three and half million in 1946.



## Kissing under the mistletoe

In ancient Greece, during the festival of Saturnalia, men kissed their partners under the mistletoe as this was believed to bring virility. In Scandinavia, it is believed to bring peace between warring people and clans and in ancient England, the plant was used to ward off evil spirits and the Evil Eye.



# Myths that surround Christmas (cont...)

## Why Boxing Day?

Boxing day gets its name from the practice of Churches and parishes to open up alms and charity boxes, inviting contributions for the less fortunate. Also, this is the day the servants and domestic helpers were given the day off for having worked hard for Christmas.



## Is the Yule log a Christian tradition?

Looking at the superstitions involved, though, the Yule log may belong more to Halloween than Christmas. Many believe that the idea of a Yule log may have European pagan origins. The traditional Yule celebrations of pagans often involved bonfires and it is said that the superstitions are necessary to keep Christians firmly attached to God.



## Is decorating the Christmas Tree an American Tradition?

Decorating the Christmas tree is quintessentially a German tradition dating back to the 1500s, initially confined to the Strasbourg region (now France). In the 1800s, the tradition spread across Germany and was brought to the US by the British. Queen Victoria's German-born consort Prince Albert adopted it and decorated the first royal Christmas tree in 1841.



# Myths that surround Christmas (cont...)

## Taking Christ out of Christmas or “Happy Holidays”?

It is believed that X represents the Greek alphabet 'Chi' which also is an abbreviation of Christmas. Xmas was an ancient way of referring to Christmas. While the debate is still open, Happy Holidays most often is said to include Hannukah celebrations as well.



## Santa Claus or St. Nicholas–Sinterklaas?

The legend of Santa Claus may be traced to St. Nicholas of Myra, now called Turkey. He lived about 280 AD and was renowned for his generosity, giving away all his wealth anonymously, most of it dropped into the homes of the poor wrapped in stockings. Hence it is believed that St. Nicholas, Sinterklaas in Dutch, became Santa.



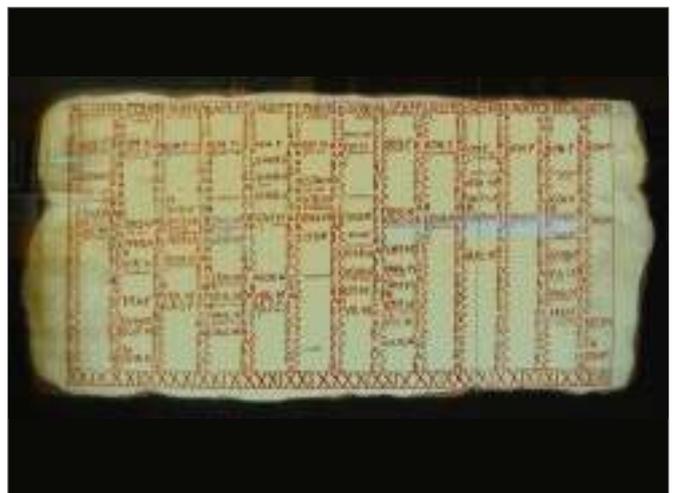
## Christmas is the most important event in the Christian calendar

Christmas is central to the Christian calendar but Easter has more significance. Historically, Jesus' birth was not celebrated until centuries after the occurrence, but His death and resurrection were celebrated by the earliest converts to Christianity.



## Jesus was born in the Year Zero

This has been debated by both religious and historical scholars. The modern calendar places Jesus' birth 2,020 years ago but both the Gospels of Luke and Matthew place the birth around the time of King Herod the Great, which means this was in 4BCE, putting Jesus' birth possibly as late as 6BCE. Working backwards, if Jesus birth is around 30 years before his death which is generally regarded as having taken place in 33 CE, that leaves a window of about eight years in which Jesus could have been born but maybe not in 1BCE or Year Zero.





# A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

## FROM LIVINGSTON UNITED PARISH CHURCH, SCOTLAND



*Firstly, I bid all readers of the SASK magazine a very Merry and Peaceful Christmas and all the very best for 2021.*

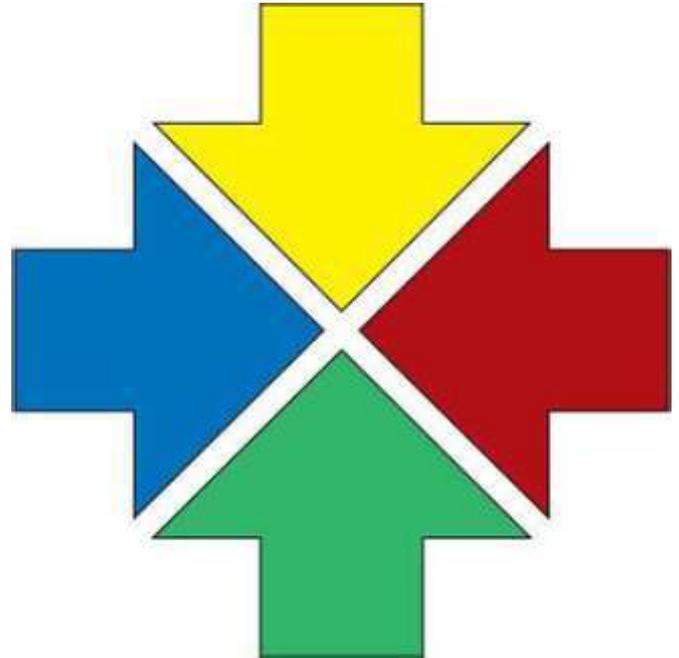
My wife, Margaret, and I are both from Glasgow but in the 1970s moved to the 'new town' of Livingston, some 15 miles to the west of our capital city, Edinburgh. Before retirement we were both in education. I was a headteacher of a large school for 10 years before joining Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education, where I worked for almost a quarter of a century, eventually becoming a Chief Inspector. Upon retirement, I opened an international consultancy business and since 2011 have been working for the Government of Dubai as an education quality assurance manager and for the World Bank in Sri Lanka helping to improve many aspects of educational provision.



Over these years I have been a regular visitor to Colombo and whilst staying at the Cinnamon Grand Hotel I found myself visiting St Andrew's Scots Kirk. I really enjoyed sharing in the ecumenical worship and meeting up with those I came to know as friends. I've had the pleasure of sharing in the inspiring SASK visits to the women's ward at the Mulleriyawa Mental Hospital and to Netherlee Cottage.

Years ago, I shared the needs of the communities in Colombo with my own congregation and we agreed to form a mission partnership with SASK. We take much pleasure in being able to make occasional donations to support SASK's wonderful

Helping Hands Project. I've watched SASK come through some trying times but our Lord has been with you through that difficult journey and I'm delighted to know that you now have permission to call a new Minister. Having had my own Church come through a vacancy in the last 18 months I wish you God speed in your quest.



**This is Livingston United Parish Church logo. It represents the 4 denominations which make up our Church.**

I should say that Livingston United Parish Church is an ecumenical partnership between four denominations – the Church of Scotland, the United Reformed Church, the Methodist Church and the Episcopal Church in Scotland. This is a unique set-up in Scotland and we proudly use the strapline 'Designed to be different'. Our Ministry Team always comprises a Church of Scotland Minister and one Minister from one of the other three denominations. In addition, we are privileged to have a Children and Young People's worker and a Community Development worker funded by the Church of Scotland. Our Parish is by far Scotland's largest – 60,000+ people!

In March 2020, Scotland was hit badly by the COVID-19 pandemic. Much of normal life came to a standstill with businesses and non-priority shops closed. Schools and all churches were closed and travel out with a 5-mile radius of home was banned. Wearing of face-masks became mandatory in all public spaces where people might meet up and visitors to our homes were significantly restricted. Life was very far from normal. However, immediately upon lockdown our Church started to deliver a weekly on-line

# A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE (cont...)

service of worship every Sunday morning. This can attract 80 to 100 worshippers each week, including many from overseas and others in our community who seldom ever join us for face-to-face worship.

Some restrictions were eased after 6 months, including the ability to have face-to-face worship in our Church buildings but subject to restrictions of numbers who can attend, no singing, no communion, face masks for all except the preacher, one-way entry/exit systems, sanitiser readily available and a signing-up system to enable tracking and tracing of attendees.



be at home participating fully online. We have learned much through our experience of the pandemic!

Throughout these months, our Church has also had a group of volunteers working to provide tangible food and financial support to families in our community that need urgent help. Our Junior Church and youth organisations (The Boys' Brigade and The Girls' Brigade) continued to meet online but are now gradually getting back to face-to-face meetings. As I write, further restrictions are being imposed as a second winter wave of COVID-19 cases has sadly hit us.

My own congregation now has two face-to-face services of monthly midweek worship alongside the continuing online Sunday morning service where we also break into discussion and social groups following the service. Members unable to join us online receive a weekly service posted out to them.

Our flower ministry and cards to individuals needing support, suffering illness or bereavement continue to be delivered every week. We have already decided that following the removal of COVID-19 restrictions, we will not return to 'normal' but have blended services where worshippers can attend in person in our Church building or

We are all looking forward to the day when the reported effective vaccine becomes widely available. However, this will certainly not be in time for Christmas 2020! Our Church is seeking to have several face-to-face services with restricted numbers and due precautions in place over Advent. The bulk of our worship will continue online as this is proving very popular. This will include an online Nativity play, online Watchnight Service and an online Family Christmas Meal! Each day in December, families will be encouraged to go online to open a 'box' on an Advent Calendar and to hear a Christmas message of hope and joy. Christmas certainly looks to be a very busy time!







In England, between 1558 and 1829, being Catholic was illegal and treated as a crime. Owning a Catholic bible meant a prison term. This is because King Henry VIII fell out with the Catholic Church and began his own 'Protestant' Church – now the Church of England.

The Twelve Days of Christmas was written during this period. The days are represented in the special symbols which have

hidden meanings – but there is no evidence that this is true. It could most likely be a folk song and the symbols are common to all Christians.

The 12 Days of Christmas refer to the twelve day period starting on Christmas day, ending on Epiphany – January 6th.

#### So there was

- One partridge in a pear tree = God
- Two turtle doves = the Old and New Testaments
- Three French hens = the Holy Trinity, God the Father, His Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit
- Four calling birds = the four Gospels
- Five golden rings = the five senses or the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch
- Six geese a-laying = the six days of creation
- Seven swans a-swimming = the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit
- Eight maids a-milking = the eight beatitudes
- Nine ladies dancing = the fruits of the Holy Spirit
- Ten lords a-leaping = the Ten Commandments
- Eleven pipers piping = the 11 faithful disciples of Jesus
- Twelve drummers drumming = the 12 points of the Apostles' Creed

#### How many gifts are there in total in the 12 Days of Christmas?

If you were receive all the presents in the song, you'd get 364!

- Day 1 - receive 1 gift
- Day 2 - receives 3 additional gifts, making 4 total gifts
- Day 3 - receives 6 additional gifts, making 10 total gifts
- Day 4 - receives 10 additional gifts, making 20 total gifts
- Day 5 - receives 15 additional gifts, making 35 total gifts
- Day 6 - receives 21 additional gifts, making 56 total gifts
- Day 7 - receives 28 additional gifts, making 84 total gifts
- Day 8 - receives 36 additional gifts, making 120 total gifts
- Day 9 - receives 45 additional gifts, making 165 total gifts
- Day 10 - receives 55 additional gifts, making 220 total gifts
- Day 11 - receives 66 additional gifts, making 286 total gifts
- Day 12 - receives 78 additional gifts, making 364 total gifts received.



# What they say ...

## ...about The St. Andrew Summer Edition

Dear Newsletter Team,  
Once again, received with thanks, my big hug and thanks  
to the newsletter team as always.  
God bless you all.

**Kumar**  
*Sri Lanka*

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Excellent read, as always. Thank you for sharing it with  
me.

Warm regards,  
**Neranjana de Silva**  
*Sri Lanka*

---

Thank you for another splendid issue of the St. Andrew's  
Scots Kirk Newsletter.

We were sorry to hear of Auntie Paddy's passing.  
We are doing well, keeping up with our work through  
email and zoom. We mostly stay inside due to the COVID  
spike in our area of California and now with the horrific  
wildfires that cloud the skies (although, thankfully, there  
are no fires close by our area).

Please greet the folks of the congregation for us.  
Grace and Peace,  
**Marlene**  
*USA*

---

Good and interesting Newsletter, though the Muslims say  
Ameen not Amen

**Pelham**  
*Sri Lanka*

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Dear friends,  
I don't often do this but, having just perused the latest  
church magazine from St Andrew's Church in Colombo, Sri  
Lanka, which I received a few days ago, I thought its  
contents would be of potential interest to you, and so I  
forward a copy to you.

The magazine includes, for example, a report on our  
Presbytery support for their project at Ward 8 at  
Mulleriyawa Hospital - but there are many other  
interesting articles also, which I commend to your  
attention when you have a few spare minutes of time.  
I add my own congratulations to the editors of the  
magazine for an excellent production as usual.

Blessings,  
**Rev Jim**  
*Switzerland*

*(The first part of this email pertains to points when Revd.  
Jim shared the newsletter with others).*

## ...about the online services conducted by Revd. Ian Gilmour

Thank you from the bottom of my heart

**Hans**  
*Sri Lanka*

---

Many thanks for this latest update. My best wishes to all at  
St Andrew's.

Regards  
**Steve Kerr**

---

Dear Gillian

I enjoyed Ian's series on the Way to God and forwarded to  
some friends.

Most states here have had no infections for a while and even  
Victoria after its severe lockdown is down to 5 cases a day. It  
seems that the only way to stop the spread is to shut things  
down and stop movement until you get on top of it. People  
are very pleased with our government's willingness to take  
strong action but cases still occasionally come in from people  
coming in from overseas.

The year slips by and Christmas will soon be upon us with  
some shops already putting out hints of Christmas.

Fond regards,  
**Charles**  
*Australia*

---

Absolutely love it.

He is a very blessed minister. He touched on two things that  
Barry and I were discussing this week. Science & faith –  
Galileo and Black lives matter- Martin Luther King.

He is very much led by the Holy Spirit.

**Rathini & Barry**  
*Cambodia*

---

Thank you so much for sending the link from St Andrew's  
each week. The Reverend Ian has truly been an inspiration.

Much appreciated by

**May McFadyean**  
*Scotland*

---

I just wanted to let you know that during these really difficult  
times especially here in the US, St. Andrew's website has  
been of great solace to me.

The services have been a God send, giving me so much hope  
and a new energy to my Christianity. I will share these with  
younger family and friends who seem to be flailing during  
these difficult times.

Please keep us in your prayers as I do for you. Thank you!  
May God bless you and keep you close and safe.

**Yolanda Morley**  
*Palm Springs, CA, USA*



# Dates for your diary

We are international, interdenominational, open to all.



Sunday morning service will continue each week at 9.30 am.

### All are welcome.

The Government restrictions concerning the number of attendees allowed for our Sunday morning services keep changing depending on the country situation. And hence, unprecedented changes may occur. Therefore please do advise our Church officer Kumar on 0722125713 / 0779978870 if you plan to attend service, so we can manage everyone.

### Services for December 2020

**Sunday 20th December 9.30 am**  
Lay Preacher Dr Dhanan Senathirajah; Organist Neranjan De Silva

**Thursday 24th December 11.15 pm**  
Revd Roshan Mendis; Organist Tim Sutton

**Friday 25th December 9.30 am**  
Revd Ian Gilmour recorded service; Organist Neranjan De Silva



### The Church Hall

The following groups normally use our Church Hall but unfortunately are not allowed to meet currently due to current health and safety regulation.

- The Thrift shop is closed currently but we expect it to open early next year.
- The Association of British Residents English Library will open once per month on the same day and timing as the Thrift shop.
- Alcoholics Anonymous
- 17th Colombo Netherlee Scout Troop

### Our Church is used by

The Korean Church every Sunday morning at 11.30 am

The Four Square Church, which have regularly met each Sunday evening and Thursday lunch time after the first curfew in Colombo, have however halted these services until further notice.



### Mission work

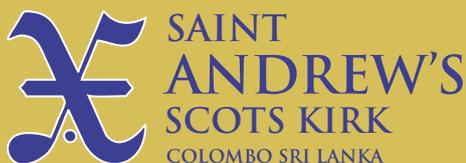
**Helping Hands** - Financial support for those disadvantaged and living in the area of St Andrew's. Contact Joubert +94777722736

**Netherlee Cottage** - Rehabilitation Centre for Mental Health issues. Contact Gillian Mailler, email gillmailler@gmail.com

**Lunch project** - Normally held each Thursday between 12 noon and 12.30 pm, will hopefully reopen next year once COVID-19 regulations allow the implementation of the project. Volunteer servers will be needed each week. Contact Shewantha email shewa@rodrigo.com

**Mulleriyawa Hospital Ward 8** - Remains closed to visitors and therefore visits cannot be organised. Lunch is sent to residents. Contact Shanthini Ahangama, email shani\_ahangama@hotmail.com

**St. Andrew's Scots Kirk Interim Moderator**  
Revd Ian Gilmour – igilmour@churchofscotland.org.uk  
Church Officer: K S Kumar – churchofficer@scotskirk.lk



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<http://www.scotskirk.lk/> <https://www.facebook.com/standrewsscotskirk/>

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