



# Soundings

Portobello & Joppa Parish  
Church Magazine

December 2024  
& January 2025

# *Portobello and Joppa Parish Church*

## From the editor



I'm interested to read in George's article this month that a treatment for Alzheimer's may come from daffodil bulbs. Once, when I was a little girl, my mother went to the garage to collect some onions that my father had grown and hung up to dry. She thought they were a bit funny-looking, but duly chopped them up and cooked them with mince. The moment my brother tasted the mince, he was deeply suspicious and refused to eat any more. At that point my parents discussed the "onions", and realised that my mother had actually used the daffodil bulbs that for some reason were also hanging up in the garage.

"Oh, it's all vegetable matter," declared my dad robustly, and ate up his mince. And then he rushed off to the bathroom and – lost his mince.

Still, neither of my parents developed Alzheimer's, and my brother is still doing fine. I'm happy to say that I was visiting a friend that day and thus didn't partake.

Stewart talks in his letter to us about silence (I imagine there was a bit of that in our house in the aftermath of the daffodil incident) and what we can hear when we're receptive to it. If you look at the list of services, I don't think Stewart's Christmas is going to be *particularly quiet*... . George is in reflective mood about a good friend and the value of plants. You're invited to the Guild's Christmas party and also to their meeting in January, when Kay will share her wonderful work for the Pachamama Project. Michael offers a Christmas visit or call from the pastoral team; Margaret invites extra support with gifting/arranging/delivering the Sunday flowers; and you can find out which member of the congregation has built a coracle.



Many thanks to all contributors, and Happy Christmas to everyone.

**Pam**

## ***Dear Friends and Neighbours,***

*Silence is the general consecration of the universe.*

This is a quote from Herman Melville that recently caught my eye.



Life is busy for so many of us and we are surrounded by so much white noise. Achieving true silence, either inside our ever-churning minds or outside in our ever-busy world, is well-nigh impossible.

One of my favourite quotes comes from the Abbot Christopher Jamison, a Benedictine monk who was instrumental in bringing to the BBC the wonderful programme called 'The Big Silence'. I've used it before: 'Silence is the gateway to the soul and the soul is the gateway to God.'

For so many people the quiet and silence on Christmas Eve carries so much weight. After all of the socialising and all of the preparations and all of the planning and all of the singing, it is powerful not just because of what it is—silence in the maelstrom—but for what it isn't. There is simply nothing to do or accomplish or prove. Appreciate it for what it is. Don't ask why it's so powerful. Don't ask why so many people find it so peaceful. Just rest within it.

That description adapts one of my favourite definitions of grace. If I remember rightly, it comes from the theologian Paul Tillich. It's that moment when one feels accepted. Totally and utterly accepted. Don't ask where it comes from. Don't ask why it has descended upon you or welled up from deep within your soul. Just accept that you are accepted. The questions and the thinking and the reflection and the pondering can come later.

Maybe silence is a form of grace. And maybe that moment on Christmas Eve is grace distilled and presented in its essence. When we rest in that silence, we rest in grace. And when we rest in grace, we rest in God's acceptance of us.

Melville suggests that the silence is a consecration. That reminds me of communion: the consecration of the bread and wine. As often stated during the communion service, the sacraments are the visible signs of God's invisible grace. Silence. Grace. Sacrament.

Faith. Hope. Love.

Father. Son. Holy Spirit.

So much comes together in that silence on Christmas Eve.

And that silence is but a faint echo of the silence of a stable where new life came in the form of one, solitary Word appearing in the silence.

May your Advent and Christmas be blessed.

**Stewart**



## ***Worship***

<b>Sun. 1 Dec.</b> (1st Sun. of Advent)	9.30am 10.30am 11.15am	Quiet and reflective with Communion Informal and interactive Traditional
<b>Sun. 8 Dec.</b> (2nd Sun. of Advent)	9.30am 10.30am 11.15am	Quiet and reflective Informal and interactive Traditional
<b>Wed. 11 Dec.</b>	7.30pm	Service of Peace and Hope (for those who have lost loved ones)
<b>Sun. 15 Dec.</b> (3rd Sun. of Advent)	9.30am 10.30am 11.15am	Quiet and reflective Informal and interactive Carol Service
<b>Sat. 21 Dec.</b>	3.30pm	Messy Church Christingle in Main Hall
<b>Sun. 22 Dec.</b> (4th Sun. of Advent)	10.30am	Nativity Service (note: only one service)
<b>Tues. 24 Dec.</b> (Christmas Eve)	6.30pm 11.00pm 11.30pm	Family Christmas Eve Service Community Christmas Singing Watchnight Service
<b>Mon. 25 Dec.</b> (Christmas Day)	10.30am	Informal Christmas Day Service
<b>Sun. 29 Dec.</b>	10.30am	New Year's Service

<b>Sun. 5 Jan. 2025</b>	10.30am	Epiphany Service
<b>Sun. 12 Jan.</b>	9.30am	Quiet and reflective
	10.30am	Informal and interactive with Baptism
	11.15am	Traditional
<b>Sun. 19 Jan.</b>	9.30am	Quiet and reflective
	10.30am	Informal and interactive with Communion
	11.15am	Traditional
<b>Sun. 26 Jan.</b>	9.30am	Quiet and reflective
	10.30am	Informal and interactive
	11.15am	Traditional with Communion
<b>Sun. 2 Feb.</b>	9.30am	Quiet and reflective with Communion
	10.30am	Informal and interactive
	11.15am	Traditional
<b>Sun. 9 Feb.</b>	9.30am	Quiet and reflective
	10.30am	Informal and interactive
	11.15am	Traditional



## *The Guild*

**TUESDAY 10TH DECEMBER at 2PM**

## **CHRISTMAS PARTY**



## **Fun, Food and Flowers**

**Everyone is welcome!**

**Tuesday 7th January at 2pm**

**The PACHAMAMA PROJECT**





***Gardening with George*** – More plant lore from George, horticulturist and star of the small screen.



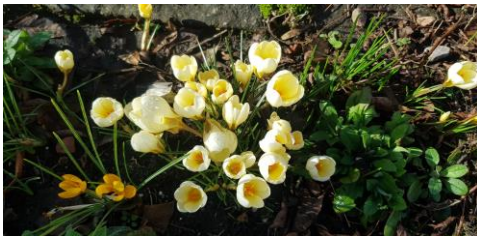
I am writing this magazine article one week after Gill and I attended the funeral of my good friend and colleague – and gardening superstar – Jim McColl. What a consummate television presenter he was, a warm and caring human being and a humble and self-effacing gentleman. A lover of Scottish music and ‘the water of life’ he was a passionate believer in the importance of gardening as a healing therapy. Like thousands of folks across the length and breadth of the UK I will miss him terribly but at the same time I am so happy that I knew him and enjoyed his company on Beechgrove for close on fifteen years. He taught me so much.

Gardening and the world of horticulture, botany and plants offer us all a treasure store of wonders. It has often been said that there is nothing we eat that does not originate in plants. Think of what you had for dinner, lunch or breakfast and all of it will have its origins in one plant or other: spices, protein, vitamins, vegetables, mushrooms, milk, cheese, bread and wine. Many of our common medicines also have their origins in plants: aspirin from willow and meadowsweet, quinine from tree bark, ephedrine (used in eye treatments) from ephedra, cancer fighting drugs from the common yew tree and treatments for Alzheimer’s from daffodil bulbs.



We have been provided with a veritable chemist's shop filled with potential life-changing medicines. Have we conserved it or destroyed it? I would suggest that we have been poor custodians of our natural world, and as a consequence many plant species have never been fully assessed and have been lost to humans, never to return. Extinction is a permanent condition. Next time you visit the chemist's, have a look on the shelves and see just how many plants have contributed to your soaps, perfumes and health products.

The Old Testament has lots of plant references scattered throughout its various books starting in Genesis with The Garden of Eden and the apple, moving through Exodus with its mention of hyssop (used to splash the blood of the lamb over the doorposts during the death of the firstborns in Egypt) and coming to a veritable climax in The Songs of Solomon with its love songs and poems, where mention is made of pomegranates, almonds, figs, capers, saffron, Cedar of Lebanon, crocus and many, many



more. And the list continues throughout the New Testament. Plants have shaped our lives for centuries and continue to do so still. That is why I garden.

This week I ordered my seeds for next year's allotment crops and have had to be careful not to get too carried away. Clicking away merrily as I look through the seed catalogues on my iPad is so easy!! What is much more difficult is deciding which seeds to buy and which to cut out so that the total bill is not too draining on my bank balance. Soon, the small

packets of dry seed will pop through the letterbox to be safely stored until the year turns and the days lengthen, the warmer days of spring summon a return to new growth and we look forward to a summer full of sunshine, warmth and gentle rain. We can dream.

I approach each new year with faith, trust and new energy, in the hope that I will have success. As Jim McColl often said, "Every day is a school day." We never stop learning. To know as much as he did, I would need two lifetimes.

Happy gardening  
**George**

## ***Pastoral Support at Christmas***

The pastoral support team is aware that Christmas can be a very lonely time for some people.

If you or someone you know would like a visit or a phone call from a member of the pastoral team then please contact Michael via email [office@portyjoppachurch.org](mailto:office@portyjoppachurch.org) or by phoning the church office on 0131 657 3401.

It may also be possible to offer home communion to those who are unable to get to our regular communion services.

The PJPC website has more information about the pastoral support that is available as well as the programme of Christmas Services that are on offer during December. **MDC**

## **Thank you!**

*The ladies of the Flower Committee would like to thank everyone who donates, arranges or delivers the flowers each week.*

*The flowers are an important part of our worship, and are very much appreciated by the people who receive them after the service.*

*If you would like to be involved in the flower rota by donating, arranging or delivering, we would be delighted to hear from you.*

*Many thanks, **Margaret***





## **Getting to know you –**

Sheila. She says, “I am married with two children and four grandchildren, half in Edinburgh and half in Perth, Australia. I

lived in Joppa as a child. We attended Greyfriars Kirk until I married but returned when my mother became unwell. She had transferred to St Philip’s (as it then was) when she became less able.



### **Q. What is a favourite hymn?**

*A. My favourite hymn that I liked from childhood is “To be a pilgrim”. I also love all the old Christmas carols.*

### **Q. What’s your earliest memory?**

*A. An early memory is sitting squashed up in the back car seat on the way to school. I think 3 children across with the 3 smaller on their laps. No seat belts in those days.*

### **Q. What was your job, and in an alternative life, what job might you have chosen?**

*A. I was an Occupational Therapist, mostly in the Community. I did wonder about being an architect but was put off by the 7 years’ training required.*

### **Q. What are you reading at the moment?**

*A. I have just finished “Close to Death” by Anthony Horowitz.*

### **Q. What is your most prized possession?**

*A. I think I have lots of lovely things - but my family is my best blessing.*

### **Q. Tell us something that not many people know about you.**

*A. Not many people know that I built a boat – a coracle on a week’s holiday course. (That was on my bucket list.)*

**Q. What luxury would you take to a desert island?**

*A. Maybe a tool kit. (Not the editor’s idea of luxury!)*

**Q. What do you do to relax?**

*A. I like reading, knitting or crocheting, sometimes sewing.*



**Q. What single thing would improve the quality of your life?**

*A. I would love to sleep through the night.*

**Q. What kind of music do you listen to?**

*A. I like listening to 60s and 70s pop music.*

**Q. What makes your heart sing?**

*A. Sunshine through my window.*

**Q. Where would you like to be right now?**

*A. Sitting round a table with all my family.*

## Brain-teaser



How much do you know about Advent? Here are a few questions to test your knowledge. (Some answers come courtesy of Google, so their accuracy is not entirely guaranteed!)

1. What does “Advent” mean?
2. What is the first line of the English translation of this well-known German carol?  
*Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht*  
*Alles schläft; einsam wacht*  
*Nur das traute hochheilige Paar.*  
*Holder Knabe im lockigen Haar,*  
*Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh!*  
*Schlaf in himmlischer Ruh!*
3. What is the meaning of the Hebrew word “Emmanuel”?
4. What does an Advent wreath symbolise?
5. How long have people used Advent calendars? Since the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> centuries?

## Alison

Answers: 1. “Coming”. 2. “Still the night” / “Silent night”. 3. “God with us”. 4. The circle symbolises eternity, the evergreen leaves remind us of everlasting life, the four candles which can be on the wreath are for the four weeks of Advent. 5. German Lutherans first used advent calendars in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to mark the progress towards Christmas Day. (Chocolate, however, didn’t feature.)

## ***Pause for a moment***

***The Rt Rev Dr Shaw Paterson*** encourages readers to stop and look with new eyes at the nativity story.



WE have had a nativity scene outside the front of the church for a number of years.

I think it is wonderful to see young children bringing adults of all ages up the path to the look at the traditional figures set out within a stable. Our stable differs from the one in Bethlehem all those years ago as it has a perspex window and LED lighting to allow as many people as possible to see Jesus inside.

Why do we want as many as possible to see Jesus? It is a simple answer. Think for a moment. How many of us hurry past nativity scenes in a whole myriad of places because we are too busy, we are in a rush, we've seen it before... yes, yes, yes, Mary and Joseph, and a baby with a sheep or two and a cow for special effect, and of course the donkey... but isn't that indicative of how the world treats the message of Christmas?

There is an attitude we adopt of knowing the story. God sent Jesus into our world and there were angels and wise men but we are busy and we are in a rush. We have seen it so many times before that the reality is we forget (or at least, put to the back of our minds) why Jesus came into the world and so, in a sense, he is forgotten.

A number of years ago, someone broke into our nativity scene late on Christmas Day or in the early hours of Boxing Day. Not much by way of



damage but interestingly Mary was found in someone's garden. Joseph was in the park and one of the wise men was standing in the middle of the road.



The animals were in the main safe and well, but what struck me was that no-one touched Jesus. Every year I think back and wonder why? Why was Jesus left alone? Was it respect? Was it 'we can mess about but maybe better not mess with God's Son?' Or maybe, it's a reflection of society, many of whom have forgotten all about Jesus and leave him alone. They see no need for a saviour to have been born, or for a light of the world, or for God to be with them.

A few years ago, I was visiting a Primary 1 class to conduct a mock baptism – they had been talking about babies as part of their lessons and were looking at traditions. A real baby had been organised for the occasion but had taken ill. So, there I was with what seemed like hundreds of wee tots looking for something to use in place of a baby. Would a doll do? Yes of course; perfect.

They couldn't find one. That was until somebody had the bright idea of going to the school's nativity scene and taking the doll out of the manger. I talked them through what happens and assigned them parts, and out of the corner of my eye I noticed a young girl giving the baby a kiss. What

struck me was that it took a five-year-old to acknowledge that the doll represented a real child. The baby Jesus was real. He was born, just as the Old Testament prophecies predicted. The story, like our manger scene, is very familiar: Luke chapter 1: The angel said to her: “Don’t be afraid, Mary; God has been gracious to you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus.” And then in Chapter 2: “... and while they were in Bethlehem, the time came for her to have her baby. She gave birth to her first son, wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger - there was no room for them to stay in the inn.”

This Christmas, as you dash from one thing to another, please pause for a moment to look in the manger within a nativity scene and reflect on Christ coming into our world.

Wishing you a super Christmas and all you hope for in the New Year.

***The Rt Rev Dr Shaw Paterson is Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 2024/25 and minister of Strathaven: Trinity.***

**This article first appeared in the December 2025 edition of Life and Work.**



## ***LIFE AND WORK December 2024***



### **Christmas**

How churches in the midst of conflict or danger are marking Christmas.

Lynne McNeil learns about the growth of Christingle service

Seasonal message from the Moderator

### **Time to Act**

As World AIDS Day approaches, Carol Finlay highlights the need for vigilance

### **Our Presbyteries**

Forth Valley and Clydesdale

### **Letter from the Holy Land**

The Rev Dr Stewart Gillan emphasises the need to keep the light shining, 'piercing the darkness together'.

### **A Trusted Friend**

Walter Scott and Anira Phipon Lepcha reflect on the life and legacy of Walter's great, great, great aunt, Mary Scott, a missionary in the Eastern Indian Himalayas.

### **Regulars**

Worship column by the Rev Roddy Hamilton

Reflection by the Rev Dr Richard Frazer

The Rev Ruth Kennedy on digital church

Bible study by the Rev Richard Baxter

My Church: Connie Anderson of Duror Church, North Argyll

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## ***Remembering***


24 October	Rev. Ian Wilson of Portobello
24 October	Carla van Bunderen of Craigentenny
30 October	Rhoda Underwood of Joppa
4 November	Norma Armstrong of Portobello
7 November	David Milligan, formerly of Joppa
15 November	Margaret Knox of Joppa



## ***MAGAZINE DEADLINES***

February 2025	Sunday 19 <sup>th</sup> January 2025
March 2025	Sunday 16 <sup>th</sup> February 2025
April 2025	Sunday 23 <sup>rd</sup> March 2025

***Scottish Charity Number : SCO117***



[www.portyjoppachurch.org](http://www.portyjoppachurch.org)

Photography by Anne Russell