

Penge Congregational Church

I'M COUNTING
ON YOU



February 2022

From the Minister

For a couple of weeks there, in the run up to Christmas, it looked as though we would have a repeat of last year. Of course not the melodramatic tabloid banner headlines about Christmas being cancelled: in the kingdom of God, how could Christmas possibly be cancelled? Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the Son of God, and is alive and rules!



Nevertheless, it began to look as though our special worship services would go the same way as in 2020.

We had arranged for the **Penge Chamber Choir** to come and sing to us and with us at our **Candlelight Carol Service**. We had asked **Alan**, a friend of Lynn and Chris, to play the organ: we had heard him practising hard and knew we were in for a treat. We were confidently expecting both the Choir and Alan to bring extra congregants with them and had excitedly run off lots of service sheets. Then on the day, just after Morning Worship, **Jessica, the leader of the Choir**, rang me and said so many of them either had Covid or were isolating that they wouldn't be able to come.

I tried to radiate calm as I talked to the Deacons about the changes that would be necessary, but I have to admit I walked home in a gloomy mood. Yet, as 4.30 approached, the church filled up with people, quite a

few followers of Alan but many other old friends we hadn't seen for quite a while. In the end there were over 50 people, the service was lovely and was followed by a very special time of fellowship over tea, albeit with the doors open and in quite a brisk draught! Some of Alan's friends even provided the descants that the choir had been going to sing!

It was the same story at **11.30pm on Christmas Eve**: when the service started there were less than 10 people; a few minutes in there was a respectable congregation. It was a reminder that God fills churches, we don't!

After those heartening times, as we go through the dark, drab days of winter, with Covid still rampaging through our communities, it's quite easy on a Sunday morning to be discouraged by the small congregations, even to wonder if there is any point. After all, we have prayed for more people and we seem to have fewer! I know one or two church members have concluded that we are no longer viable as a church, and have stopped coming to services. But hang on a minute! "Where one or two are gathered, there am I also."

It isn't the head count that matters, it's the amount of faith. If we read our Scripture, we know that God is faithful to us and that, if we ask, we will receive. We don't just ask once or twice and then give up, we keep asking and we wait for God to act, in total faith that he will.

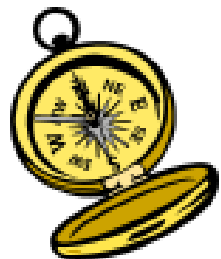
Waiting for God's help in times of trouble is hard. It can be tempting either to try and find our own solutions or simply just to give up. Waiting for God's help takes faith and it takes patience. But when, at the end of it all, he answers, we realise it was so worth it!

Isaiah 30:18 says "***Blessed are all who wait for him.***"

Some of us haven't had that faith or patience, but some, thank God, have. Some of us are continuing to wait in faith. And while we wait, we will ***joyfully praise our God*** and give him the glory he so deserves!

Pam

Joyce Perry is very, very pleased with all the good wishes and gifts for her birthday and for Christmas. **A big thank you to everyone.**



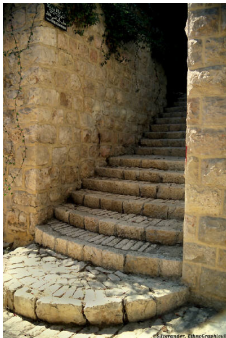
Middle Eastern history in the Bible

At the time of writing, we have just had a Zoom Bible study on one of the pre-exilic prophets where someone said they got confused about the various powers which influenced the fates of Israel and Judah. At much the same time I was preaching about the “people who walked in darkness (Isaiah 9) and remarked that at the time of Jesus’ birth, the Jews had spent several hundred years enduring 6 different rules, 5 of them as a conquered people. One of the few pluses of the various lockdowns is that I got to spend time studying the history behind the Old Testament prophets which led me to conclude that confusion is the natural reaction!

Just look at a map of the eastern Mediterranean and you will see that modern day Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan are all small countries. But they sit in a corridor that links Europe with Africa. During the Second World War, my uncle served in a force that spent a considerable time stationed in Gaza positioned to block Rommel and his Afrika Korps from using that route as a short cut to reach Europe. (In the event Rommel’s defeats at El Alamein forced him west, my uncle never saw action in Palestine, and his time there ended up being a regularly repeated family anecdote invariably known as “The Bogs At Gaza” and accompanied by a lot of eye rolling from us children!)

Israel, Judah and the surrounding states had the same strategic importance in the time of the Old Testament: small they may have been, but they sat on a vital trade route between Europe and Asia Minor in the north and Africa in the south. The power to the south all through Biblical times was Egypt but the situation to the north was much less stable. Let's not cover too much ground: we'll start at the point where Israel, Judah and the surrounding small states began to experience the events that would lead to exile.

The power in the north in the 8th century BC was the Assyrian Empire. It threatened all the small countries of the Eastern Mediterranean which at various times allied with Assyria against the other countries depending on the whims of their kings. In 722 BC Israel, the northern kingdom, and neighbouring modern day Syria were vanquished and the people mostly taken away north into exile. That was the end of Israel: some of its people had managed to escape south to Judah, but the northern kingdom was never re-formed. Judah held out for over another century. By this time there had been uprisings and internal wars within the Assyrian Empire which resulted in the overthrow of the Assyrian king and the rise of the Babylonian Empire.



So the people of Judah over a period of 30 years before the final conquest of Jerusalem in 586 BC were taken into captivity in Babylon.

The captivity in Babylon lasted for about 65 years. It ended because by that time

the Babylonians had been conquered and replaced by the Persian Empire, which had a policy of letting subject peoples live in their own land under a Persian Governor. So the exiles who returned, as told in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, weren't a free people; they were under the rule of Persia. And so they remained for the best part of 200 years until the campaigns of Alexander the Great. King of Macedonia, he conquered Greece and then, over a ten year period, went on to conquer most of the known world east of there. When he overthrew the Persians, he of course became overlord of Judah, before conquering Egypt. If he hadn't died in his early thirties, who knows how far he would have got!

Alexander died without an heir and his vast empire was carved up between his generals. Over the next couple of hundred years, control of Judah passed between the Egyptian and Seleucid empires before a brief period of independence under the Maccabees. BUT these empires were founded by Alexander's generals, who were Greek, which is why the culture and language of the Greeks played such an important role in Israel at the time of Jesus, and also why the books of the New Testament were all written in Greek. By Jesus' time ordinary people spoke Aramaic but Greek was the official language.

And then of course some 60 years before Jesus, along came the Romans...

Pam



FOOD FOR THOUGHT...

The video on the TV News was grey and grainy but the plaintive little voice was heartbreakingly clear. “No one is going to feed me”.

Such cruel abuse leading to the death of 6 year old Arthur was so distressing I awoke the following morning with his words imprinted on my mind and then quickly converted into my prayers.

And somehow those words are tragic echoes down the years, coming from other youngsters, albeit in vastly different circumstances - from desert wastelands, war-torn areas, natural disasters, from famine, from fighting, from refugee camps, from religious divides and, now, from poverty pulsating from the pandemic.

To transpose Jesus' own words, little children do indeed suffer. With horrified hearts all we can do as a new year dawns is take them to Him in our prayers, uphold those charities seeking to support children and families wherever in the world they are suffering, contribute all we can to local food banks like Living Well and hope that Social Services are given sufficient Government funding to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the precious next generation.

Jenny Froude

Apologies: Jenny wrote this article on 3rd December for the January issue - when we didn't know there wouldn't be one!

Memorial for Lara

On Friday 21st January, the **Revd Mr Bill Bowman** returned to Penge Congregational Church. This was to lead a **memorial for Lara**, daughter of a past member, **Judith Gault**. It was a beautiful service with family and friends.

Bill recalled baptising Lara in the church many years ago.

Bill was a past minister and, at one stage, the treasurer at our Church. He was also married here, which some of our readers may remember.



News from the past from one of our readers

Thank you for the latest Penge Congregational Church Newsletter.

You may be interested to know why I, whose name will be unfamiliar to you, should be interested in the affairs of PCC. My late wife **Rose and I** were members of PCC from **1955 to 1996** during the ministries of **Harold Short house** and **Douglas Godfrey**. We both sang in the choir under Mr Pocock and I was a **Deacon** until my work with Barclays Bank moved us away.

When we came to Penge, Rosie and I were only 25 and so three of our children were born in Penge and Christened at the church. Later in the 1960's all four sang in the **Junior Choir** which was grounded by **Lauren Harding**.

When we moved away we left behind many friends with whom we remained in contact, most of whom have sadly now passed on, but since then we have followed the church through the Newsletter for which we have always made a donation, and covered the postage, most recently through **Margaret Collins**. I have also, since we left, celebrated **my wedding anniversary** by providing flowers for the church at the beginning of April each year, lately through **Joyce Perry** who also, with her parents, sang in the church choir.

David Nye

February readings

In the first letter of John, the apostle reminds us that we have been born into God's family. *"those who obey God's commandments live in fellowship with him, and he with them. And we know he lives in us because the Holy Spirit lives in us."*

God's family is a network of relationships just like a human family. So our February services will explore various aspects of our relationship with God, week by week.

During February our readings will be:

6th February: John 3: 1-21. Our relationship in the Spirit.

13th February: Isaiah 62: 1-12. A new name- God marries his people.

20th February: Colossians 3: 1-17. Because God is our Father, we are siblings. **INCLUDES HOLY COMMUNION.**

27th February: Romans 8: 9-17. As God's children we will inherit his glory.



We have restarted our **Tuesday**
evening **Prayer and Praise** -
from 7.30 to 8.30pm.

All are welcome to come and sing!

Prayer for Christian Unity

The week of 18th to 26th January 2022 was the Week of prayer for christian unity - lots of people visiting each other's churches and joining in praising God together.

One God and many ways to worship! The photo below is of **Steve** from **Avenue Baptist Church** leading "campfire singing" around the brazier and candles.

We had powerful prayers and thanks for our unity.

Fr. Leon is a great drummer from **St Michael's Church** of England. **Gilbert** from **Avenue Baptist** led us in saying psalms to one another.



Ian's song



In January 2022, we have had a theme of sharing the good news with people around us by the way we live and behave.

Ian Gray shared with us a song that was really important to him when he was young and living in Jamaica.

This song has been a guide to him as he has continued strong in the faith for many years. **Ian is a real encouragement to all of us to keep praising the Lord and turning to Him at all times.**

Here is the song Ian shared with us. The song is based on **Acts chapter 9** where Paul met Jesus on the road.

The Lord said, “Stand up, Paul”.

The Lord said, stand up Paul and dry up your tears.
You must preach the gospel through many long years.
Now go to Damascus, a street called Straight
and there you'll see Annias and there you must wait.

Chorus

***I've counted on Adam, I've counted on Cain,
I've counted on Jonah, but he was the same.
I've counted on Judas, but he proved untrue.
Now go tell the world, Paul. I'm counting on you.***

Three days have gone by Lord, and I never see,
but here is my brother now speaking to me.

He said Brother Paul, the Lord that called you,
has sent me to seek thee and open thine eyes.

I've sent you to the Gentiles. I've sent you to Rome.

And there you must suffer till God calls you home.

You'll sleep in the desert, you'll be shipwrecked on Sea,
but keep on preaching my gospel for me.



Sleeping in a Pod

Last weekend **Carrie and I** went to **Croydon Arena** to pick up some *sleep pods* from an organisation called '**Build a Home**' that supplies home made 'sleep pods' for the **homeless**, here in the UK and Europe.

We picked up five pods, but almost brought home twenty-five as we thought there was one in a bundle and not five.

The pods are made from foil-backed insulation sheet, bamboo cane and tape. Our first attempt at setting up the 'pod-bed' took 2 hours, so we are glad we only took five of them.. They are about 7 feet long and 3 feet wide in a 'toblerone' shape.

On Tuesday evening, after getting back from the service at Elm Road Baptist Church (as part of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity), I went into my unheated garage and set up the pod. I cheated a bit and put a thin bit of foam on the floor to cushion my hips from the concrete.

Keeping my clothes on and a blanket at hand, I settled down at about 22.30 hrs.

It was quite warm in the pod and I didn't pull the blanket on till about midnight. I woke several times due to the foam shift under me and it became very uncomfortable due to the gap between my pillow and the foam. This

gap was also the coldest area. By 02.30 hrs. I have to admit, I whimped out and came indoors.

It was an experience which taught me how those who are homeless must struggle during the cold months night after night.

May we show God's compassion to those who are not so fortunate as ourselves.

Chris Parker



A Sleep Pod - temporary shelter for the homeless.



Alleluia!

Pam's grandson, Teddy, was to have been baptised in February, but the great day will now be **24th.July**, when we can safely fill the church with lots of family and friends!



Part of **Clive's** Christmas Quiz which arrived too late for the December edition, so now appears as the Candlemass Quiz:

What CONNECTS the following?

1. (this one is for those who are knowledgeable about Biology!)

Sea horse; Emperor Penguin; Rhea; Marmoset; Pouched Frog.

2. (those who are acquainted with literature will know this one)

Ellis (1); Acton (2); Curren (4)

3. (music and grammar?)

Half note; female sheep; midday; Inuit canoe

4. (If you come from the North?)

Ginnel; Snicket; twitten; wynd

5. (Geography obviously!)

California; Arizona; New Mexico; Texas



Answers next month! Please have a go!

Gnostic - Agnostic?

Someone asked the other day, what a '**gnostic**' was.

They are 'knowers' as opposed to 'believers', and the term was applied to various sects in the first six centuries of the Christian era. They tried to accommodate Christianity to the speculations of *Pythagorus, Plato and other Greek and Oriental philosophers*.

They taught that knowledge, rather than faith, is the true key of salvation.

*In the Gnostic creed, Christ is thought of as an **eon** or **divine attribute** personified, like Mind, Truth, Logos, Church, etc., the whole of which eons make up this divine pleroma or fulness.

So '**Agnostic**' means 'not to know'.

*The term was coined by **Professor Aldous Huxley** in 1869 (with allusion to St Paul's mention of an "Altar to the Unknown God") to indicate the attitude of those who withhold their assent from whatever is incapable of proof, such as an unseen world, a First Cause etc.

Agnostics neither dogmatically accept nor reject such matters, but simply say, *agnosco* - "*I do not know - they are not capable of proof.*"

* *from Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*



***How about writing an article for Penge
Congregational Church?***

***There are some memories of Archbishop Tutu on
the following page, but I have nothing with which to
fill this page!***

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Mpilo Tutu

I was asked by a member of the Third Order of the Society of St Francis, to which I belong, to write about my memories of Desmond Tutu.

Here are a few of my notes:

Desmond was very special to my family. We first met when he became Bishop of Johannesburg in 1985.

My husband, Graham Ballard-Tremeer, and I were professed in the Third Order in Pretoria in 1976. We met as a small group alternating our monthly meetings between Pretoria (even though we were the only members in Pretoria) and Johannesburg (a group of about twenty members). The Convenor was Ray Carter, the wife of the Suffragen Bishop John Carter. (Ray and the group were very involved with social outreach, working in the townships, schools, etc.)

We moved to Johannesburg when Graham left the South African Atomic Energy Board at the end of 1979.

Desmond joined our Johannesburg group TSSF during the short time that he was Bishop of Johannesburg (1985/86). Graham was his Novice Counsellor and if he was writing now, he would tell you that Desmond was always the first of his novices to send in his quarterly report. He was meticulous at time-keeping in the many areas of his life.

Desmond came on our Annual Retreat with us all at this time and none of us have forgotten his laugh - you could hear him coming at some distance - and that was a joy.

Desmond went at one stage for treatment for cancer to America and it was during this time that he wrote to say that he would have to withdraw from the Franciscan Third Order, as he had joined a Contemplative Order in the United States.

But he always kept in touch and during my husband's fight with cancer for three years, he would 'phone him or write frequently. People mattered to Desmond and he remembered names (for me that is a plus).

I don't know how he knew when Graham died, but a bouquet of flowers arrived at our door the next day.

On the occasions as Archbishop when he stayed in his house in Soweto, he would come to the early service at St Mary's Cathedral. A couple of times when I was the celebrant, I would not be aware of his presence in the congregation, until I went to the lectern to preach!

I have many good memories of him and so have my family (he is a patron of my son's company).

He was a kind and compassionate man; he fought for justice wherever he came across wrong deeds or words; humble; his concern for Creation; Justice and Peace outstanding and above all a good priest - a man of prayer.

Margaret Tremeer

Website:

www.pccweb.co.uk



To arrange a marriage service, funeral, baptism or similar event, please contact the Minister:

Pam Owen on:

pamjowen@hotmail.com

To book any other events (concerts etc.), please contact **Bernie Hall:**

pcclettings@outlook.com

Tel: 07900 518 537

For enquiries related to this website please contact **Callum McShane** on:

callum.mcshane@gmail.com

To submit articles for the monthly newsletter:

margaret@ecoharmony.org

Deacons at the moment are

Jannett Ashley

Douglas Rathbone

Chris Parker

Lynn McShane (treasurer)

lynn.mcshane22@gmail.com