

Church News Ireland



Image of the day – Fifty years a singing in Armagh



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Fifty years a singing in Armagh

On Sunday 17th December 2023, at the end of the morning service, the Dean of Armagh, Very Reverend Shane Foster made a special presentation to Dr David Reaney in



recognition of David's 50 years of dedicated and devoted service to St Patrick's Cathedral Choir.

Many congratulations David.

People and places

Children's and Family Rep Meath and Kildare

Congratulations to Rev Yvonne Hutchinson, serving as OLM in Tullamore, who has been appointed as Diocesan Children's and Family Rep Meath and Kildare to the Church



of Ireland Children and Families Network. She will continue in her ministry in Tullamore.

‘Flowers of Remembrance’ at National Arboretum

Flowers of Remembrance is an enchanting illuminated indoor garden that has been crafted in collaboration with local schools.

The artwork is accompanied by a soundtrack of poetry written by Dan Simpson, the Arboretum’s Poet-in-Residence, and explores the symbolism of different flowers and how they commemorate and honour individuals who have left their mark on our communities.



Flowers of Remembrance features along this year's Illuminated Arboretum route and will also be on display to daytime visitors until 28 January

Visit our website for ticket availability, prices and to book your visit to Illuminated Arboretum.

<https://thenma.org.uk/what's-on/events/illuminated-arboretum>

Christmas unwrapped in Rathmichael

Families flocked to Rathmichael Parish Church for the third of what is now an annual event – Christmas Unwrapped. The family event took place on Saturday December 9.

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This year the theme was 'Nativity Escape Rooms', drawing on the increasingly popular phenomenon of escape rooms, in which participants solve various puzzles and challenges in order to 'escape' and get to the awaiting prize.



The idea for this year's event came from Cherith Hanily, who explained: "The Christmas Story is an amazing story unlike any other, of God sending His Son to be amongst us – the long awaited, promised Saviour coming down to earth and being born in a lowly stable because there was no room at the Inn.

"How can we tell this amazing story to the children of our parish in a way that will capture their attention and really

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make them think? How can we express the unique, special and life changing moment that happened 2000 years ago?”

You can read all about it here: <https://dublin.anglican.org/news/2023/12/11/christmas-unwrapped-nativity-escape-rooms>



Christmas Message from Bishop Paul Colton, Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross and Bishop Fintan Gavin, Bishop of Cork and Ross

We send greetings to the people of faith in our city and county of Cork this Christmas: may you be filled with the hope which Christ brings. And we greet all people of good will, wishing you peace and joy always.

Peace is the gift most conspicuously lacking this Christmas. The images from the Middle East on the nightly news are horrifying. In Gaza, men, women and children are starving, wounded, living in fear for their lives. These innocent civilians suffer as did the victims of Hamas' October 7th invasion of Israel. There seems no end in sight to the pain of the innocents.

The images from Gaza are like those that have been beamed from Ukraine for the past 21 months, since the Russian invasion began. Innocent civilians there seek to get out of the way of the invading forces and those lethal nightly bombing raids.

The invasion of Ukraine has had effects closer to home for us too. Refugees from that war travel across Europe looking for a safe refuge, with some arriving in Ireland. Across Europe the challenge of welcoming refugees has seen politics swing from centrist parties to the extremes. In Ireland, the recent Dublin riots reflected a trend towards violent extremism.

An absence of peace is not the only lack the world suffers. As pastors, we are aware of many other ills plaguing our people. The shortage of homes impacts on many in our congregations, and we can never forget the homeless men, women and children on our streets.

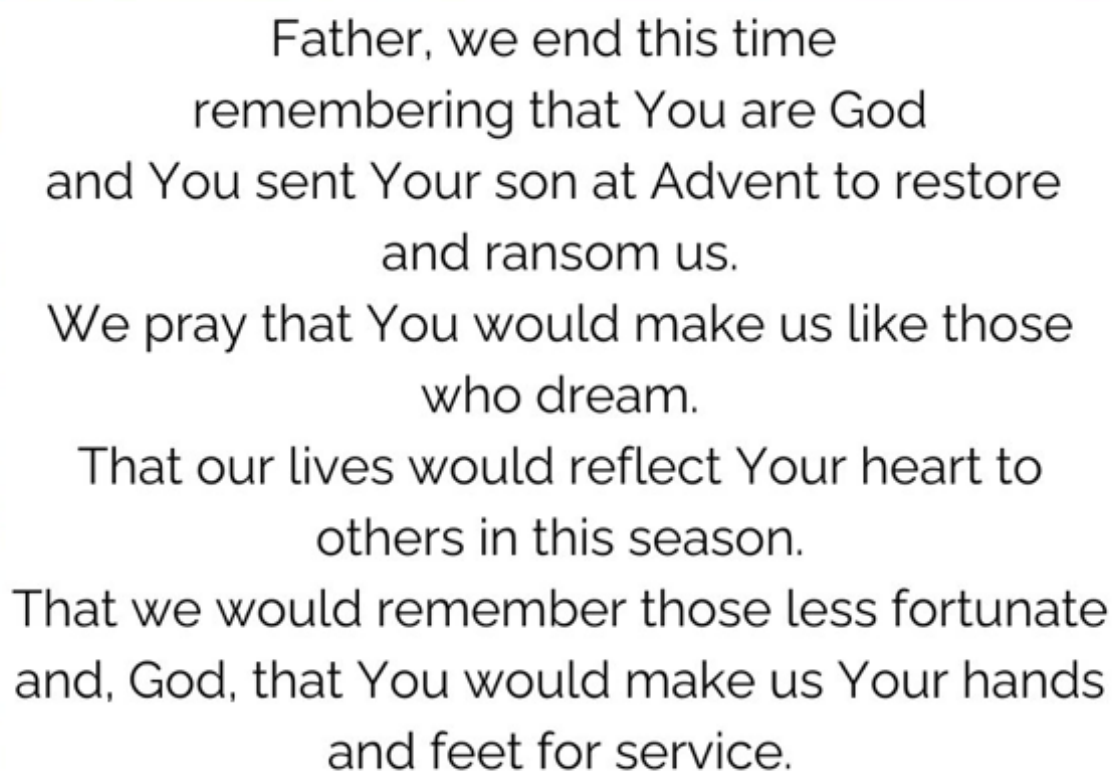
Financial pressures also afflict many families, with more and

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more finding it hard to make ends meet, as charities such as the Cork Penney Diners and St Vincent de Paul Society – among many – regularly report.

All these external pressures afflict people inwardly also, causing much anxiety and stress. To these ills, add the loneliness afflicting many older people – and the not-so-old also. Social media often leave people isolated and even more vulnerable.

In the face of all these challenges, Christians might be tempted to give up. But we never do. We pray for deeper faith and meaning in those who search for it, for harmony and peace for all, even when it seems to be slow in coming.

The text is centered on a white rectangular background. The background image shows a vast ocean with several large, flat icebergs floating on the surface. The sky is a pale, hazy blue, suggesting a calm, overcast day. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

Father, we end this time
remembering that You are God
and You sent Your son at Advent to restore
and ransom us.
We pray that You would make us like those
who dream.
That our lives would reflect Your heart to
others in this season.
That we would remember those less fortunate
and, God, that You would make us Your hands
and feet for service.

And we work for justice and compassion, as the Christ whom we serve keeps whispering challenging words in our ears: “When I was hungry, you fed me ... when I was a stranger, you welcomed me (Matthew 25:35ff)”. We have no option but to try to put these challenging words into action, particularly by welcoming strangers and making sure they feel at home in our midst.

We do not give up when our prayers seem to be in vain. For we know that, behind the scenes, in a divine and mysterious way, the Spirit calls even the most belligerent fighters to thoughts of peace, working patiently and delicately to end wars everywhere.

The work of peace includes the work of aid agencies, seeking to help those who suffer in war-torn lands – to bring light in the midst of darkness. Their efforts to provide a safe-haven for refugees from the war in the Holy Land is a sad echo of the flight into Egypt by the Holy Family with the new-born Christ child.

The Holy Family knows, and we know, that war is not about abstract principles and rights – it’s deeply personal. Every person left dead or injured belongs to a family whose life is forever changed. Remembering this too increases the pressure on believers never to abandon their work for peace.

The birth of Christ, which is the true heart of Christmas, is a call to each of us to renew our respect for the dignity and life of every person on earth, irrespective of their state of health or life. Only in this way will we lay strong foundations for a peace that will last.

As you journey through the Christmas season and into the New Year, our prayer for you is that you will be blessed with the peace of Christ in your life, the greatest gift of all — and that this will spur you on, to share in the work for “peace on earth and goodwill to all”.

✠ Fintan Gavin
Bishop of Cork and Ross

✠ Paul Colton
Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross

Christmas message from the Bishop of Derry & Raphoe

Bishop Andrew Forster writes - Christmas Day is one of the great feast days in the Christian calendar, and probably the most eagerly anticipated. Children will be on tenterhooks, waiting to see whether they get the presents they've asked for.

For most adults, it'll be a chance to enjoy some time off work, visit family and friends, and share a fine meal together. Even non-Christians appreciate the opportunity – or the excuse – to have a celebration, and who would begrudge anyone a day of happiness and joy, especially in these troubled times?

Recently, our television screens have been filled with images and reports of carnage in Gaza, slaughter in Israel,



bloodshed in Ukraine, the furore over migrant boats arriving on British and other countries' shores and, of course, the cost-of-living and energy crises (which present very real challenges for many people in our parishes and communities). The world is a very dark place, at present, so one might reasonably ask, 'What is there to celebrate?'

For Christians, the birth of Jesus – the arrival of God on earth – is undoubtedly something to be enormously thankful for. Matthew 1 v 23 tells us, "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). For me, the Incarnation is tremendously reassuring, as is Christ's promise – in Matthew 28 v 20 – that he is with us always, "to the very end of the age".

Our Christmas Day liturgies are peppered with references to 'light'. In our Morning Prayer on Christmas Day, we'll be invited to "come to the light of Christ". The liturgy for Evening Prayer will say, "To dispel the darkness of our night you sent forth your Son, the firstborn of all creation, to be the Christ, the light of the world." One of my favourite prayers begins with the words, "Lighten our darkness". And Jesus himself told us, in John 8 v 12, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Light is comforting and reassuring. It guides us along the right path. It enlightens us and helps us to see more clearly. Often, in the darkness, it's difficult to see the good that's being done around us. But it is happening – in our parishes, schools and hospitals; throughout our healthcare services; in workplaces, charities and the community and voluntary sector; and wherever our emergency services personnel are at work. We are truly blessed by this generosity of spirit.

This Christmas, I give thanks for the Incarnation of God on earth. I pray that we will all come to Christ – the light of the world. I pray that his light will illuminate the road to a better future and enlighten people all around the globe. I pray that all of us – here in our homes and parishes; in war-torn places like Gaza, Israel and Ukraine; wherever there is pain and anguish and turmoil – will come to know the peace of Christ – the greatest gift that any of us could hope for this Christmas.

I wish you all a joyful, prayerful and peaceful Christmas and a happy New Year.

In the media

Rare painting of the Nativity on display in Belfast - RTE

A rare painting of the Nativity, dating back more than 500 years and created by a celebrated Italian artist, has gone on display in Belfast by Conor Macauley

The work by Baldassare Peruzzi is one of only a handful of his paintings known to be in existence.

A contemporary of celebrated artists Raphael and Michelangelo, he was a central figure of what became known as the High Renaissance around the early 1500s.

The work had been in a private collection in Britain for decades before being put up for sale.

Such is its cultural significance that the authorities put a temporary export ban in place to give domestic galleries and museums time to raise the asking price.

The Ulster Museum had just six months to raise the capital needed and was supported by several funders, including a grant of £70,000 from Stormont's Department of Communities.

Senior Curator of Art Anne Stewart said it was the perfect time to put the painting on display.

Ms Stewart: "Most of Peruzzi's work was in fresco and much has been lost.

"His oil paintings are extremely rare and so it's something of a Christmas miracle that we are able to welcome visitors to the Ulster Museum to enjoy this exciting new acquisition."

She said the biggest challenge of the period was in painting a night-time scene and Peruzzi had demonstrated great skill in the complex use of light to bring the work alive.

It is on display after months of careful restoration in London.

Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts, and books

Irish Primates broadcast on RTE

This year's broadcast Christmas message from the Primates of All Ireland, Archbishops John McDowell and Eamon Martin, will focus on the theme of peace and reconciliation.

Mindful that the world is overshadowed by war and conflict in so many places this Christmas, the archbishops will be joined by five guests to talk about the work of peace-making and reconciliation locally and around the world.



The conversations will take a global perspective focusing on international development work, as well as the relationship between the Churches in Ireland alongside local community work. The archbishops will be in conversation with:

Caoimhe de Barra (Chief Executive, Trócaire)

Hilary McClay (Education Advisor, Church of Ireland Bishops' Appeal)

Dr Damian Jackson (General Secretary, Irish Council of Churches)

Fr Martin Magill (St John's Parish, Lower Falls, Belfast)

Canon Tracey McRoberts (St Matthew's Parish, Shankill Road, Belfast)

The 10-minute programme will be broadcast at 12.10pm on RTÉ One television and at 1.05pm on RTÉ Radio 1. Filming

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took place in Armagh earlier this month, and the message will be available after broadcast through the RTÉ Player website – www.rte.ie/player – and the RTÉ Radio Player app.

Ding! Dong! merrily on high arr. Mack Wilberg - The Choir of Belfast Cathedral

“We were thrilled with the attendance on Sunday at our 3.30pm Carols in the City! As we settle into the busy week ahead, here is a little taster of one of our favourite carols, taken from a live recording of the service. Don't forget that you can hear this, and much more, at our Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, this Christmas Eve at 8pm

“All are most welcome!”

<https://www.belfastcathedral.org/music/music-list>

The Shepherd's Pipe Carol - The Bach Choir

The Shepherd's Pipe Carol is one of the most popular modern carols out there. How did John Rutter compose it, and why does it still resonate? Find out in the Christmas special of our podcast featuring John Rutter, Lloyd Griffith & David Hill. Listen here -

<https://thebachchoir.org.uk/change-your-tune-episode-6/>



Archdeacon of The Argory

To conclude the year, the Mid Ulster volunteers of the National Trust gathered at The Argory for a final social event. “We were honoured to have Peter Thompson, Organist, Chorister, and Archdeacon of Armagh, join us in the Organ Lobby of the house, where he led us in song”.

The historic Argory organ, crafted by Bishop and Sons in 1824 for the Bond Family, holds great significance. It was used for religious gatherings attended by both the family and their staff. It stands as one of the few remaining cabinet barrel organs found within a private residence.

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Don't miss this year's opportunity to experience The Argory house adorned in its full Christmas attire from Wednesday 27 until Sunday 31 December.

Pioneers 125th anniversary



Pioneers around the world are invited to attend Mass next Wednesday, 27 December, and to prayerfully mark the 125th anniversary of the foundation of the Pioneer Association in 1898. Mass and prayers will be live-streamed on that day at 10am (Irish time) around the world via www.pioneerassociation.org.

Speaking to the soul

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

Church News Ireland

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