

# Church News Ireland

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**Image of the day – Christmas crib et al**

# Image of the day

## Christmas Crib et al

This Christmas Crib stands beside the church and the town square in Tervuren east of Brussels. Each year the church hosts a carol service with nativity play for the local parish of the Anglican Diocese of Europe. Once again this year the church was packed with children, their parents, and visiting grandparents.

Children also gathered around the Crib in Turlough Church to sing 'Away in a manger' during the Service of Nine Lessons and Carols on Saturday 16th December. On Christmas



Eve at 7pm there was a Crib Service, to which the young and the young

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at heart were invited to come dressed in simple Nativity costume. Photos from various parishes follow.



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# People and places

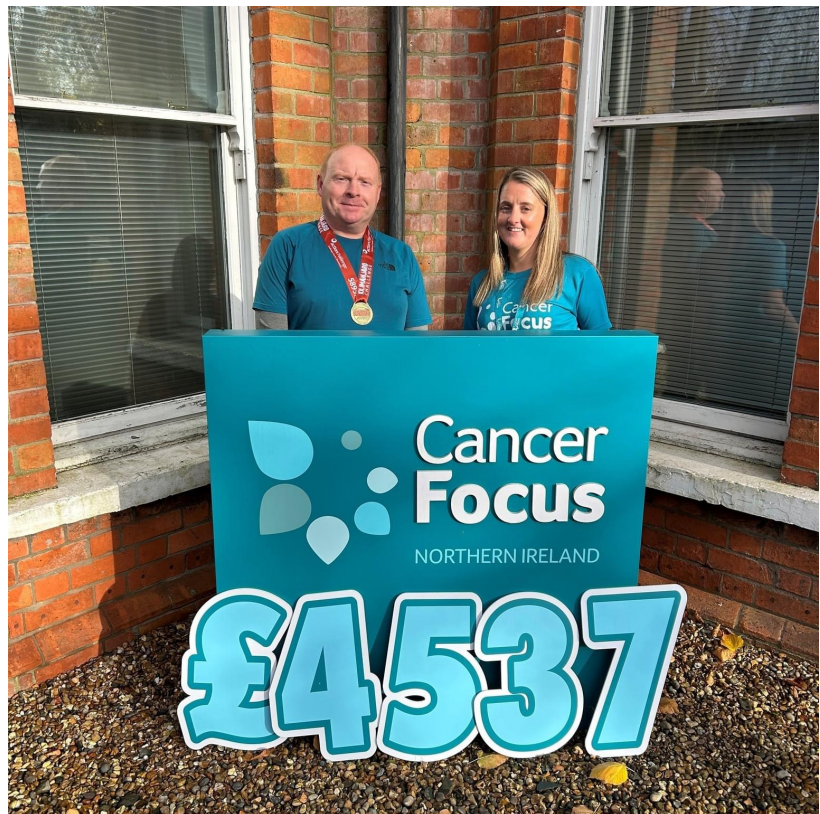


## Parishioner climbs Mount Kilimanjaro and aids Cancer Focus NI

**All Saints Craigyhill and St Patrick's Cairncastle Parishioner Simon Hunter wanted to make his 40th year one to remember, so he set himself the challenge of climbing Mount Kilimanjaro which stands at 5,895m.**

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At the same time Simon wanted to give a little back in the process. Simon has raised a fantastic £4,537 for Cancer Focus Northern Ireland and he has conned his thanks to family, friends and all from the parish and community who supported him



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## Parish seasonal fundraising for Southern Area Hospice

**Aghaderg Church had the joy of presenting the Southern Area Hospice volunteer Liz Armstrong a cheque for £1551.30.**

This amount was from all the loose collections lifted in the Parish Church during the month of December, including £877.00 collected at the Community Carol Service on the 19th December. “Many thanks to all who made this such a



wonderful amount” commented the Rector.

## Presentation to Diocesan Lay Reader

“It has been a pleasure having William Graham with us these past 3 months as he trains to be a Diocesan Lay

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Reader, we wish him well as he completes his training and we hope to see much more of him in the future” comments the Rector of Donagh.

The Parishioners of The Donagh Group of Parishes presented William with a desk edition of the Book of Common Prayer at their Carol Service in St Salvator’s church.

## News reports

### Archbishop of Canterbury’s New Year Message on BBC One

“On New Year’s Day, I’ll be sharing a New Year Message from RAF Brize Norton” Archbishop Justin.. It will be broadcast on BBC One at 12:55pm. Learn more at <https://bbc.in/3RSt3qt>





## Archbishop of York warns against cycle of revenge

**The Archbishop of York has cautioned against embarking on a “journey of revenge”, in an apparent warning to Israel.**

Writing in *The Sunday Telegraph*, the Most Rev Stephen Cottrell spoke of “endless cycles of reprisals” and the mistaken belief that “might is right”.

He referenced both the Chinese philosopher Confucius and Martin Luther King Jr in his Christmas message.

Quoting the former, he said: “When you embark on a journey of revenge, dig two graves; one for your enemy and one for yourself.”

It came as the UN held votes on whether to call for a ceasefire in Gaza, where more than 20,000 people have died in Israel’s bombardment following the Oct 7 massacre by Hamas, which killed more than 1,200.

Quoting Martin Luther King, the Archbishop also said: “Violence begets violence; hate begets hate; and toughness begets a greater toughness ... Along the way of life, someone must have enough sense and morality to cut off the chain of hate.”

His intervention – which did not explicitly mention the Israel-Gaza war – comes a week after the House of Bishops



## York Minster

issued a statement criticising the loss of civilian life and humanitarian situation in Gaza as unjustified. The Archbishop of Canterbury has also spoken of the “trauma” in Israel following Oct 7, as well as warning that, in Gaza, “the more heavy the casualties, the less chance there is of a renewed peace”.

In his Telegraph message on Sunday past, the Archbishop of York said the Christmas story offered “clues” as to the real God.

He also spoke of the need for Christians to persevere in their belief in God. “Faith comes naturally to a very few. For some it just flickers and needs to be rekindled. But for most people these days, faith-talk sounds completely alien and they won’t have a clue where to start.”

## In the media

### Sole Kingsmill survivor urges Troubles victims to share stories - Belfast Telegraph

**The sole survivor of the Kingsmill massacre has called for other Troubles victims to break their silence about what they went through, Noel McAdam writes.**

Alan Black, who shot 18 times during the attack on January 5, 1976, said he hoped families and survivors would find speaking out a cathartic experience.

Mr Black was speaking at a launch event in Portadown for a new book called *The Border Cleansing*.

It documents the lives of Protestants in Co Armagh, Down and Fermanagh who had family members murdered by terrorists.

Mr Black said the book “gives a voice to innocent victims, setting the record straight and allowing them to share their stories”.

He added: “The book has stories from victims and survivors who had previously remained silent, and I hope that they find comfort in having their experiences heard.”

Encouraging other victims and survivors to speak out about their experiences and get in touch with publishers Maurice Wylie Media, Mr Black said it was crucially important to establish the truth of the past.

The publishers said many families had an empty space at the dinner table over Christmas because of terrorism.

They also told how the attack had been planned in the run-up to the festive season.

The publishers explained: “It was a clandestine meeting in December, as people began their festive preparations, that planning for the massacre began when a man with a distinctive Belfast accent seized control of a van in Dundalk.

“Kingsmill would be forever etched in the collective memory as a stark reminder of how while some would plan celebrations, others would plan destruction of lives with indiscriminate violence.”

The publishers also told how Mr Black “faced physical and emotional wounds after 18 bullets tore through him”.

“His body healed, but his soul remained scarred by the loss of his friends and colleagues,” they said.

“Alan took to the platform at the launch event in Portadown determined to ensure that the sacrifices made during the Troubles are not forgotten.”

The Kingsmill massacre was claimed by a group calling itself the South Armagh Republican Action Force but was carried out by the IRA.

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The atrocity, in which 10 people were murdered, followed the UVF'S killing of six Catholics in two separate incidents the previous day.

Ballistic studies later linked the guns used in the Kingsmill attack to 37 murders, 22 attempted murders and 19 non-fatal shootings carried out between 1974 and 1989.

“The Border Cleansing”, published by Maurice Wylie Media, is part of The Truth Revealed series. For more information on the series, visit [truthrevealedseries.com](http://truthrevealedseries.com)

## **Strong Christian faith is my 'anchor' in politics, Donaldson tells GB News' Foster - Belfast Telegraph**

**Sir Jeffrey Donaldson has described how his strong Christian belief helps guide him through the “storms” of frontline politics, Adrian Rutherford writes.**

The DUP leader discussed his faith during a Christmas Day interview with Baroness Arlene Foster on GB News.

Faiths of the Nation involved interviews with four high-profile politicians.

On the programme, Conservative MP Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg discussed the “extraordinary” drift of Sinn Féin from Catholic teaching.

Labour MP Khalid Mahmood and Tory peer Lord Wolfson were also interviewed.

In a deeply personal discussion, Mr Donaldson recalled becoming a Christian in 1989, which he said was “a life-changing experience”.

“I grew up in the Presbyterian Church in my home town and every Sunday we would go to Sunday School and church,” he said.

“I was a member of the Boys' Brigade — that was a very important part of my childhood experience, not just for the weekly meetings that we went to, but also a lot of my outdoor activity.

“I lived in the shadow of the Mourne Mountains and every month we would have been up in the Mournes...

“I always remember the motto of the Boys' Brigade, which in later life I came to understand more fully, which is 'sure and steadfast'.

“It's out of that Christian hymn, Will Your Anchor Hold in the Storms of Life.

“And in politics, I have found that having a strong Christian faith has helped to anchor me in the storms of politics.

“And so, from my childhood days right through to my career in politics, my faith has been very important.”

Mr Donaldson, an MP since 1997, became DUP leader in 2021.

He added: “My Christian faith has influenced the way that I interact with others, it has helped me through difficult and challenging times, not least in Northern Ireland.

“It's helped me to have a sense of perspective, to keep focused on what is really important in life.

“And of course it influences your approach as well on the wider policies and challenges that we face in politics today - the social issues that impact on us.

“The idea that a politician who has a faith perspective can somehow divorce that faith perspective from the politics fails to understand what is at the heart of faith.”

He told Baroness Foster how “faith goes to your very being — it defines you in so many ways”.

He said: “To give you an example, when I'm going into difficult meetings, where I know that there will be disagreements, differences — some of them fundamental — I just find that saying a prayer before you go into a difficult meeting has a very profound impact on the way that you conduct yourself.

“Going in to do a difficult interview with the media, for example, just taking time out to pray, gives you a sense of calm, a sense of peace, and that helps.”

Earlier, in his interview Mr Rees-Mogg said he was “encouraged” by how many MPs are people of faith.

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They discussed the experience of Christians such as ex-Lib Dem leader Tim Farron and the SNP's Kate Forbes, who were criticised for their beliefs.

Asked if people in faith could be put off politics, or there is a space for politics and religion to coexist, he added: "I think it's very important that there is a space. I think as a Conservative it is much easier than it is if you are in the Labour party, the Lib Dems or the SNP, and obviously if you're with the DUP it's part of your party.

"It's extraordinary how Sinn Fein has lost its faith and has completely abandoned any understanding — as far as I can tell — of Catholic teaching. Certainly it's strongly pro-abortion nowadays, which I think is very sad and damaging."

## Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts, and books

### Aled Jones performs 'Brand New Day'

In this New Year's Eve celebration, Aled Jones performs 'Brand New Day' a song that he co-wrote that speaks of hope, faith and thankfulness. Here's a taster but you can hear the whole song on Songs of Praise tomorrow at 1.15pm on BBC One [bbc.in/2Qlw5uT](https://bbc.in/2Qlw5uT) in the UK.



## **Coleraine Grammar School Carol Service 2023**

From St Patrick's Parish Church

[<https://www.facebook.com/colerainegs/videos/219213644564805>]

Processional

[<https://www.facebook.com/colerainegs/videos/1432928154299229>]

O Come all ye faithful

[<https://www.facebook.com/watch?v=1063223661493136>]

## **Children's ministry resource for twixtmas**

CFM says this is "Perfect for this "twixtmas" period when you're not really sure what day it is or what to do with the children - Muddy Church will keep them busy while you study the calendar to see when school starts again!"

<https://www.facebook.com/churchofirelandchildrensministry/posts/410243637998287>

## **Perspective**

### **Baby's invitation to peace on earth**

**What did the angels mean by saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace"?**

The shepherds must have wondered when they heard it from a multitude of the heavenly host. It had begun with one angel, and that was bad enough, for they were “sore afraid” when he appeared, though the first thing the messenger of God said was: “Fear not.” Once they had swallowed down their fear they heard the news: that a saviour had been born that very day. As a sign that they had discovered the right newborn child, they would “find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger”. They hurried to Bethlehem and found it was so.

This is the moment depicted by the Le Nain brothers in about 1640. Their painting is in the National Gallery, London, not in a special Christmas exhibition, but free to view in the wonderful main collection. The picture was bought from the Duke of Norfolk in 1962. Parts of it look naturalistic to modern eyes: the hindquarters of the ox or the shepherd’s wrinkled ankles and dirty feet. He must have had a cold night of it in his ragged clothes. But, in the conventions of high Renaissance art, the stable is sheltered by grand if broken classical architecture. In a Baroque fancy, two little angels are shown as children really, not lofty messengers of God likely to make anyone sore afraid.

Peace is here in an uneasy way: the peace of a chill rural morning with nowhere to live. The young shepherd in a hat and one of the angels glance to the left – at what? It is too early for the Magi, too soon to know of Herod’s murderous plan for the innocents. But danger may be drawing near.

The Virgin Mary, the Child’s mother, kneels in calm contemplation. St Joseph, his face weather-beaten, looks down steadily too, hands folded on his staff. The baby lies

there, looking to his mother. The question about peace on earth remains for the moment in the air.

A contemporary of the Le Nain brothers, Henry Vaughan, began a poem on the Nativity in his condensed way: “Peace? and to all the world? Sure One, / And He the Prince of Peace, hath none!” Jesus’s mother had no peace even to bring him into the world at home, but had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem. This infant Prince’s only courtiers are the beasts of the stable. At sunset, “How dark it is!” exclaims the poet. “Shed down one ray, / To guide us out of this dark night.”

Yet no irresistible light from the Child transforms the earth. Things go on year by year, from bad to worse. Jesus is taken to Egypt to escape Herod. The martial Romans rule with iron strictness. Accused of being no friend of Caesar’s, Jesus is executed under the watch of a centurion. What could be a greater injustice than this man of peace violently done to death? A generation later Jerusalem and God’s Temple are a desolation. Only the grave seemed peaceful.

Today, though, we are not on the brink of Good Friday but of Christmas. The doleful future did not on the first Christmas day expunge the joy of a child being born. It is a methodically optimistic aspect of human life: that a new life is reason to rejoice, though everyone born will one day die.

What difference, then, did the name Emmanuel make, attached to the Child Jesus as the prophet Isaiah declared it would be? Emmanuel means God With Us. In the painting, the baby simply lies there. All babies do that, relying on the love and kindness of women and men around them for their

very life each day. That is all the force they possess: the capacity to be loved. If, as Christmas claims, God is With Us, then it is as a real human baby that he comes. In one of the nation's favourite carols, that true poet Christina Rossetti wrote: "Enough for Him, whom cherubim / Worship night and day, / A breastful of milk / And a mangerful of hay."

The Christian belief embodied by Christmas cannot be imposed on anyone. Everyone is free to find their own way. Any thoughtful person is moved by Greek tragedy or stirred by ancient myth. So it would be dim-witted to ignore the central cultural thread in Britain's history, especially when it speaks to undeniably dreadful world events.

As the occasion for Christmas cards and carols, of family dinner and wrapped-up presents, the birth of Jesus is good news to be celebrated. It is no crime to enjoy a family Christmas despite the wars and horrors in the world. The mission of the person called Emmanuel was not to establish a new world order but to bear witness to God being with us – in the happy task of raising a family, and through sorrows, pain and misery. He fights for peace by lying there as a baby.

## Poem for today

### The Oxen

by Thomas Hardy

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.  
"Now they are all on their knees,"

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An elder said as we sat in a flock  
By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where  
They dwelt in their strawy pen,  
Nor did it occur to one of us there  
To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave  
In these years! Yet, I feel,  
If someone said on Christmas Eve,  
“Come; see the oxen kneel,

“In the lonely barton by yonder coomb  
Our childhood used to know,”  
I should go with him in the gloom,  
Hoping it might be so.

## Speaking to the soul

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

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# Church News Ireland

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