



Daniel, Sophie and Gabrielle from St Malachys

Co Down pupils' version of The Nativity to be aired across UK tonight on BBC

The Nativity, a special festive drama produced by BBC Northern Ireland, will be aired on BBC Radio 4 across the UK on Christmas Eve.



Eoin from St Josephs at the BBC studios

Schoolchildren from St Joseph's, in Strangford, and St Malachy's, in Kilclief, have helped put together an improvised drama of The Nativity for the BBC.

The pupils, with help from **actor Liam Neeson** who will introduce the drama, have taken part in the special festive drama produced by BBC Northern Ireland which will be aired on BBC Radio 4 across the UK on Christmas Eve.

At age five and six they know only the world around them so even hurdling the concept of "Long, long ago" - a world where there are no

cars, no planes, no televisions, no iPods, no hospitals - naturally throws up a lot of lively debate.

And what with Angels appearing, there being "no room in the inn", having to have the baby on straw in a stable with animals, Three Wise Men showing up with gifts and Shepherds arriving, this really is rich terrain to place in the small hands of truly natural story tellers. Who knows what we will learn?

The Nativity will be broadcast on Radio 4 on Christmas Eve at 11am.

Christmas Nativity pulls crowd at Hillsborough Parish

On Sunday past, over 1,000 people (or 1024 people to be exact!) attended one of the Church Services in Hillsborough Parish. There was a great crowd in the morning at the Christmas Nativity which was presented by members of the Sunday School. Then in the evening, there was another packed church for the Carols by Candlelight Service which was led by a special choir formed for the occasion.



Speaking afterwards, Rector Bryan Follis said, “Sincere thanks to everyone who worked so hard to make each Service such a success. We had many visitors present and it was wonderful to hear them say how much they felt welcome and how they really appreciated the Services. So well done everyone.”

Church of England makes late bid for Christmas ad of the year

The Church of England has squared up to commercial giants John Lewis, Sainsbury's and

Marks & Spencer with its bid for Christmas ad of the year.

The Church's new two minute film "Joy to The World" features Gogglebox vicar and Songs of Praise presenter Kate Bottley and has been released on the Church's official website and social media channels.

The film highlights the hectic life of a vicar at Christmas, combining priest, social worker, parent and dog owner up to the traditional midnight service on Christmas Eve and the magical first moment of Christmas Day.

The advert is the last in a series of short films produced by the Church in the lead up to Christmas and has featured Revd Rose Hudson-Wilkin (Chaplain to the Speaker of the House of Commons), comedian Paul Kerensa and Hull based author Revd Matt Woodcock.

"We think the ad captures the real joy of Christmas in a way that supermarkets point to but haven't quite managed" said the Revd Arun Arora, Director of Communications for the Church of England.

"Although the film was made for a fraction of what the big retailers spend, I think it manages to tell the story of the lead up to Christmas with Kate's charm, humour and faith all shining through.

"Kate's film captures all the busyness and rushing of Christmas, from the pint down the pub to wrangling with the tree, from the cooking of the spuds through to that magical moment after the midnight service when Kate finds her moment of Christmas Joy staring at the stars and taking in the full wonder of God's creation."

Kate Bottley said: "When all is said and done, the turkey eaten and the presents unwrapped, the film points to the fact that the discovery of real, lasting Christmas joy involves a visit to your local Church. You only have to look at the images and pictures from across the country being posted under the #JoyToTheWorld hashtag on social to see for yourself."

The new ad is part of the Church's promotion campaign for its website www.AChristmasNearYou.org, which lists over 34,000 Christmas services taking place at local churches across the country during the

Christmas season. From carol services to crib services, nativities to midnight mass and Christmas morning celebrations the website enables people to find a range of services near them by postcode.

Rev Kate Bottley's film can be seen here: <http://bit.ly/2hLJchg>

All four of the Christmas films can be seen here: <http://bit.ly/2hAlyUs>

Church Of Scotland Encourages Worshippers To Attend 'Virtual Church' On Christmas Day Amid Severe Storms

Christians in Scotland have been advised to attend online "virtual services" on Christmas Day due to dangerous storm activity expected on Sunday.

Scotland faces storms of speeds of 50-60mph in its southern/central belt, up to and beyond 80mph in the far north. Senior Kirk officials are suggesting that congregations who are therefore unable to travel instead access a Christmas Day service online.



A couple from St Andrew's Arbroath, Scotland stream a church service online

The online platform is already in use by some congregations, whereby the traditional church service is streamed live online. Now the Church of Scotland expects its largest online audiences for live-streamed services on the 25 December.

The **Sunday Herald** spoke to the Rev Neil Glover, minister at Flemington Hallside Parish Church in Cambuslang, Lanarkshire, who said: "If for any reason people are unable to attend, many of our churches now make their services available online.

"So there will still be an opportunity to feel part of a church congregation at this special time of year."

The new form of Christmas service could mark a shift in how families experience the festive season. Glover added: "It could even be a great chance for the less 'tech-minded' members of the family to ask their loved ones to help find an online service for them on their phone or tablet and share it together."

The Church of Scotland told Christian Today that "increasing numbers" have been using the online platform, though no official figures on its use currently exist. On Christmas Day, "more churches than ever before" are set to stream online or put their services online via Youtube, Soundcloud, Facebook and other services.

Parishes like St Andrew's in **Bo'ness**, St Andrew's in **Abroath**, and **Luss Parish Church** in Loch Lomond are already keen cultivators of online service streaming. Martin's Memorial Church in the Isle of Lewis emphasises how one can now visit Church "**from the comfort of your own home**".

The Rev Albert Bogle runs **Sanctuary First**, a Pioneer Ministry of online outreach which hopes to "develop an authentic caring worshipping community online," and become "a worshipping congregation of the Church of Scotland on the internet".

Cardinal: we shouldn't be gloomy about Brexit

We must not be “prophets of gloom” over Brexit, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O’Connor has said.

Writing in this week’s Catholic Herald, the former Archbishop of Westminster compares Brexit to the “seismic event” of the Second Vatican Council.

“We have just detonated another kind of seismic event in the history of our country,” he writes.

“Leaving the EU is a huge step in our history and, like General Councils of the Church, the consequences will take many years to unravel. But, as Pope John said to the assembled bishops in 1962, we must not be prophets of gloom,” he writes.



Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor

Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor, who had argued for remaining in the European Union, says “we have now an opportunity, and an obligation to address the result of the referendum, not as partisans of Leave or Remain but as citizens of a great democratic exercise which stands for certain principles and values”.

He quotes the Book of Proverbs, which says “without vision the people perish”, and continues: “Without a positive vision not only for Britain apart from the European Union but also of a Britain still close to Europe, all Europeans will be diminished and less able to contribute to that stability and peace we all desire.”

In an article for the Spectator in May the cardinal said he wanted Britain to be “part of the European community and cooperate ... to build a union that is greater than the sum of its parts.”

He said that the EU needed “reform and renewal” but that Brexit would make this “even more difficult”.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols had also signalled his support for Britain staying in the EU. He said last month: “Our main concern will be to continue to keep an eye on and [give] practical help for the poorest, whose circumstances will probably worsen in the next two or three years.”

Archbishop Of Canterbury Condemns Christian Persecution In Letter To Churches Around The World

The Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby has released his **Christmas Letter** addressed to churches across the world. In it, he laments the Christian persecution and suffering seen in the last year, but also celebrates the unity of the

Church and the call to live in hope as Christians serve the most needy.



The Archbishop of Canterbury has released his annual Christmas Letter to churches across the world

He said of minority groups, Christian or otherwise, who have been targeted: "These are acts not only of terror but of genocide; criminal acts for which the international community must bring those guilty to account. Yet although so vulnerable and often forgotten and marginalised, our brothers and sisters are being courageous in the Lord. Indeed, 'God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong' (1 Corinthians 1.27)."

He recalled a trip to Pakistan in November, where he visited Christian communities who have suffered intense persecution in recent years.

"Such attacks are not only designed to inflict appalling suffering but also to sow fear in the heart of Christian, and other minority communities," Archbishop Welby said. "During the visit I spoke with some of the survivors of these attacks, and I was deeply moved and humbled by their extraordinary courage in continuing to be faithful witnesses of Jesus. They spoke of knowing now more than ever that Jesus is the Good Shepherd.

"In many parts of our troubled, uncertain world, Christian minority communities along with other minorities are being similarly targeted. In some places, this is motivated by a desire to eradicate the indigenous Christian presence completely."

He added that: "In other places conflict and corruption have become so normal that the world forgets the suffering of the poor." He called the Church not to be "bystanders afar off" but to stand alongside those who suffer and work for change.

Echoing previous emphases on evangelism and social justice, Archbishop Welby insisted on the need for proclamation of the gospel in word and in deed, and a rejection of lukewarm complacency. He wrote: "In many countries there is no persecution but there is apathy and complacency which leads us, in the striking words of Pope Francis, to be practical atheists."

Archbishop Welby called the Church to stand with the poor and the vulnerable, writing that: "The measure of a Christ-like community is the extent to which it holds the vulnerable and marginalised of the world at the centre of its life."

Although the Anglican Communion is increasingly divided on certain issues, Archbishop Welby celebrated "a strong sense of the unity of Christians." After what has been a difficult year for many, he emphasised the importance of Christians "sowing hope" in the world, particularly during the festive season which is a celebration of the dawning of God's light on the world.

Concluding, the Archbishop said: "In our common celebration of the light of Jesus coming into the world, may we then encourage and build up one other, and so may the Church in every

place, united in suffering and in hope, shine with his light and act with his strength, today."

Tribute: Monsignor Colm McCaughan, pioneer of Catholic school system

A senior clergyman who was critical to the establishment of the local Catholic education system has died, the Belfast Telegraph reports

The Right Reverend Monsignor Colm McCaughan, Chancellor Emeritus of the Diocese of Down and Connor, was 89.

Mgr McCaughan, who was born in Ballycastle in 1927, was educated at St Malachy's, Queen's University and Maynooth.

He was ordained in 1954 and was first appointed as curate to Bangor Parish.

Three years later he became involved in the church's education work.

From 1968 to 1987, he worked as secretary to the Diocesan Education Committee, eventually becoming the inaugural director of the Council

For Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) in 1990
- an important role he held until 1993.



Respected: Mgr Colm McCaughan

Bishop Patrick Walsh is on record as saying that Mgr McCaughan virtually single-handedly guided the Catholic Maintained Schools Commission for almost 20 years, until it was replaced by the CCMS.

After a three-year tenure as director of the CCMS, Mgr McCaughan was appointed as Chancellor to Bishop Walsh in 1993, with responsibility for the administration of the Bishop's office.

He served with distinction in that role until his retirement in 2009.

Speaking to the Belfast Telegraph, Fr Eddie Magee, from the Diocese of Down and Connor, said: "Colm was a very warm, very good humoured person, and a wise counsellor.

"He had a profound humanity and was highly regarded by bishops, clergy and parishioners.

"All his life, he retained a fond affection for the Glens and its people."

A notice placed in this newspaper said that the cleric's death was deeply regretted by Bishop Noel Treanor and by the priests of the Diocese of Down and Connor.

Requiem Mass will be held at noon today in the Church of St Patrick and St Brigid in Ballycastle. It will be followed by burial in the cemetery adjoining the church.

News briefs

+++ First visit by a Portuguese President to Anglican church -

The President of Portugal, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, this week (Monday 19 December) became the first President of the Republic to visit St Paul's cathedral in Lisbon. The cathedral is the seat of the Lusitanian Church – the Anglican Communion in Portugal. The President joined in the celebration of evening prayer with Christmas carols. The service was led by Bishop Jorge Pina Cabral, the Lusitanian Bishop. In his speech, President de Sousa said that the characteristics of the Lusitanian Church in Portuguese society was its adaption to new times, its social and educational intervention among the most needy; and its openness to the ecumenical movement and inter-religious dialogue.

News links to reports on faith, politics and education

Christian Today

Reports that the Archbishop of Canterbury has released his Christmas Letter addressed to churches across the world. In the letter,

Archbishop Justin refers to his visit to Pakistan in November to express solidarity with Christian communities across the country who have suffered much over recent years. Archbishop Justin wrote that in many parts of the world, Christian minority communities, along with other minorities, are being targeted.

FT

Book review under the headline, “Gifts and God: should we feel guilty about seasonal excess?” The Archbishop of Canterbury’s “Dethroning Mammon” is one of the books featured in the essay.

[https://www.ft.com/content/31061614-c609-11e6-9043-7e34c07b46ef?FTCamp=engage/CAPI/webapp/Channel Moreover//B2B](https://www.ft.com/content/31061614-c609-11e6-9043-7e34c07b46ef?FTCamp=engage/CAPI/webapp/Channel%20Moreover//B2B)

Times

Reports that Revd Arun Arora, Director of Communications for the Archbishops’ Council, has described the BBC’s religious programmes as “tired and formulaic”. Writing a comment article for the paper (see below), he called for the Corporation to revamp religious programmes in a similar way to the broadcaster’s science coverage under Brian Cox.

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/bbc-religious-coverage-has-no-originality-xs8tvrq5x>

BBC/Mirror/Tel/Mail/Ind/Times

Reports that Prince Charles has spoken out against religious persecution around the world, warning against a repeat of "the horrors of the past". Delivering BBC Radio 4's Thought for the Day, the Prince of Wales urged respect for those of different faiths and said the rise of populist groups "aggressive" to minority faiths had "deeply disturbing echoes of the dark days" of the 1930s.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-38401857>

<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/prince-charles-warns-against-rise-9499527>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/12/22/prince-charles-warns-return-dark-days-1930s-inthought-day-message/>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4057762/Prince-Charles-says-rise-populist-groups-echoes-1930s.html>

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/prince-charles-donald-trump-warning-right-populism-dark-days-thought-for-the-day-a7489876.html>

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/religious-attacks-recall-dark-days-of-1930s-says-charles-8bpk2rxwx>

BBC/Kent online

Report that payments to ex-residents of a CofE-run children's home (Kendall House in Gravesend), which closed in 1986, have been described as an "insult" by one of the former residents. A review into the home, commissioned by the Bishop of Rochester and published earlier this year, showed that girls were routinely drugged and locked up. A spokeswoman for the dioceses of Rochester and Canterbury said payments had been made to all former residents who took part in the review "as an expression of our gratitude to the women who have had the courage to share their stories, and an acknowledgement of the pain of revisiting their trauma."

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-kent-38401346>

<http://www.kentonline.co.uk/gravesend/news/payouts-made-to-church-abuse-117850/>

BBC/Guard

Reports that York Minster's bells were rung ahead of the Minster's Service of Nine Lessons

and Carols on Thursday. The Minster dismissed its bell-ringers in October, when they failed to accept a safeguarding decision made by the Chapter. The Dean of York, Vivienne Faull, said the bells were rung by a team of experienced volunteers from across Yorkshire. "We are grateful to the ringers of Yorkshire for kindly providing such a wonderful festive welcome for worshippers to the cathedral tonight," she said. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-york-north-yorkshire-38407325>
<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/dec/22/bells-sound-out-at-york-minster-despite-mass-sacking-of-ringers>

Guard

Report featuring Rev Sally Gaze, from Norwich Diocese and the challenges of conducting Christmas services for a group of churches in rural Norfolk. The report quotes Dr Jill Hopkinson, the CofE's national rural officer and the Bishop of Truro, Tim Thornton. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/22/christmas-highlights-pressure-church-of-england-stretched-rural-clergy>

Ind

Reports that different faith groups are teaming up across the UK to help the homeless in the run up to Christmas, including the multi-faith night shelter, "One Roof" which opened last week in Leicester.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/muslims-christians-homeless-people-christmas-london-streetlytes-dinner-al-khair-a7490016.html>

Times/Exp

Reports the results of a YouGov poll has found a four-point decline in the proportion of people who say that they believe in God, from 32 per cent in February last year to 28 per cent today. Those saying that they actively do not believe in any God or higher spiritual power has risen by five points, from 33 to 38 per cent.

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/belief-in-god-slumps-after-turbulent-year-mqz9j7mlh>

<http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/746688/religion-decline-Britain-fewer-God-believers-YouGov-poll-Christmas-church-2016>

Tel

Reports that Holy Trinity Church in Wallington, south west London, has requested that it does not receive the ministry of a woman bishop or

priest. A spokesman for Southwark Diocese and a spokeswoman for Women and the Church (Watch) are quoted.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/12/22/anglican-church-bans-women-vicars-job-biblical-grounds/>

Comment

Times: The BBC's religious programmes need to be born again, writes the Revd Arun Arora.

<http://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/comment/the-bbc-s-religious-programmes-need-to-be-born-again-jtc9vn8c3>

Tel: By defending religious freedom Prince Charles took a risk. The crown will be safe with him, writes Tim Stanley.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/12/22/defending-religious-freedom-prince-charles-took-risk-crown-will/>

Mail: (Prince) Charles and the cheap slur of 'populism'

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-4060408/DAILY-MAIL-COMMENT-Charles-cheap-slur-populism.html>