

Christmas 2017

BRITANNIA UNITED CHURCH

THE  ritannian

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Peter Bain, Editor

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Editorial

Clever? Smart? Wise? What's the difference? My definitions are: *Clever*: knowing how to do it. *Smart*: knowing what to do. *Wise*: knowing whether to do it at all.

As an engineer, I am supposed to be clever: we want to show off our years of training and experience by coming up with an ingenious solution to a problem. Sometimes, though, it's smarter to use a simpler approach (or not bother in the first place). I have been in meetings where we discuss a "clever" idea in detail, only to have the person in the back of the room (who has usually been quiet until now) ask "why do it at all"? After an uncomfortable silence, it usually becomes clear that the idea was unnecessarily complicated and clever did not mean smart. People will respect sound judgment more than cleverness.

What I like about the teachings of the new testament is the Jesus was wise and smart, rather than clever. When asked a question, he avoided the "clever" answer, quoting Torah chapter and verse. He was smart: he knew the meaning of the writings, not just the text. And he was wise: he didn't give the answer everyone was expecting, but the one everyone needed to hear.

Britannia has had its challenges in the past and will have more in the future. I pray for wisdom.

Peter Bain
Editor

Minister's Message

I had a lovely meeting with the Worship Committee this week. We were hosted by one of our members, instead of meeting in The Little Chapel as we usually do. With the sunlight streaming through the windows of her condo, it was hard to believe that Advent and Christmas are just around the corner!

I'm not sure how many people realize how much planning goes into worship. Our committee meets about every six weeks to plan themes, choose communion dates, talk about the liturgical seasons, discuss any special decorations that need to be in place, share feedback we have received from the congregation and then pick hymns.

It all starts with scripture. The scriptures suggest the themes and the themes help us to select the hymns (and anthems) for our worship. This week we were choosing hymns for the seasons of Advent and Christmas so we had our work cut out for us! I think our "short list" of favourites for Christmas Eve alone, had about 30 titles on it.

Advent means "coming" and it is a time of waiting, so while the Christmas Carols may be playing in the stores already, we typically save them for the real season of Christmas which, for Christians, starts on December 25th and lasts for 12 days...you know...The Twelve Days of Christmas.

This year is a bit of an exception. We decided as a Worship Committee to focus on different characters in the Christmas story each Sunday of Advent. We will start with the Magi, followed by the Angels, Mary and Joseph, and finally the Shepherds. Each character will be used to illustrate the Advent themes of hope, peace, joy and love: the hope of Wise Men who travelled from afar, the message of peace shared by the Angels, the joy that filled Mary's heart when she would give birth to the long-awaited Messiah, and the love that extended even to the lowly Shepherds from our God who came to earth in human form. Each week we will sing one of the hymns that tells each character's story: As With Gladness Men of Old, Angels From the Realms of Glory, Gentle Mary Laid Her Child and Go Tell It On the Mountain. So we will get a little preview of the Christmas music, even while we wait.

Our hope is that each will inspire us to think about those who were there at the beginning. Did you know the Magi could have been travelling as much as two years before they found Jesus? Their gifts also tell a story about the identity and future of this child, and then their return home "by another way" symbolizes the spread of the Gospel to the whole world. As we learn about each character, our understanding of the story deepens, and when we finally come to that wondrous night, our joy may be more profound.

So, come and join us on the journey with the Magi, the Angels, Mary and Joseph and the Shepherds. And as we journey may we be truly blessed by the hope, peace, joy and love that the Christ-child brings.

Holy Manners

(I thought this was appropriate in the context of Reverend Jim's sermon today. ed.)

- We shall endeavour at all times to conduct ourselves in a manner that honours God and our Church.
- We shall act with respect, love, integrity and truthfulness towards all those with whom we associate, irrespective of position, race, gender or age.
- We shall incorporate respect, humour, calmness, a positive attitude, politeness and cooperation in our actions and in our words when interacting with others.
- We shall deal with one topic at a time when problems are presented. We shall state the problem clearly and focus on a respectful solution, incorporating compromise.
- We shall listen sincerely to others.
- We shall maintain confidentiality.
- We shall address unkind acts, not unkind people.
- We shall not harm or degrade any other person.
- We shall encourage input from others.
- We shall take time to reflect and be prayerful in our interaction with others.
- We shall be compassionate and understanding.
- We shall show integrity, fairness and sincerity with all persons, peacefully solving conflict.
- We shall seek to pursue reconciliation through compromise when conflict or division occurs.
- We shall agree to disagree.
- We shall be truthful, and shall avoid exaggeration or misrepresentation.
- We shall be persuasive but not coercive or manipulative, accepting and respecting people's trust.
- We shall consistently seek guidance from the Spirit to govern our thoughts, words and deeds.

Mary Lou Farrell, Chair of Ministry and Personnel

December 2017 News from the Shaao-Artin Family

Here is an update on the Britannia Syrian Refugee Family.

The family is very active as winter and the Christmas season approach. Rim (pronounced "Reem"), the mother and a former obstetrician, has successfully completed the summer and fall phases of her midwife training at Ryerson University in Toronto. On December 4, she will begin her clerk/internship with the Ottawa Midwifery Group at Carling and Bronson. A lot of her training, however, will be carried out at a local hospital and the birthing centre on Walkley.

She will be on call 24/7 until the end of March, then return to Toronto for exams and to conclude her clerkship in April and May. Her work will require her to drive and she will need a car. Needless to say, Rim will be a busy lady.

Her husband, Abboud, continues with language studies and frequent full-time care of the boys. These are both difficult tasks. Jack (11) and Christian (8) are finding it nice to be able to walk to school, which is only 5 minutes away. Halloween was an exciting time. They are looking forward to more ice skating and winter play. Volunteers are working on getting them to cross-country skiing lessons and providing them with equipment.

Grandparents Nadia and Raymond are not looking forward to winter. They find dealing with major health issues and weather here is very difficult.

Salem and Mary, the Canadian-Syrians who have sponsored their family, continue to be very occupied with their two infant children and with assisting their family as best they can.

Indeed, without the time, prayers and donations of many generous people within and outside Britannia United Church, the Shaa-Artin family would not have made it to this point. Your prayers and donations for them continue to be much needed. As always, cheques should be made payable to *Britannia United Church* with a memo specifying that the contribution is for the *Local Syrian Refugee Family Fund*. Please contact Don Cullen or Marie-Therese O'Sullivan for further information (at 613-726-1863 or britunitedref@gmail.com).

We join with the Shaa-Artins to wish everyone, but especially the Britannia United Church family and community angels, a Merry Christmas, a Happy Hanukkah and a Happy New Year.

May you know the gifts of JOY, PEACE, LOVE, KINDNESS and UNDERSTANDING this holiday season and always.

Sincerely,
Don Cullen and Marie-Therese O'Sullivan

Music Director

Many thanks to Mary Lou Farrell and the hiring committee for their hard work selecting a new Music Director. Special thanks to Reverend Jim for a great job filling in during the search.

I know the whole congregation is looking forward to meeting the new director once the hiring formalities are complete. We hope you will welcome the new member of the Britannia team. If you have any comments or concerns, please contact Mary Lou Farrell, Chair of Ministry and Personnel. Her email is minandpers@brituc.ca

Name Tags

Do you want a name tag? There are sign-up sheets on the second bulletin board: one for paper name tags and one for the plastic name tags (approx. \$15). Please sign your name and we will make or contact your about your tag! See Dori Jensen for more information.

SENIORS' TEA CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON

The Seniors' Tea Christmas luncheon will be held at Kristy's, 809 Richmond Road, at 12:00 noon on December 14th.

If you would like to join us, please contact Maggie Taylor at 613-596-8928 or at bmtaylor9@sympatico.ca. The cut-off date is Monday, December 11th.

We will be having turkey with all the fixings and perhaps some entertainment. If you have a Christmassy/seasonal poem, story, skit or song you would like to share, feel free to sign up. Desserts are most welcome.

Maggie Taylor

Pot luck

The Christmas pot luck is scheduled for Sunday December 10 at 6pm and entertainment starting at 7. We need a convenor. Please talk to Candice in the office if you can help.

The Living Bible:

His name is Tim. He has wild hair, wears a T-shirt with holes in it, jeans, and no shoes. This was literally his wardrobe for his entire four years of college.

He is brilliant. Kind of profound and very, very bright. He became a Christian while attending college.

Across the street from the campus is a well-dressed, very conservative church.. They want to develop a ministry to the students but are not sure how to go about it..

One day Tim decides to go there. He walks in with no shoes, jeans, his T-shirt, and wild hair. The service has already started and so Tim starts down the aisle looking for a seat. The church is completely packed and he can't find a seat. By now, people are really looking a bit uncomfortable, but no one says anything.

Tim gets closer and closer and closer to the pulpit, and when he realizes there are no seats, he just squats down right on the carpet.

By now the people are really uptight, and the tension in the air is thick.

About this time, the minister realizes that from way at the back of the church, a deacon is slowly making his way toward Tim.

Now the deacon is in his eighties, has silver-gray hair, and is wearing a three-piece suit. A godly man, very elegant, very dignified, very courtly. He walks with a cane and, as he starts walking toward this boy, everyone is saying to themselves that you can't blame him for what he's going to do.

How can you expect a man of his age and of his background to understand some college kid on the floor?

It takes a long time for the man to reach the boy.

The church is utterly silent except for the clicking of the man's cane.

All eyes are focused on him. You can't even hear anyone breathing. The minister can't even preach the sermon until the deacon does what he has to do.

And now they see this elderly man drop his cane on the floor. With great difficulty, he lowers himself and sits down next to Tim and worships with him so he won't be alone.

When the minister gains control, he says,

“What I'm about to preach, you will never remember. What you have just seen, you will never forget.”

“Be careful how you live. You may be the only Bible some people will ever read!”

Who were the Magi?



The exact origin of the “wise men” is debated: some sources credit them with coming from as far as China. However, Matthew uses the word “Magi” which refers to a class of ancient Zoroastrian astrologer-priests who once lived in the Persian Empire.



According to the Gospel of Matthew, the Magi were the first religious figures to worship Christ. It is said the Magi

travelled from the east following a bright star that lead them to Jerusalem. They first visited Herod (appointed as a vassal king of Judea by the Roman Empire), asking him where the new king could be found. Herod, showing his knowledge of local prophesy, sent them to Bethlehem, and asked that they return when they had found him (Matthew 2:1–8). There, they appeared before the infant Jesus, and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh (Matthew 2:11). Of these three gifts, the last is the most important: Myrrh was an herb that was mixed with oil to make a *chrism*, the ointment marking Jesus as a royal figure, a king. Accordingly, the three gifts are interpreted as prophetic emblems of Jesus' identity: (1) *Frankincense* was an incense used in temple worship and speaks of Jesus' priesthood. (2) *Gold* speaks of Jesus' kingship. (3) *Myrrh*, was a spice or balm used in preparing bodies for burial, speaks of Jesus' atoning death.

After offering the gifts, the Magi were warned in a divine dream not to go back to Herod, and so returned to Persia by another route. This infuriated Herod and resulted in his massacre of the Holy Innocents (Matthew 2:12, 16–18).

As judicial astrologers, the Magi were known for the respect of spiritual light and rejection of spiritual darkness. The star that was rising in the east, was interpreted by hearers of Matthew as the fulfillment of the "Star Prophecy" from the Book of Numbers 24:17: "*There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.*" However, the Star Prophecy was not alone in identifying Bethlehem as the natal place for a coming king: an interpretation of the Book of Isaiah presented before Herod also identified Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Jewish Messiah, who would be a descendant or "son" of King David. Yet, again, the clearest prophecy of Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Messiah is found in Micah 5:2, "*But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.*"

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Respectful Communication Guidelines

R = Take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel without blaming others

E = use EMPATHETIC listening

S = be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles

P = PONDER what you hear and feel before you speak

E = EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions

C = keep CONFIDENTIALITY

T = TRUST ambiguity because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong

from *The Bush Was Blazing but Not Consumed* by Eric H. F. Law

Submitted by Mary Lou Farrell



Bazaar

Many thanks to Kelvin Stanke for organizing this year's fall bazaar. More importantly, he has taken the initiative to look at ways we can improve the bazaar. He has hosted a brainstorming session which produced a number of excellent ideas and he visited several other bazaars to get more ideas. I am looking forward to using some of the ideas in the spring Garage Sale tentatively planned for May 12.

The work isn't finished yet. Please talk to Kelvin if you have ideas or suggestion, or you know how you can contribute.

Upcoming Events

- Bible Study on Revelation: November 5th to December 3rd. Sundays from 7pm to 9pm. No need to attend the whole series.
- Council Meeting November 28th at 7pm
- Pot luck supper evening of Sunday, December 10. Convenor needed (see above).
- Blue Christmas: Sunday Dec. 17 at 7pm
- Christmas Eve: Sunday Dec. 24th at 7pm and 9 PM.

See below for a description of the services.

Christmas Services

Blue Christmas	Sunday Dec. 17 at 7pm	For those who have a hard time at this time of year. A quiet and contemplative service.
Christmas Eve	Sunday Dec. 24th at 7pm	An up-beat and fun service celebrating the season. Great for families with children! No communion at this service.
Christmas Eve	Sunday Dec. 24th at 9pm	A quieter service with communion.

Forrest Gump goes to Heaven

Forrest Gump dies and goes to Heaven. He is at the Pearly Gates, met by St. Peter himself. However, the gates are closed, and Forrest approaches the gatekeeper.

St. Peter said, "Well, Forrest, it is certainly good to see you. We have heard a lot about you. I must tell you, though, that the place is filling up fast, and we have been administering an entrance examination for everyone. The test is short, but you have to pass it before you can get into Heaven."

Forrest responds, "It sure is good to be here, St. Peter, sir. But nobody ever told me about any entrance exam. I sure hope the test ain't too hard. Life was a big enough test as it was."

St. Peter continued, "Yes, I know, Forrest, but the test is only three questions."

"First: What two days of the week begin, with the letter T?"

"Second: How many seconds are there in a year?"

"Third: What is God's first name?"

Forrest leaves to think the questions over. He returns the next day and St. Peter says, "Now that you have had a chance to think the questions over, tell me your answers."

Forrest replied, "Well, the first one – which two days in the week begins with the letter 'T'? That would be Today and Tomorrow."

The Saint's eyes opened wide and he exclaimed, "That's not what I was thinking, but I will give you credit for that answer. How about the next one?" asked St. Peter.

"How many seconds in a year? Now that one is harder," replied Forrest, "but I think and think about that, and I guess the only answer can be twelve."

St. Peter said, "Twelve? Twelve? How could you come up with twelve seconds in a year?"

Forrest replied, "Well: January 2nd, February 2nd, March 2nd... "

"Okay," interrupts St. Peter. "I will have to give you credit for that one, too. Let us go on with the third and final question: what is God's first name"?

"Sure," Forrest replied, "it's Andy."

"Andy?" exclaimed St Peter. "Ok, explain that one!"

"Shucks, that was the easiest one of all," Forrest replied. "I learnt it from the song: *Andy Walks With Me, Andy Talks With Me, Andy Tells Me I Am His Own.*"

St. Peter opened the Pearly Gates, and said: "Run, Forrest, run."

The Way to Joy

Sermon from October 15

I had a great Thanksgiving last weekend. Jaclyn and Andrew came from Brampton, which was a wonderful surprise because we weren't expecting them to be here this year. We were together on Saturday for dinner with our sons and their wives, Val's mom and a few friends, and while our whole family wasn't together, Jaclyn Face-Timed with Shannon and her boyfriend, so we got to see her and at least wave "hello" as we crowded into the computer screen.

I thought the service on Sunday was beautiful. I was a little stressed out at the start, trying to keep all of the parts in order, but the choir did an amazing job of two anthems, watching the children sing which filled my heart with joy and just being here with all of you was reason enough to be thankful.

Monday was a quiet day as we said our goodbyes to Jaclyn and Andrew, spent some time with a friend who needed company, went for a walk in our beautiful city, ate leftovers and finished off the day making a pot of turkey soup. It was a pretty perfect day.

Family, friends, good food, great music, the beauty of creation, being able to appreciate them all with good health, and taking time to worship and give thanks; these are the true blessings of life.

As Thanksgiving weekend came to an end, the first Christmas posts began to appear on my computer screen. Most of them were just for fun, but one of them really caught my attention because it captured what I was already feeling. It said:

"I think as you get older, your Christmas list gets smaller, and the things you really want for the holidays can't be bought."

There is so much truth in that statement. When we are young, it's all about the glitter and lights, and parties and presents. Then as we get older we start to realize the anxieties and stress and credit card debt. But hopefully, the time comes when we reconnect with the child in the manger, the wonder of God's grace, the beauty of the worship and the joy having people to love who love you back.

Sometimes you only realize how important that last one is, after they are gone and you would give anything just to have them back for one more Christmas...one more phone call...one more embrace...the little things that can't be bought.

It reminds me of an airline pilot who was flying over the Tennessee mountains and pointed out a lake to his copilot. "See that little lake?" he said. "When I was a kid I used to sit in a rowboat down there, fishing. Every time a plane would fly overhead, I'd look up and wish I was flying it. Now I look down and wish I were in a rowboat, fishing."

The letters of St. Paul speak a lot about such things. We are all familiar with his teaching about love in chapter 13 of I Corinthians; I just read it at another wedding on Friday: *“Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceited or proud; love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable; love does not keep a record of wrongs; love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth. Love never gives up; and its faith, hope, and patience never fail. Love is eternal.”*

Most people stop there as they contemplate romantic love, but Paul is speaking about something greater; he is speaking about the love God shows to us, that we should share with one another. It is a love that should permeate our thoughts, our worship and our interactions with one another.

He goes on to say that most of the things we hold dear in life are temporary, so we should focus on the things of God, and then he says:

When I was a child, my speech, feelings, and thinking were all those of a child; now that I am an adult, I have no more use for childish ways. What we see now is like a dim image in a mirror; then we shall see face-to-face. What I know now is only partial; then it will be complete—as complete as God's knowledge of me.

Meanwhile these three remain: faith, hope, and love; and the greatest of these is love. It is love then, that you should strive for.

In Chapter 3 of the letter to the Philippians, he shares the same kind of message, saying that he regards the things that once seemed important to him as rubbish, compared with the assurance of salvation that he now feels through his faith in Christ. And so his sole focus has become knowing Christ and the power of Christ's resurrection, so that he might one-day experience eternal life.

This is what leads us into chapter 4 and his teaching about joy. The first word of chapter 4 is “Therefore” which indicates that it is a continuation of his thoughts in chapter 3.

His teaching is pretty simple and clear:

Be of the same mind.

Work together.

Help each other.

Rejoice in the Lord always.

Let your gentleness be known to everyone.

Don't worry about things that really don't matter, in fact, don't worry about anything – trust in God and trust that everything will work out fine. Instead of worrying:

Pray. Have the confidence to

Ask for what you need.

And give thanks to God.

If you can do these things, then *“the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus”*.

Finally, he says we should think about whatever is true, honourable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable. Our focus should be on excellence and whatever is worthy of praise.

At the end of his letter, he tells his followers that if they can do the things they have learned from him, they will know God's peace.

Paul is an impressive speaker and teacher, of that there is no doubt, but what really makes this teaching about the path to joy more powerful, is the knowledge that when he wrote this letter he was sitting in jail at the time.

Philippi was the first European city that Paul evangelized. He riled people up when he healed a slave girl, because her owners lost their source of income. But the real reason he was imprisoned was that he proclaimed Jesus as Lord, and Caesar had proclaimed him self as Lord above all.

So Paul was arrested, beaten and thrown in jail, and it was there that he wrote his letter about finding true joy. This is the peace that surpasses all understanding. It is not just peace and joy when things are going well. It is peace and joy when everything is chaotic, and life is challenging and our world is falling apart. It is peace and joy in the knowledge of God's grace and the understanding that there is something more. And we too can benefit from Paul's life and experience, his example and his teaching.

Joy, prayer, thanksgiving and peace. These things are all interconnected. Thanksgiving can lead to joy. Prayer can lead to peace. So praying with a thankful heart is the most direct path to peace and joy in our lives. It puts everything into perspective, it puts ourselves into a relationship with God, and it puts God's heaven into our hearts.