

Message from the Leadership

One of the things we associate with Christmas is singing. There are so many wonderful Carols that have been written over the years that tell the story of how God came in to our world in the person of his one and only Son-Jesus Christ.

We should not be surprised that singing is so significant when we look at the way Luke in his Gospel describes the events surrounding the birth of Jesus. In the opening two chapters there are four songs.

When Elizabeth greets Mary her relative with the words, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear,” Mary sings a song that begins, “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour”.

When Zechariah is able to speak following the birth of John the Baptist, he sings, “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come and has redeemed his people.”

After an angel breaks the news to the shepherds a company of angels appear singing, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests.”

Finally, when Simeon sees Jesus in the Temple he sings, “For my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the sight of all people.”

When we think of the amazing and wonderful gift that God gave the world, “How can we keep from singing.”

May you have a very Happy Christmas and a Good New Year.

CONGRATULATIONS

Our warmest congratulations are extended to Emma MacAulay and Davi de Paula who were married on 8th December in the Free North Church. We pray for God's rich blessing to be with them in their life together.

KIRK SESSION NEWS

New members

The Kirk Session were pleased to welcome into membership from other congregations- Mary Macdonald, Derek Morrison, Alastair Gillespie, Kirsteen Gillespie and Katherine Davidson at the recent communion weekend, 10th to 11th of November. The Session were also delighted to welcome into membership Alastair Morrison who professed his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for the first time.

New evening service time

After polling results from the congregation were passed to the Session it was agreed to change the Sunday evening service to 5.30pm from the first week in January on a trial basis. The Free Church Offices will be informed of the change and also messages on Facebook, weekend bulletin and the projection screens would reflect the time change information.

It is hoped the earlier time will make it easier for more people to attend the evening service and Youth and Congregational Fellowships which are held after.

CONGREGATIONAL NEWS AND ACTIVITIES

Events

A Christmas Eve Service on Monday 24th December at 6.30pm followed by refreshments. Do invite family and friends along.

A New Year's Day Service on January 1st at 11.00am. (In the hall) followed by refreshments. (There is normally a collection for the Disaster Fund)

Christianity Explored

Christianity Explored has just finished. During the past seven weeks around 18 of us have met each Monday evening to read and discuss Mark's Gospel. We have all found it to be a helpful experience and pray that God will continue to bless his word.

Special thanks are due to Janet and Ruth who provided a delicious meal each evening.

Christmas Lunch

Last Tuesday around thirty of us gathered for the regular monthly lunch when enjoyed a sumptuous meal and had good fellowship together. We were able to sing carols and reflect on the responsibility that was placed on Joseph as the legal father of Jesus. Thanks are due once again to Jane and all who helped in the preparation of the meal.

The next meal will be on the 16th January.

School Work

I am thankful for the opportunity to be involved in conducting Christmas Assemblies at this time of year. Pray that God will bless

the message as it goes out in most of our schools at this time of year.

We have also just finished delivering Bible Alive in Merkinch Primary where the programme was well received. A member of staff said, "It was great. Some pupils wanted longer. They were really engaged." And a pupil said, "It was really fun."

Next term we hope to resume with schools that we have already been working with.

Sandy

Film Night

We plan to show the Hiding Place on an evening in January. This film is based on the true story of the ten Boom family who lived in Holland and saved many Jewish people during World War Two.

Home Groups

Our Home Groups meet once a month as we look at the life of Abraham. The remaining dates for this session are:

16 th January 20 th February 13 th March	24 th April 15 th May
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Vacancy

As we hear prospective candidates and consider them as preachers, pastors, leaders etc. do convey your feelings to members of the vacancy committee.

Preaching Supply

<u>January</u> 6 th 13 th 20 th 27 th	John Murdo MacDonald Gordon Matheson (Sleat, Skye) Lachie MacDonald (Ullapool) Alasdair MacLeod Innes MacSween)
<u>February</u> 3 rd 10 th 17 th 24 th	Trevor Kane (Dumfries) Rory Stott (Ayr) David Court (Christchurch, Edinburgh) Daniel Sladek (ETS Old Testament)
<u>March</u> 3 rd 10 th 17 th 24 th 31 st	Malcolm MacLean (Greyfriars) Gordon Martin (Urray) Murdo MacLeod (Nairn) Innes MacSween Robin Gray (Student)
<u>April</u> 7 th 14 th 21 st 28 th	Ian Hamilton TBC Andrew MacLeod (Tain Assistant) Martin Cunningham (Ullapool Elder)
<u>May</u> 5 th 13 th 20 th 27 th	Ian Hamilton Garry Brotherston (Bishopriggs) TBC TBC

20 SCHEMES

From all of us here in the Merkinch we thank you for your faithfulness, for your prayers of support and for your warmth to us as we endeavour to plant a church in the Merkinch area of Inverness. The whole team here in the Merkinch. Thank you!

We are coming to the end of our first year in the Merkinch and I thought it would be a good time to give you all an update. Before I do, I would like to share with you a couple of principles on church planting.

We in the Free Church of Scotland favour the mother/daughter church planting model. This is where one church bears the burdens of the plant for a time (like a mother). This is the Free North position. This then means we here in the Merkinch are a daughter of the Free North and we are a baby. As such we are needy like a baby! Needy of your prayers, needy of your care. And, like a child, we will God-willing develop into adulthood.

Our desire in the Merkinch is to be a local church, for local people, with a local leadership. As a group, we have already seen signs of growth. When we moved into the area in January 2017, we knew a couple of people. In our first group meeting, we had about seven people who we were actively praying for. Now we have a prayer list of over 30 people, and we are beginning to get known in our community by the local people. Over the past year, we have also hired Martin Black from 20 Schemes. Martin comes fully funded which is such a blessing from God as we do not incur any cost. Martin has lived with Katherine and I since he moved up. We have also seen our Thursday night community meeting grow from an

average of five people to an average of twelve. This is encouraging but the purpose of church planting is not about starting a service but growing a covenant community that will exist for generations. With this goal in mind, we endeavour for everyone to have a one-to-one. This is a time for us to encourage one another in the Lord and also a space where we can challenge sin. With this goal in mind we seek conversions from the connections we are making in the community. So we ask that you continue to pray and give to the work in the Merkinch and that you all would share in the joy when we see people become disciples of Jesus Christ.

If you wish to receive our newsletter, please email Chris and he will add you to the list. chris.j.davidson.30@gmail.com

If you want to learn more about church planting especially in housing schemes the podcasts from 20 Schemes are helpful <https://youtu.be/EqMDHocpt5s>

OTHER NEWS

The Leprosy Mission Scotland

Thank you to all those who supported the Leprosy Mission coffee morning in the Free North hall in the autumn. We raised over £1,500 to help patients affected by leprosy in Nilphamari Hospital in Bangladesh and provide educational bursaries and micro-credit schemes for children and young people in Dhaka. If you would like to support TLMS further, there are a few blue tubs at the lane door which you can fill and return to me or to Ella Cormack.

Anne Muirden

Blythswood Inverness Support Group

Annual Quiz Night –

This was held on Friday, 16 November in the Kingsview Christian Centre. Twelve teams of four from in and around Inverness competed and we were grateful to our team of Alec MacPhail, Torquil MacRitchie, Effie Finlay and Anne Muirden for their participation in what was an enjoyable and very worthwhile evening, where the sum of £1,140 was raised for this year's projects: the Talita Kum Project in Jimbolia, Romania, providing a programme of support for 40 children from some of the poorest households in the town; and the Highland Foodbank.

Thanks also to members of the congregation who came along to support our team and Blythswood. This year, the winners of the cup were the Culloden Baptist Church.

HELPFUL THOUGHTS

SUFFERING

“As we learn to know and trust God on His terms, we learn to trust Him and rejoice in the hope held out to us in the gospel. A heavenly home awaits those who have learned not only to believe in Him but also to SUFFER for His Name.”

“Christ learned obedience through the things which He suffered. For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross. God has no other plan.”