

December 2003 (Converted to text via OCR – there may be minor spelling/format errors)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

*John 1:1-5*

The Christmas story is one of light shining into a dark world. Jesus came at a time when the voice of the Old Testament prophets was silenced — the last, Malachi, had been more than 400 years before. Jesus came to a land occupied by the alien power of Rome. Under them, the Herodians ruled — a dynasty of at best doubtful legitimacy. There were sporadic outbursts of nationalist terrorism followed by terrible retribution. The religious leadership was divided — the Sadducees emphasising ritual and the Phanses strict interpretation and observance of the law. The Pharisees themselves were split and various sects had arisen, perhaps the best known being the Essenes.

Not many would have seen anything hopeful in the birth of a son to a poor family. It was the elderly Simeon who was blessed with the insight that this was the Saviour.

Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelations to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.” *Luke 2.28-32*

We live in a time that seems hostile to the Christian gospel. Surveys indicate feelings of insecurity and fear of violence, sometimes heightened by political warnings about terrorism. It is difficult not to be cynical when confronted with the materialism of this season or to be concerned at the ignorance of so many as to the source of the celebration. We all tend to worry that the elderly outnumber the young in our churches. Perhaps we need to be still and look again with the aid of the Holy Spirit at this baby. Can you see the Light of the World?

### **A Personal Word**

It has been a privilege to work with you at St. John's and I am grateful for the support which I have had. I have shared your sadness in bereavement, been impressed by the workrate of your vacancy committee, found new friends in your Guild. It was a real joy to me to receive four new members into the church and to know that Peter, Simon, Gail and Gwen will be encouraged by the warmth of your fellowship. St. John's has a strong and committed leadership and a membership which is faithful to Sunday worship. It is good to see how eagerly you await your new minister. Your enthusiasm and keen anticipation of a new start bring the assurance that you will respond to the Rev. Nicola Frail's ministry. Wishing you every blessing in the future.

Anne

## **Tony Mclean-Foreman — August 2003**

Dear Friends,

My first piece of news is that I am in good health. I got a bit of a fright with a neglected melanoma and had to return to Scotland for treatment. By the grace of God and thanks to the doctors it appears to have been caught in time. The prognosis is favourable. Thank you for your prayers.

At the moment we are caught up in a tragedy here in our local congregation. One of our Church families is a widow with six children. She lost her husband many years ago and brought up the four girls and two boys herself, with very little money — there is no family allowance or social security here in Sri Lanka. Now the children are all grown up, two of the girls are working as maids in Singapore and another in Cyprus. For poor families this is a means of earning foreign currency. The two boys worked in Kandy.

The elder boy, on his 28th birthday went off on an excursion with some of his friends to a mountain area and famous waterfall. As in so many countries there is a serious drink problem here in Sri Lanka. The lads polished off several bottles of gin and proceeded to the falls. Here Nishantha slipped on wet rocks and was swept off his feet from the shallows into the powerful current. There was nothing that he or his friends could do and shockingly he fell from the top 280 feet to the rocks below and into a deep and dangerous pool. The friends, panicking, risked their lives trying to reach him but to no avail and to make matters worse the body could not be found.

Hearing the news in Kandy I went up to see the mother and sister who were in a state of extreme shock. In Sri Lanka on such occasions village people do not in any way seek to restrain themselves; their grief, fear and anger comes pouring out in displays of emotion that the average Western person finds disturbing. The mother was particularly upset that there was no body and she begged me to pray that it would be found I decided that, although the search was to be called off, I would go with some of the elders to see what we could do. We set off at the crack of dawn and went by single-track roads to a very remote area. We went first to the Police station. The Police sergeant was very helpful. He was certain that the boy was dead and that the body would eventually emerge from the deep pool.

He assigned us a constable who took us down to the pool. It was an impressive and fearful place. We climbed out as far as we could on the rocks and we saw the body. It was in a very inaccessible spot, we wondered how to retrieve it but were warned by the constable not to touch it. It would be necessary for the Procurator Fiscal to come and do a proper examination. I was quite relieved. We were, however, very glad that the body had been found. From there we went to see the friends of Nishantha who were being held in police custody until after the post mortem examination. They were deeply shaken and frightened. There was a lot of community anger against them, not for any rational reason as far as I could see but because of the human tendency to look for someone to blame.

Finally we returned to Kandy, the normal Wednesday Bible study was moved to what is called 'the funeral house' and we found the family in a better condition, the sisters having come from abroad and a host of family and friends giving support. The Christian community regards it as important to give an effective witness in such situations. At

funerals the Christians are able to say that Jesus has defeated death and that whatever the circumstances He is able to bring hope and help to the bereaved.

When I left home last night the friends had been released by the police but were afraid to go and pay their last respects being uncertain of what kind of welcome they would receive. I was called upon to speak to family and to remind them that the friends would be feeling guilt, remorse and grief and that they too should be allowed to come and pay their last respects and as a Christian family it was important to accept them and to forgive them if that was necessary.

Blessings

*Tony*

### **Fabric**

Dry Rot As reported in East December's issue Dry Rot, found to a limited degree, had been dealt with. Decoration however remained to be done in the Wedding Room, Passageway's and Gents Cloakroom. This was completed early this year.

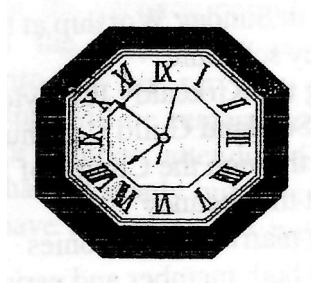
Vandalism This took the form of two breakins on 10th and 24th March. A considerable amount of damage was done to doors, windows, cupboard units etc., in addition a considerable amount of equipment was damaged or stolen. The Church's Insurance covered the repairs and replacement costs which amounted to a claim of £3,444.38 of which we had to pay a £200 excess.

Security Steps had to be taken to install an intruder alarm system and at a cost of £2131.70 this was completed in June. This was funded by an appeal to Members which was successful.

Manse This was vacated in October 2002. A survey was carried out to identify what improvements may be required. Work was put on hold for a short period but I'm now in a position to say the work is almost complete and nearly ready for our new Minister's occupation.

Repairs Day to day repairs are always required and I am grateful to those who have given me help.

*It's MONDAY morning again Lord,  
Another week in view,  
Please help me do the best I can,  
And walk along with you.  
Whatever's round the corner Lord.  
Just somewhere out of sight,  
Help me to meet it cheerfully  
And seek your guiding light.*



*The weekend goes so quickly Lord  
And Monday's always near.  
I think there must be more of them  
All scattered through the year.  
Please teach me to be patient Lord,  
And find the strength I seek,  
It's Monday morning yet again  
Go with me through the week.  
(Iris Hesselden)*

### **THANK YOU TO**

**Rev. Anne Job, B.Sc., B.D.** on behalf of everyone associated with St. John's, the time is right to put on record our sincere appreciation to our Interim Moderator for looking after us for the last 15 months. In addition to her 7 day ministry to both Viewforth and Thornton Parish Churches, Anne has made time to both publicly, and very much behind the scenes, to satisfy our needs in the following areas:

- leading us in Sunday Worship at the appropriate times in the vacancy schedule
- conducting the Kirkcaldy Presbyterial Council of the Church of Scotland Guild Communion Service
- guiding us through the Church of Scotland procedure throughout the vacancy

- conducting marriage ceremonies
- conducting both member and parish funeral services with associated bereavement home visits
- pastoral visitation both at home and in hospital
- advising and being in attendance at vacancy committee meetings
- organising and leading a new communicants' class finishing with a special admission and informal communion service.

We trust you have enjoyed the fellowship during your time with us. We appreciate that you can now look forward to a more normal work load with the vacancy drawing to a close here at St. John's.

We thank you Anne for everything,

### **THANK YOU TO**

#### **Dr. Andrew Munro, M.A., B.D., Ph.D.**

Throughout his 14 months of pulpit supply at St. John's, Dr. Munro has been off for only 4 Sundays. During this time he has done all that has been asked of him and more — including helping Anne with wedding and funeral services and home visits.

The initial thinking for the vacancy period was to achieve continuity both from the pulpit and in congregational attendance. Dr. Munro for his services, with particular mention of his preaching, will be remembered in St. John's for a long time. As for numbers attending Sunday worship not only have they remained steady but a number of people have returned and we have welcomed new members.

For your time with us Andrew and what you have done for us each week throughout the vacancy we thank you most sincerely.

### **WELCOME TO**

#### **Rev. Nicola R. Frail, B.L.E., M.B.A., M.Div.**

On Sunday, 2nd November, Rev. Nicola Frail conducted the morning service as Sole Nominee. At the close of the service a secret ballot vote convincingly decided to invite Nicola to come to St. John's as our next minister. After her acceptance we are privileged to have access to the following background information as an Echoes exclusive:

St. John's new minister will be the Rev. N Frail who comes to us from Cadder Parish Church in Bishopbriggs near Glasgow, where she is currently completing a 15 month Board of Ministry placement. Nicola studied for the ministry at San Francisco Theological Seminary in California and was ordained by Denver Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to serve Craig-Alder Grove Parish, an ecumenical parish in the American mid-west. Nicola moved back to Scotland last year after petitioning General Assembly to transfer her ordination to the Church of Scotland.

Although born in Inverness, Nicola spent most of her early childhood in Darvel, Ayrshire before moving to Gask, near Perth. She is a graduate of Aberdeen University where she read Land Economy and played inter-varsity table tennis. Nicola worked as a chartered surveyor in Germany, before earning a Master's degree in Business Administration from the University of Denver and going on to study for the ministry. Nicola has a wide range of interests including spending time outdoors with her dog Shona and hill walking. As a qualified taekwondo instructor, she enjoys both practising and teaching martial arts.

We all look forward to the exciting and challenging times ahead for St. John's and trust that in our true tradition we will welcome our new minister and rally round her at all times in the many years ahead of us.

On behalf of the Kirk Session, I should like to thank the members of the Congregation for all their support throughout the period of the vacancy.

Bill Stenhouse, Session Clerk

### **A History of St. John's Church**

In the summer of 2002, the Kirk Session of St. John's appointed a group to research and document the history of our church. Since then, five of us — Janet Ferguson, Lilian Haig, Beth Millar, Bill Stenhouse and I — have been working together to produce a book. It has been an enjoyable task, made easier by the vast amount of help, interest and encouragement given by members of the congregation. Please accept our thanks.

The book was launched at our recent Christmas Fayre in November. Over that weekend we sold 77 copies and 6 CD Rom, and were able to donate £249 to church funds.

Copies of both the book and the CD Rom are still available to £3 each. The CD Rom, which contains copies of the Echoes newsletter from 1950-2002, was made for us by Mr. Jim Gauld, nephew of the Rev. John Millar, and we are glad to acknowledge the considerable amount of work he has undertaken for us.

As a comparatively new member of St. John's, I have found it a privilege and a heart-warming experience to be part of the research/writing group. I have learned of the proud past of St. John's, and of how extreme difficulties have been overcome by the steadfastness and hard work of the congregation.

We look forward to hearing your verdict on our project. Buy a copy, read it, then let us know!

Mary Sherrard

### **GET TOGETHER**

Our invitation for everyone to come and join us on a Thursday seems to fall on deaf ears. So instead, to show how much you are missing, I'll go over some of the things that happen.

Apart from the usual cards, dominoes and scrabble, we celebrate several famous dates along with special birthdays. There are always gifts of chocolates, biscuits etc. pouring in.

At the moment we are looking forward to highlight of the year, our Christmas Party, which is always a great success. Feeling jealous? We start again on Thursday, January 8th at 2 p.m.

P.S. We also laugh a lot!

## **THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND GUILD**

Another successful year. Some of our members were able to enjoy a holiday in York with ladies from other guilds in the spring. Our summer outing was to St. Mary's Haddington — not as long a visit as had been planned as our bus broke down and we were mentioned on Radio Forth as a traffic hazard, but enjoyable once we arrived. St. John's were also privileged to host the Council Communion Service in June when Mrs. Job officiated. We thank everybody who supported our Coffee Mornings and Concert and the committee and members for all their support. We have had interesting talks and meetings and we would welcome new members of both sexes. Why not come and join us?

## **CHOIR**

On return from holiday in June, I was saddened to learn of the death of Ian Cripps. Ian was a loyal attender at weekly Choir Practice and at Church on a Sunday. He was always a perfect gentleman, and, if he was ever unable to attend, he always let me know. In November, the Choir was sad to learn of the death of another loyal member, May Whyte. Like Ian, May brought to the Choir her many talents, including her dancing skills and her happy personality. We have lost two members of the Choir family, and we thank God for the privilege of knowing them and for their friendship.

As Christmas approaches, we are very busy at our weekly rehearsals. On Friday 12th December we have our Carol Party in the Church Hall at 7.30 p.m. Please come along and join in the carol singing and enjoy a Christmas Supper Tickets are £3 and we hope to raise some money for Church funds. On Sunday 14th December, we are again assisting the Sunday School with the music for their Nativity Play. The following week, some of the Choir will be carol singing at Abbeyfield on the afternoon of Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> December, and the following day we are providing some Christmas entertainment at The Get Together at 2 p.m. in the Church Hall. As in previous years, on Christmas Sunday 21st December at 11 a.m. the Service will be Lessons and Carols with the Choir. Altogether a busy but enjoyable time for us all.

My appeal for new members was a little more successful than previously, but, as warned, insufficient of you lent your voice, so you leave me no choice but to continue my havers for new members. So we will expect to see some new members in January 2004!

Thanks to all the members of the Choir for their continued support. Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Brian A Booth

Organist

## **TREASURER'S REPORT**

On behalf of the Congregational Board, I wish to thank you all for the wonderful financial support over the past year to the work of the Church. Our two recent fund raising events have been great successes, with the Gift Day (including the income tax recoverable) raising £4,858, and the Christmas Fayre raising a sum in excess of £3,000.

Thank you all for your support and encouragement. Wishing you all a Peaceful and Happy Christmas.

Brian A Booth

Treasurer