

Connections Winter 2014

Comox Valley
Presbyterian
Church



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A MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

Growing up the Advent and Christmas season was a big deal. Every year we made an Advent Calendar in which each day would reveal a Christ-centred activity to help us prepare for Christmas. To this day I still make an advent calendar for Mike and me. I will admit I even enjoy the secular traditions like the Santa Claus parade and *A Christmas Carol* readings. In our family the biggest tradition was our Christmas day musical jam sessions. My Grandma would get out her banjo or ukulele, Grandpa would have his fiddle, Dad was on the harmonica, Mom was on the recorder or sharing her incredible voice, my brother twinkled on the piano and me, sometimes trying to keep up on the violin, sometimes singing, or sometimes just hitting the big bass drum. Music was a big part of our traditions at this time of year.

At some point someone had the foresight to do audio recordings of our musical gatherings. For this I am very

grateful as now our family is far apart and we rarely get together at Christmas—the fiddle and banjo remain silent since my Grandparents' deaths. Sometimes I'm saddened by the fact that those nights are things of the past but mostly I feel blessed to have those memories and look forward to making new ones.

Music has a way of reaching us in both our joy and sorrows. I can't say I'm the biggest fan of the Musak or schmaltzy Christmas carols that we already hear in the stores but I love the traditional carols of the season. I am always fascinated by the history of some of those carols and intrigued about the writers or composers. For example, did you know that The Twelve Days of Christmas is actually a very old carol dating to the 16th century? What is most interesting



is that this carol, although thought to be secular, was actually used during the turbulent time of the reformation in the Roman Catholic church as a way of teaching the church's catechism. In certain places and at certain times it was illegal to be Roman Catholic and as a result these lessons were taught in secret and used hidden meanings in songs. If you're not sure how these twelve gifts could have religious meanings, here they are.

The partridge is the only bird that will die to save the lives of its chicks thus the bird has become a symbol for Jesus. The two turtle doves represent the Old and New Testament. I would like to believe that the three French hens symbolize the trinity but am told that they actually represent the gifts of faith, hope and love as mentioned in 1 Corinth 13:13.

The four calling birds correspond to the four Gospels. Five golden rings represent the first five books of the Old Testament, which is known as the Pentateuch in the Hebrew Bible. Six geese a-laying stand for the six days in which God created the world. The seven swans represent the Holy Spirit and the seven gifts of the Spirit found in Isaiah 11:2-3.

The eight maids a-milking is a bit of a stretch, but due to the lowly place of a milk-maid in society, they have come to

represent those who are blessed in the beatitudes in Matthew 5. Nine ladies dancing represent the nine fruits of the Spirit as found in 1 Corinth 12:7-11. Ten leaping lords symbolize the ten commandments. Eleven pipers represent the eleven faithful disciples (minus Judas) who first piped the Gospel to the world. Finally, we reach twelve drummers drumming which represents the twelve different parts of the Apostle's Creed. Isn't that fascinating!

I would invite you to join me throughout the Advent season as we explore more stories behind favourite carols. Each Sunday will focus on a particularly interesting carol and the story behind its authorship. In this edition of the newsletter we have invited you to share with us what is your favourite carol and why. There will be many opportunities throughout this season to sing them!

Please note that there are going to be extra services during the month of December as well as other special events to help us celebrate this season and set our minds toward to the real reason we are celebrating. Let us join our voices with the angels who proclaimed Christ's birth, let us gather in the stable and sing songs of awe with the shepherds and let us take time to sing with Mary a quiet lullaby to the beautiful baby born in a manger— Emmanuel, God with us.

IMPORTANT DATES

Tuesday Dec. 9 Prayers for Peace
4:30 pm Join us for a time of prayer and worship. We need to pray for peace in our time and make room for the Prince of Peace in our world!

Sunday Dec. 14 Communion Service

Tuesday Dec. 16 Service of Joy
4:30 pm Join us for lots of music and a carol sing!

Fri. Dec. 19-(5—8 pm) & Sat. Dec. 20 (11—4 pm) Nativity Sets will be on display.

Wed. Dec. 24 at 5pm Christmas Eve Service
 Join us for this family friendly service. All are welcome!

Every Tuesday	Tai Chi	9:30 am	
	Coffee	10 am	Quality Foods Aspen Road
Every Friday	Centering Prayer	2:30 pm	

THE MEANING AND ORIGINS OF SOME CHRISTMAS SYMBOLS

Bells: Bells were embroidered around the hems of the Jewish priests robes. St. Patrick used bells to summon the faithful to services in Ireland, and his missionaries spread the practice and association of bells with Christianity around the world.



Christmas Trees: There is debate about exactly how trees became associated with Christmas, but it almost certainly started in Germany. At one point, religious plays were suppressed in Germany, and the popular symbol of the tree in Paradise plays made its way into the homes of Christians. By the 15th century, Christians started to decorate their trees not only with apples (the symbol of sin and the need for a Savior) but with small white wafers (the symbol of Christ's body, the Savior). These wafers were later replaced by little pieces of pastry cut in the shape of stars, angels, bells, etc.



Candy Canes: According to legend, in 1670 a choirmaster at Cologne Cathedral got a local candy maker to reshape white candy sticks into shepherds crooks to keep children in his living nativity scene occupied and quiet, while keeping a connection to the shepherds of the Christmas story. The Swedes added the red stripes in the mid-19th century



Holly: Holly stayed green past the winter solstice in many Northern European countries and was part of many pagan celebrations. When adopted by Christians the holly's sharp leaves represented Christ's crown of thorns and the red berries symbolized his blood shed for us at his crucifixion.

and neither will ever forget that Christmas.

Most peacekeepers served just six months on the Heights, but Ian did a full year. His reward was a promotion and a

one-year posting to Jerusalem, where he and Jean took full advantage of their opportunities to visit the many holy sites in that ancient city.



CHRISTMAS IN...GERMANY

Jack Morrison served as a UN peacekeeper in West Germany from 1958 to 1960. His job involved providing the whole army with the supplies it needed: everything from guns to toilet paper. At first, he was there alone. Because there was no room available in the PMQ (married quarters), his family could not join him until he found appropriate accommodation, entirely on his own. After he located a furnished three-room flat in a country home outside Hamer, near Dortman, the Canadian army flew Joan and their two young sons across the Atlantic.

The flat was some distance from Jack's base, and this was the case for several military families. The men carpooled. Joan hated this, as the car couldn't seem to drive past a *gasthaus* (pub) without stopping. Since they had bought their own little Renault, she insisted that Jack drive himself to work. The children were taken by school bus to the English-speaking school run by the military.

The family did a lot of travel in those three years: to Joan's old stomping grounds in England, to Scotland, to Ireland, and especially to the Netherlands, as the Dutch border was less than 100 km from the flat. They often spent their weekends there, camping.

Joan was nonplussed when she realized that the German *hausfrau* never made

bread or pie crust. They considered Joan's white bread a special treat, since the only bread they could buy was a grim shade of grey.

The family first reached Germany just before Christmas, and everyone was amazed at the local markets, which displayed masses of evergreens, and decorations of a type they'd never seen before. However, quaint as the village was, none of the householders put up outside lighting, and the inside lighting was quite different.

The neighbours waited until the children were asleep on Christmas Eve to erect their *Tannenbaumen*. These trees were not lit electrically. Instead, they mounted clip-on candle holders after the other decorations had been hung. Come morning, the candles were lit, and only then were the children invited to come in and view the shining Christmas tree.

Though the Germans ate lots of rich food, there was no fruit cake for Christmas. Instead, everyone ate *stollen*, a sweet yeast bread surrounding a ribbon of marzipan and packed with dried fruit.

Because Joan had to do the shopping and interact with the community, she learned a fair bit of basic German. Jack seldom had reason to speak to German nationals, but he did learn how to say *zwei bieren bitte*. And both of them knew how to say *Froliche Weinachten*.



CHRISTMAS IN...CAMBODIA

Sharon Scott spent a year in Cambodia, teaching elementary school. Though the majority of the students were Buddhists, the principal was a Christian Australian married to a minister, and the school did acknowledge Christmas. That may have been coincidental, however, as there was a two-week end-of-year holiday. By then, Charlie had joined Sharon, and they took the opportunity to visit friends in New Zealand. They'd thought of that country as "close", but in fact the flight there took eleven hours!

By the time of the Scotts' sojourn in the "far east", Cambodia had caught on to the small-c meaning of Christmas. Middle class families appreciated a good excuse to buy their children the same toys being sold in North America. The kids, of course were very excited by the prospect of presents, and chattered about what they were going to "get".



CHRISTMAS IN...NEW ZEALAND

The Scotts spent their two-week holiday with a couple they'd met long before in Calgary, who now lived in Wellington. This was definitely a big-C Christmas, with no technology ringing. On the day, friends and family of all ages gathered around the table for a magnificent potluck meal. Gingerbread. Modest gifts. Warm. Fuzzy. Wonderful.



CHRISTMAS IN...MALAWI

At the mission where the Scotts served for six years, Charlie conducted church services and Sharon taught school. The children of expatriates were not allowed to attend the regular Malawian schools. Instead, they went to a "designated" school, still under government authority. Even so, a few "designated" Malawian children were allowed to attend with the ex-pats, and all the children played well together. For the Malawian families involved, the catch was that a modest tuition fee was charged.

Thank you Tara Fry (daughter of Wally and Paula) who made 33 hats (one for each day of her visit this summer) and donated them to our Ladies Circle for distribution to those in need at Christmas.



CHRISTMAS HYMN SURVEY & MEMORIES

AND THE WINNER IS.....*all of us who enjoy the music of
Christmas past and present*



Comments:

#122 O come, oh come Emmanuel	<i>*the mystery of Advent in the key and tempo</i>
#144 'Twas in the moon of wintertime	<i>*sung as a solo at former church</i>
#145 In the bleak mid-winter	<i>*has a haunting melody and soulful verse *sad with beautiful melody *captures Christian feeling about Christmas</i>
#149 Away in a manger	<i>*Grandma sings me to sleep with it *I sang it at my Christmas concert at age 6; my cousin made me laugh and I got into trouble *I picture Jesus in a barn warmed by the animals –peaceful</i>
#150 Jesus, our brother, kind and good	<i>*easy to sing, reminder that everyone can serve the Lord</i>
#151 Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming	<i>*it's my wife's favourite</i>
#154 Silent Night	<i>*very special aunt sang it on local TV in English and German * my grandfather taught it to me as a little girl; reminds me of the best grandpa anyone could have</i>
#173 We three kings	<i>*I had once of the solo parts in junior choir</i>
#651 Guide me, o thou great Redeemer	<i>* not really a Christmas song, but very special to me</i>

Other favourites not in our hymn book:

Ere Zig God	<i>*a Dutch carol, Glory to God, song of the angels, sung every Christmas since childhood</i>
The Holy City	<i>*stirs my heart!</i>
O Holy Night	<i>* sang this as a solo in church on Christmas Eve many years ago</i>

PICTURE GALLERY

FASHION SHOW October 6

Helpers: (l-r) Jackie Rose, June Kuhn, Jeanne Webb, Maryka Wester



ADVENT DINNER November 28

Left: Corinne Wester helps children decorate tree

Below: The Forbidden Plateau Quartet

