



Advent, Christmas and Epiphany

The seasons of Advent, Christmas and Epiphany are the ones that tend to stay with me the most – the atmosphere, the music and all the candles, speaking of the promise of light in the darkness.

I am overweight, middle-aged, probably pre-diabetic, with hypertension and an arthritic knee. (I'm not looking for sympathy, but give that information so that when I say 'dancing' in the next sentence the reader can interpret the meaning of the word with those details in mind!) As we approached the start of Advent I was lucky to enjoy several occasions 'dancing' in crowds (including many of similar age and, um, condition as myself). Dancing joyfully to songs of protest and anger but also of hope, of determination and longing for light.

But there has also been a sort of melancholy tempering the joy. Many of the songs come from the counterculture of the 1980's and 90's full of hope for change in attitudes away from the overt racism, institutionalised homophobia and ever growing gap between the rich and poor that had been so much a part of the the society we had grown up with. There was some real change and cause for celebration as Section 28 was repealed and tighter laws on discrimination were brought into force. And we dared to hope that change in government would bring renewal,

Comment p3

From the Editor

Holiday Cheer on both sides of the Pond... p4

by Geri Falconer-Ferneau

December crossword p5

by Mthr

Sorry! p6

by Stuart Forbes

Three Ships Come Sailing in on Christmas Day p6

by Angela Morgan

away from uncaring individualism and grotesque consumerism to something more positive, hopeful, equitable and life-giving.

And yet in 2025 all those songs still seem astonishingly relevant; so many disappointments in the decades since, so many wasted opportunities, so many backward steps or at least refusals to make progress. And so the songs are still sung and danced to, and hope is still clung on to that maybe, one day, change will come. Which is why I so enjoy Advent and Christmas. The nativity story is one of hopes, finally fulfilled, after generations of waiting, trusting in the message of the prophets who had gone before with the promise of the light to come. We

see the child, born to a poor, scandalously unwed couple, from an unremarkable backwater town, housed in a cattle shed before being forced to flee a murderous tyrant and seek asylum in a foreign land. And so we are reminded that hope is still to be found, that there is light in the darkness, we just have to remember where to look for it.

I am grateful for this annual reminder and rejoice, with candles and carols, mulled wine and mince pies, stars and angels, finding joy and hope because the light still shines in the darkness and the darkness has never put it out.

Rev'd Jim



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From the Editor

December is with us and we are only 25 days away from Christmas. The evenings are getting darker earlier as is the way at this time of year. And although at the time of writing December is not here all the major supermarkets are advertising and the famous John Lewis advertisement is out and features the song "Where Love Lives" the hit song by Alison Limerick from the 1990s. It features a son connecting with his father at Christmas time through the song with nothing said between them.

In addition to the major stores there is a thriving local business community on Sydenham Road, Kirkdale and Dartmouth Road. On Kirkdale there is the gift shop Vardowich sells a mixture of the new and tastefully selected vintage pieces. The shop always smells of the fragrance of quality soap. There is also Kenrick's wines located near Sydenham Rail Station which sells a mixture wines, beers and spirits.

One of my regularly visited shops is Well Being that sells a wide range of health and food products. I recently purchased their unbranded porridge and with some goats'milk and blueberries was delicious.

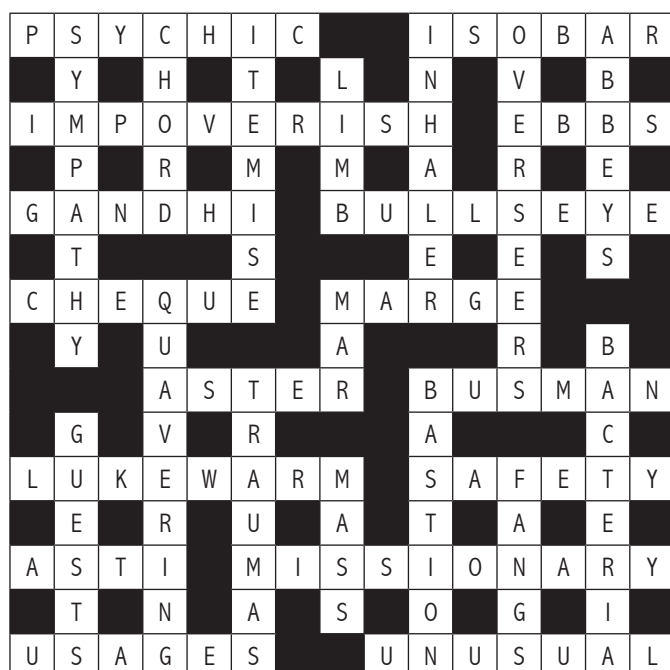
It would be remiss of me not mention Sarah the florist at Sydenham Flower Studio by the NatWest Bank who sells a wide range of wonderful flowers, reefs and Christmas trees. It does not matter what time of the year it is she or one of her colleagues is out there providing wonderful flowers for all occasions.

And right opposite the Greyhound pub is the Lewisham and Bromley Credit Union in the old Barclays Bank building. We also have branches in Catford and the Green Man community hub on the Bromley Road. At each of these branches the staff are there willing to help with membership and loans. Anyone who lives or works in the borough of Lewisham and Bromley or SE19 may become a member.

I want to wish all those who advertise with Sydenham Life, the writers and the distributors and all those who read the magazine and those that give feedback a Happy Christmas and all that is good in the New Year.

Geoffrey Cave, Sydenham Life Editor

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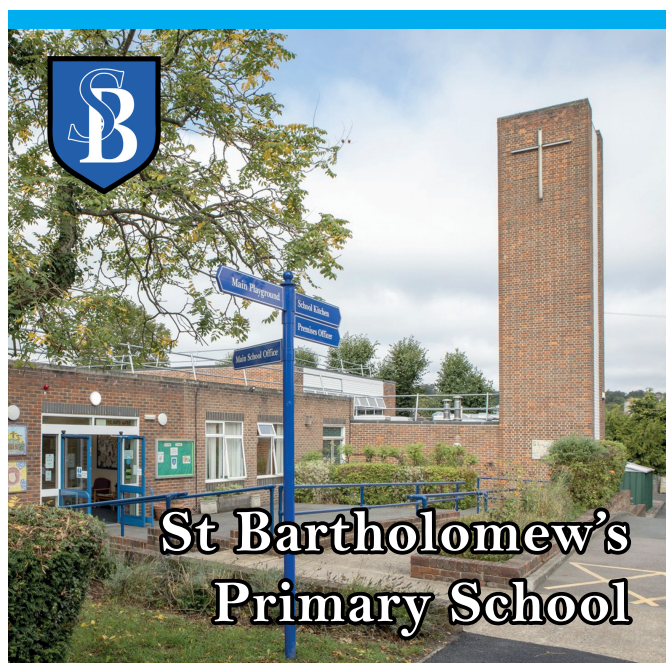
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Holiday Cheer on both sides of the Pond...

First time I set foot on British soil was 1996. Over the course of those years it has given me the opportunity to experience many holidays in America and many in the UK. Through the years I have come to appreciate many facets of each. Not necessarily one better than another but different. Let me share some of these with you as it relates to my perspective of the Christmas season...

I see the holiday season (I'm not talking about the merchandise available in the stores. After all the stores start to display holiday merchandise as soon as the children return to school) in the UK commencing after Guy Fawkes Day so you have essentially eight weeks to enjoy the season. In contrast America for intents and purposes waits until after she celebrates Thanksgiving (the fourth Thursday in November) before she declares it the Christmas holiday season; giving her four weeks to pack it all in.

From the onset Britain seems to begin the season earlier, hence having a more relaxed season than in America. Yet the hustle 'n' bustle of the shorter season can be intense but also exhilarating. From a female perspective, with more time to enjoy the festivities of the season it makes it less

stressful (women know what I mean when I say holiday stress).

As for decorations, America decorates! Do they ever!!! Over the course of the 30 years that we have been coming here Britain's residential decorations have become markedly more pronounced. When we first came it was commonplace to see things like white candles in windows. It has evolved so that now the full spectrum of the rainbow is on display in the holiday decorations and the quantity has definitely exploded; along with less religious and more animated themes. The season's sombreness seems to have given way to a much more jovial time. Britain's decorations are starting to rival America's decorations.

Both countries pretty much play the same music and have themed store window displays and street decorations in similar quantities. I admit I am quite amused with the idea that one of Britain's most popular Christmas songs is *The Fairytale of New York* by the Pogues. LOL

Food served on Christmas is much the same in either place. Both countries bake delightful Christmas cookies. Although mince pies are much more abundant in Britain, and they are delicious.

One of the things unique to the UK is the pantomimes at Christmas time – I love it! America does not have anything like it. There are plenty of singalongs and holiday plays and Christmas movies but no pantomimes. The stores' television commercials are another treasure Britain has that America does not. The British ones are thematic, whereas American commercials are more merchandise driven.

Boxing Day is another unique feature of the season in particular to Britain (and Canada). I recall as a child I my grandfather saying that was the day that he, a postman, went around and received his Christmas gifts from the people on his mail route. The fact that the day after Christmas is a holiday I think is an utter treasure. Here you celebrate the biggest holiday of the year then have a day to relax and recover from it; and enjoy the memory of another truly wonderful holiday. In America you celebrate the biggest holiday of the year, imbibing in Christmas cheer, enjoying the good food, and celebrating gathering with those near and dear to us. Then for many you must return to work first thing the following morning. It seems to put a wee bit of a damper on the celebration knowing one has to be up and functioning by 8am the next morning.

Christmas cards in America are much more personalized. It is not uncommon to have the sender incorporate a photo or several of their family as part of the card in addition to including a yearly newsletter. Perhaps because distance there can be so great one does not always see friends and family on a regular basis and the card serves as a means of bringing one's family and friends up-to-date on family events. British cards seem to fundamentally be more cordial and holiday focused wishing one the best of the season.

Steeped in the midst of the holiday season it is so easy to get lost or caught up in little things and as a result lose sight of the whole picture. In the end it is a season of profound goodwill. For those of you who did not watch the series Ted Lasso, I would like to leave you with a toast put forth on a Christmas episode that I found most touching.

"To the family we're born with and to the family we make along the way."

So for all of you whatever your faith, I wish you a fun, rich and meaningful December holiday season.

Geri Falconer-Ferneau

December – Mthr Bea

Across

1. Daring broadcast of unsure SOS after advent (15)
8. Pointer tour ending in a squabble (5)
9. Big bird in a frock (3)
11. Glower at the end of the month (5)
12. Unruly vikings going AWOL (7)
13. Cricketer's terms take too long (7)
14. Get rid of posh saint (4)
15. Led to Bethlehem? Oh no! Retreat! (4)
16. ChatGPT botched oil for accompanying pizza (5)
18. Photo of Mthr Bea? Wizard! (5)
20. Adjust order of merit without second decoration (4)
22. Rees-Mogg has a hangover? (4)
25. Swimmer raced back with Harry (7)
26. Name of Greek character quietly taken ill (7)
28. Three, bizarrely, is a number (5)
29. Spain out? Try Bath (3)
30. At first, not all the animals learned of the nativity (5)
31. Driving home for Christmas, Chris takes gift (model & 4 drugs) for congressmen (15)

Down

1. Gather what happens at midnight on the 24th (5)
2. Mary's maids (7)
3. Novice bishop in fresh, immaculate clothing (6)

1		2		3		4				5		6		7
8						9		10		11				
12								13						
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18		19				20		21			22	23		
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28						29				30				
31														

4. Decent piano (7)
5. Up late, the French King's emaciated (8)
6. Ban space, ban progress (7)
7. Tying tie, taking strong drink (9)
10. Ensemble from Switzerland run up Spanish river (5)
14. Navigate for Melchior? (9)
17. Fill up on fare (8)
19. Zeppelin broadcast is cool (7)
20. Overheard ends of stories (5)
21. I'm up a mountain, on a heritage organisation's lodge (7)
23. Deviant to loom over very fiery cocktail (7)
24. Heard a little bird ring seal (6)
27. 4 seconds for eastern Europeans (5)

Sorry!

Are you a 'sorry' person? I don't mean are you 'pathetic,' but rather do you say 'sorry' rather a lot? I know I'm always saying it, and it's often said to me.

Recently I've seen quite a lot written about the use of the word 'sorry.' I've heard it said, "The trouble with you Brits is that you are always apologising!" It's seen as a sign of weakness. But it's a misunderstanding to think that 'sorry' is used as an apology. If we do use it when apologising we do it profusely by saying something like, "I'm most terribly sorry" or "I really am very sorry." But more often we don't use the word at all to express genuine sorrow. We might say something like, "I apologise unreservedly;" or "Please forgive me, I wasn't thinking clearly;" or "That was my fault, I was being stupid." The longer the sentence used, the more profound the remorse.

So why do we say 'sorry' so often? It's an important word in our society. It's glue that helps unite us to one another. It acts to oil the friction of social engagement. It acknowledges the other person without admission of guilt. But its precise meaning depends on context and tone of voice. Here are some examples I've heard or used recently.

- 'Sorry?' – meaning "I didn't hear what you said."
- 'Sorry' – two people squeezing past each other on a narrow pavement.
- 'Sorry' – navigating a crowd meaning, "Excuse me, may I come by?"

- 'Sorry' – someone pushing brusquely past you meaning "look out – I'm in a hurry."
- 'Sorry' – friendly commiseration when upstaging someone.
- "Sorry, – but" – someone disagreeing with something you say.
- 'Sorry' – "but we're going to have to let you go," meaning, "You're fired!"

None of these express real remorse. You can probably think of other examples where there is no thought of genuine regret for giving offence to somebody else.

But there is a 'sorry' which is life changing. The Bible's word for 'sorry' is 'repentance.' It means a complete reset of mind and outlook. Instead of ignoring God it involves us turning to engage with him. We ask for forgiveness for all that has been wrong in our lives and look to the risen Christ as satisfaction for our sins. We might be haunted by our past misdeeds. Or when someone has hurt us we might say we can forgive but not forget. But when God forgives, he forgets. Our sins are 'thrown into the sea of his forgetfulness' as the paraphrase puts it.

This is liberating. It lightens our soul and brings joy to our heart. It frees us to love God and our neighbour.

I shall be a 'sorry' person still when I'm out and about. But I trust also I shall never forget that God forgets when I say 'sorry' genuinely to Him.

Stuart Forbes

Three Ships Come Sailing in on Christmas Day

I was thinking, what could I write about as we enter the Christmas period? The festive season seems to start earlier every year! I allowed my thoughts to drift. What entered my mind without any effort on my part was the Christmas Carol I saw Three Ships Come Sailing In.

On Christmas day most people will enjoy being with family and friends; copious amounts of food and drink will be shared; the giving of presents etc. For those who are mindful of the significance of the day, it will be the telling of the Nativity the birth of Jesus. The New Testament (St Matthew chs.1-2 & St Luke ch.2 vs.1-35) gives insight into the circumstances that led to his parents travelling to Bethlehem. The characters that are part of this special story - Archangel Gabriel, the unwitting parents to be, three wise men, a jealous and vindictive King, shepherds, animals and a celestial star to mark the event. The drama and joy of the birth of Jesus are traditionally translated into school and church nativity plays as well as film and television. After Jesus's birth, Joseph and Mary received a warning that they would be in danger if they remained in Bethlehem, so they fled to the City of Nazareth. Their child became a Nazarene.

We look at this event from a distance of 2000+ years.

But this story is not unique. Over the centuries there have been families who found themselves having to seek a safe place or country to start a new life. When a despotic king seeks to murder all the children under the age of two, what would you do? It would be not a casual decision; in fleeing there is the hope that a safe and secure place could be found until it is safe to return home. The following lines in the carol made me think about the about families today fleeing their homelands and taking perilous journeys:

And what was in those ships all three, On Christmas day, on Christmas day?

Our Saviour Christ and His Lady, On Christmas day in the morning.

The story of Christ's birth continues to be told. At the time of his birth, he was one of many children that were being born. His parents fled to safety, and he was able to grow up and demonstrate the love and charity that we now hold as part of our Christian values. As we share the joy of celebrating Christmas by feasting and the giving of presents, let it also be a time of reflection and to think of those who seek the gifts of safety, peace and friendship.

Angela Morgan (London Blue Badge Tourist Guide).

Instagram: angelamorgan365

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24th Wed
Dec | 16:00
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24th Wed
Dec | 23:30
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