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READ IT! LOVE IT! LIVE IT!

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Activities



**Where  
do you  
find  
Jesus?**



# Dear Reader

Christmas is nearly upon us again and I'd like to take this opportunity of wishing all our readers a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year from myself and all the team at CathCom.

At this time of year we remember and celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our schools and parishes play an integral part in these celebrations. This edition however, also examines where we can see Jesus in the world around us today and I have learnt a lot about the different ways that we can do this. In fact, sometimes, we can encounter the Lord where we least expect to do so – in times of sadness, trauma and devastation. But we can also experience Jesus in each one of us, whether we are young or old, rich or poor, sick, refugee, prisoner and of course, whatever race we may be. As part of the joy and happiness of Christmas, we exchange gifts with our loved ones. Appeals such as 'Love in a Box' (Shoebbox Appeal), helps to try and give a little of what we have in such abundance, to those who have little or nothing at all.

The Catholic Church is supporting the independent public inquiry into prison conditions in England and Wales, with a view to future reform, and worldwide aid agencies also continue the wonderful work of globally helping those in need, who are suffering through destitution and illness. May this work of helping others always continue for however long it is needed.

Jesus came to humanity as a helpless babe born in the most humble of conditions - yet we can still find him alive and well today - in all of us. May you have a blessed and joyful Christmas.

Julia  
Editor

# 'Our society deserves a prison system which is safe, secure and humane'

## – says Bishop Richard Moth

**Speaking after the Prison Governors Association called for an independent public inquiry into the state of prisons in England and Wales, the Catholic Liaison Bishop for Prisons, Bishop Richard Moth said:**

"I am struck by the call by the Prison Governors Association, the people who actually manage our prison service, for an independent public inquiry into the state of prisons. For prison governors to unanimously make such a call underlines the current serious nature of the state of the prison service.

In the last year there have been 105 self-inflicted deaths in our prisons, a terrible loss of human life and human potential. At the same time, non-fatal self-harm incidents and serious attacks on staff have both increased at an alarming pace. I know from our own prison chaplains the nature of the problems caused by staff shortages across the prison estate. But I also want to be clear that my aim in speaking out is not to attempt to apportion blame, but rather to urge us all to work together to improve the situation.

Last week I welcomed the announcement by the new Justice Secretary, Liz Truss, of an extra £14 million to recruit over 400 extra prison staff. It is a welcome

move in the right direction, but more needs to be done in terms of both resource and reform. Our society deserves a prison system which is safe, secure and humane."

**"Visiting prisons is, of course, a central aspect of every bishop's ministry. At Christmas time in particular I believe it is extremely important to be with those Catholics inside the prison walls, to remind them that they are valued members of our Church."**



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# Where do you find Jesus?

Continued from page 1

**IT'S HARD TO believe that another year has passed by and Christmas is just around the corner again.**

The usual round of eating, drinking and making merry is almost certainly on the cards for many of us and for parents, attending the school Christmas carol services and nativity plays is all part of the usual seasonal activities. And rightly so, as we prepare to celebrate the Incarnation – the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ which took place over two thousand years ago. The Christmas season should be, and hopefully is, a time of joy as we prepare to be thankful for Christ entering our lives entirely for our sakes. Yet it is so easy to become caught up in the rush, mayhem and madness of Christmas preparations as we struggle to pull everything together in time for the great day. Of course, it goes without saying that Christmas Day is an important date in our calendar, as we remember and teach our children that Jesus became man for our sake, but experienced the lowliest start in life.

The 'Crib' – the traditional setting of stable with Mary and Joseph, infant Jesus and shepherds, is a common sight at this time of the year in homes, churches and schools. Jesus is instantly recognisable as the infant lying in the manger under the adoring gaze of his parents and those led to him by the guidance of the star. Yet in our everyday lives we can witness the Lord – whether it's Christmas or not – in others. We have only to look

around on any average day to be aware of this. In our families and friends, in our schools and workplaces and in our parishes, we know we can find the Lord. And the reason for this is simple – Jesus is present in each and every one of us. Sadly, 2016 has brought its share of disasters and misfortunes which the world has had to deal with and respond to. Earthquakes and hurricanes, storms and flooding and droughts and landslides to name but a few of the year's global misfortunes. Victims have lost their homes, livelihoods and in the very worst cases, their lives. But Christ is still present and active within these people and Christ always walks beside them. And this is not all. We have only to reference numerous charitable societies and agencies that exist and work in many countries, to be aware of the massive relief and aid that is given to those who most need it. Again, the inspiration comes from the Lord, whether or not we recognise it as such.

Society is made up of so many different types of people. Our race, creed, colour, age, sexual orientation, personality and physical appearance give us our own unique blueprint – and thank God for it. Yet whether we are rich, poor, employed or not, homeless, in prison or sick, we are all of value because we are God's own people. And we can see Jesus in every one of us.



## All are Healed

*Bishop Mark O'Toole, the Bishop of Plymouth, speaks at Lourdes of how suffering can be transformed in Christ.*

"I FIRST CAME to Lourdes when I was 17 with a group of other young people. We spent the week living here in the City of the Poor, cleaning the dormitories and bathrooms in the morning, and working in the Baths in the afternoon. It was an experience of the Gospel and of the Risen Lord.

There was one experience which took place in the Baths which particularly sticks in my mind. It was when I encountered the extraordinary faith of a young English pilgrim who came with his carer. He had Spina bifida so his body was very contorted and it took ages to undress him. We laid him on a stretcher to lower him into the bath. Knowing how cold the water is, I thought he would shout the house down. But as we put him into the water he began to smile and his smile grew wider and wider. And then he began to giggle and to laugh. It was very infectious. His smile and his laughter illuminated the whole of the baths that afternoon.

This young man knew what it was to trust, and in the face of his suffering to continue to be hopeful. He taught us helpers something of the meaning of human suffering and how, in Christ, it is transformed.

It's important to remember that the Gospels record that Jesus healed all those who came to him. For some that healing was physical; for many it was spiritual, psychological, personal – deeply human. Jesus knows that a crippled heart or mind is as debilitating as a broken body.

Each of us on pilgrimage knows our vulnerability and weakness. We know our need of the Lord. And dear sick and frail pilgrims who travel with us, thank you for the witness you give us, for the courage you show in the face of suffering. Continue to bless us with your presence and to show us the tender face of Jesus, Our Lord."

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# Time to get crafty...!

**WHEN MY CHILDREN were young, I once saw how to make your own chocolate Advent calendars, on a television programme. Being keen on arts and crafts, this seemed to be an ideal task for me.**

So, without further ado I began on the project. Firstly, you had to draw your picture on thick cardboard, examples given were a snowman, Santa Claus, a star or bell. You had to collect twenty-five plastic milk bottles and cut off the screw tops with the surrounding piece of plastic still attached. You then had to fasten these to the picture, at suitably spaced intervals and then cover the area with cotton wool, spraying it the appropriate colour or leaving it white for the snowman.

Finally, when you've completed the picture's details, numbered the lids and filled each little plastic screw off 'window' with a chocolate or sweet, hey presto – your Advent calendar is completed!

Now, I have four children, so this, of course, meant four calendars and they took up a huge amount of room in the home. They were also very big and heavy when finished. Quite honestly, it appeared in retrospect, to have been a lot of effort for a less than average result.

Each Christmas, we, as Christians, put in our own effort as we celebrate the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. During both Advent and the season of Christmastide, we often try to consider our own spirituality, giving thanks for all we have received and praising God.

## JEWEL IN THE CROWN

We also try to help others as part of our pre-Christmas 'giving'. Advent is a special time when we can become even closer to God, and Christmas, when we have so much to rejoice about, cannot help but cement this. In fact, it is truly a jewel in

the crown of our Christian year.

Therefore, if you're looking for a good spiritual 'result' this Christmas, my advice would be to pay less attention to some of those hectic everyday activities and use your energy and talents instead for the glory of God. And, unless you're really keen, never attempt to make Advent calendars for your children!

## BUT...

If you're enthusiastic about being creative and crafty, you really can make some lovely gifts and decorations for your friends and family this Christmas. It can sometimes be an expensive time of the year, so here are the top ten tips for you and your children to have lots of fun, become inspired and maybe cut down on some of your festive costs:

## 1. ANGEL

If you need to buy an angel to top off your Christmas tree, here's a top tip... Simply buy a small, very inexpensive doll (such as the one shown) and then put your own dress on her. Any small piece of material will do the job and you can achieve a stunning result!



## 2. PINE CONES

It's so easy to produce some beautiful decorations for your tree! Pine cones make a lovely display and can be used either in their natural state or can be spray or hand painted any colour you wish. Gold and silver look particularly decorative. Don't forget to tie some cotton through the top of the cone to make a loop to hang on the tree with.



## 3. BOOKMARKS

Bookmarks make a fantastic present for anyone who is a reader. You can easily get a template from the internet and it's nice to put on special pictures to personalise them. If you've got a laminator, this will make the bookmark really durable. If not, make out of thin cardboard. If you put a couple of these with a book, you've really got that present all wrapped up!

## 4. HYDRANGEA TABLE CENTRE

If you've got a hydrangea bush or you know someone who has, carefully cut off the flowers at the end of the season and leave them to completely dry out. Don't rush this. Then spray paint them red, gold or silver to make a stunning table centre with a tall candle in the middle. It will look terrific when you have your Christmas meal!

## 5. FUDGE

If you're good at cooking or baking there are so many easy present options which you can make! Homemade fudge is popular with many people and is quick and easy to make. Here's a simple recipe:

### Super Christmas Fudge

#### Ingredients

- 397g can Condensed Milk
- 150ml milk
- 450g demerara sugar
- 115g butter

You will also need...

20cm square tin lined with baking parchment



#### Method

1. Place the ingredients into a large non-stick saucepan and melt over a low heat, stirring until the sugar dissolves.
  2. Bring to the boil then simmer for 10-15 minutes, stirring continuously and scraping the base of the pan. Take care while the mixture boils and during stirring as the fudge will be VERY hot! To see if it's ready, drop a little of the mixture into a jug of ice-cold water. A soft ball of fudge should form. Alternatively, check with a sugar thermometer if you have one (the fudge should be approximately 118°C).
  3. Remove the fudge from the heat and beat until its very thick and starting to set (this should take about 10 minutes).
  4. Pour into the prepared tin and leave to cool before cutting into squares.
- TIP Try adding nuts, fruit or chocolate chips at the end of step 2!  
Place in small plastic bags and tie the tops with ribbon to make an attractive gift.



### 6. JAMS & CHUTNEYS

Home-made jams and chutneys make marvellous Christmas presents. For a festive feel, decorate your lids with a circle of Christmas wrapping paper or Christmassy material and tie around with ribbon.

### 7. TREE DECORATIONS

Use unwanted items from around the home to make tree decorations – you'd be surprised what can look really effective with a bit of glitter, a hanging loop and some creativity! Here are a couple of examples:

An unwanted belt buckle with a hook attached looks pretty and decorative:

Plastic pastry/cake cutters with added glitter give the tree some pizzazz!



### 8. DECORATED BAGS FOR PRESENTS OR FOR THE TREE

Small decorated bags can be filled with sweets or a little gift and either given as a present or hung on the Christmas tree. Just cut a length of material to the size you would like – allowing extra for hemming – fold in half to form a rectangle and sew up the two side seams. Next fold over the open top of the bag all the way round, to form a hem and sew, leaving a small opening. Finally pass a ribbon or tape through the hem at the top to make a cute draw-string bag. Don't forget to sew up the small opening afterwards. Plain or patterned materials can be used – it's up to you and you can decorate the bags with beads or sequins too, if you wish.

### 9. HAND KNITTED JUMPERS, CARDIGANS, HATS & SCARVES

Can you knit? If so, there's a whole world of home-made and hand-made presents out there for you to make and give! What is really lovely is that you can tailor-make each item for the person you are giving it to, for a really personal touch. However, if you want to keep things nice and easy, knitted scarves are warm, useful and colourful. There are plenty of free patterns available on the internet.

### 10. PETITS FOURS

Finally, it's back to food! If you don't want to actually do any cooking or baking, Petits Fours could be the ideal present for you to create and give. All you need is marzipan, some tiny/Petits Fours cases and decorations.

Roll the marzipan into equal sized balls – an appropriate size to fit into the cases. Dust some of the balls with cocoa powder and dip some of the others into melted dark, milk and white chocolate. Leave some of these plain. Others can then be rolled in finely chopped nuts, grated chocolate and desiccated coconut. Chill in the fridge. Present in a gift box.



**Have fun being  
creative this  
Christmas!**

# Investigating Modern Day Saints

**Sainted by God in our modern times by K Rodgers**  
– A 'Reach' reader

**SAINTS ARE MEN and women who are often seen framed by a halo. Saints are God's best friends. And I know a few – modern ones – who walk the earth. They are beautiful people, who have aligned their hearts and their wills with God's will. Every day they say:**

"Thy will be done", and that's why they're saints. It's total self-giving and a daily love letter conversation with God. I would like to mention one: Fr Paul.

Fr Paul is the Parish Priest, at Our Lady of Ransom Church. He's been involved with prison chaplaincy, and he's also the Essex Police Chaplain. To my knowledge, all the priests that have done their priestly ministry at my local parish have been prison chaplains.

Our Lady of Ransom, is Mary, Mother of God, who

spoke to a merchant to create, and found an order in Spain, to ransom and free the Christian captives during the crusades.

A past member of our parish said to Fr Paul that he would be good for the Parish – and he is. We often find his homilies send a message to us. They are clear and personal; almost like he has written them for us individually.

On one occasion, I was thinking about of a friend I have not seen for a long time and Fr Paul said that some people 'need time', in his homily. On another Sunday, I was thinking about the word 'love' and Fr

Paul said 'love' at the exact same time, again in his homily! God is love, said the saint, and Gospel writer, John. The Priest at the altar acts in persona Christi – in the person of Christ. God talks to us through his saints; through his best friends.

How do we become a saint? We can follow our Mother Mary, the greatest saint of all, who said, "Let it be done according to thy word". So maybe we too can say,

"Let your will be done, according to thy word, in my life".

**We would really love to hear your stories of kindness, loving, caring, generosity or bravery in adults or children. We'd like you to tell us all about anyone you feel has 'gone the extra mile' in this way. Please send your stories of these wonderful modern day saints to:**

**[editor@cathcomreach.com](mailto:editor@cathcomreach.com) – with a subject header of 'Modern day saints'.**

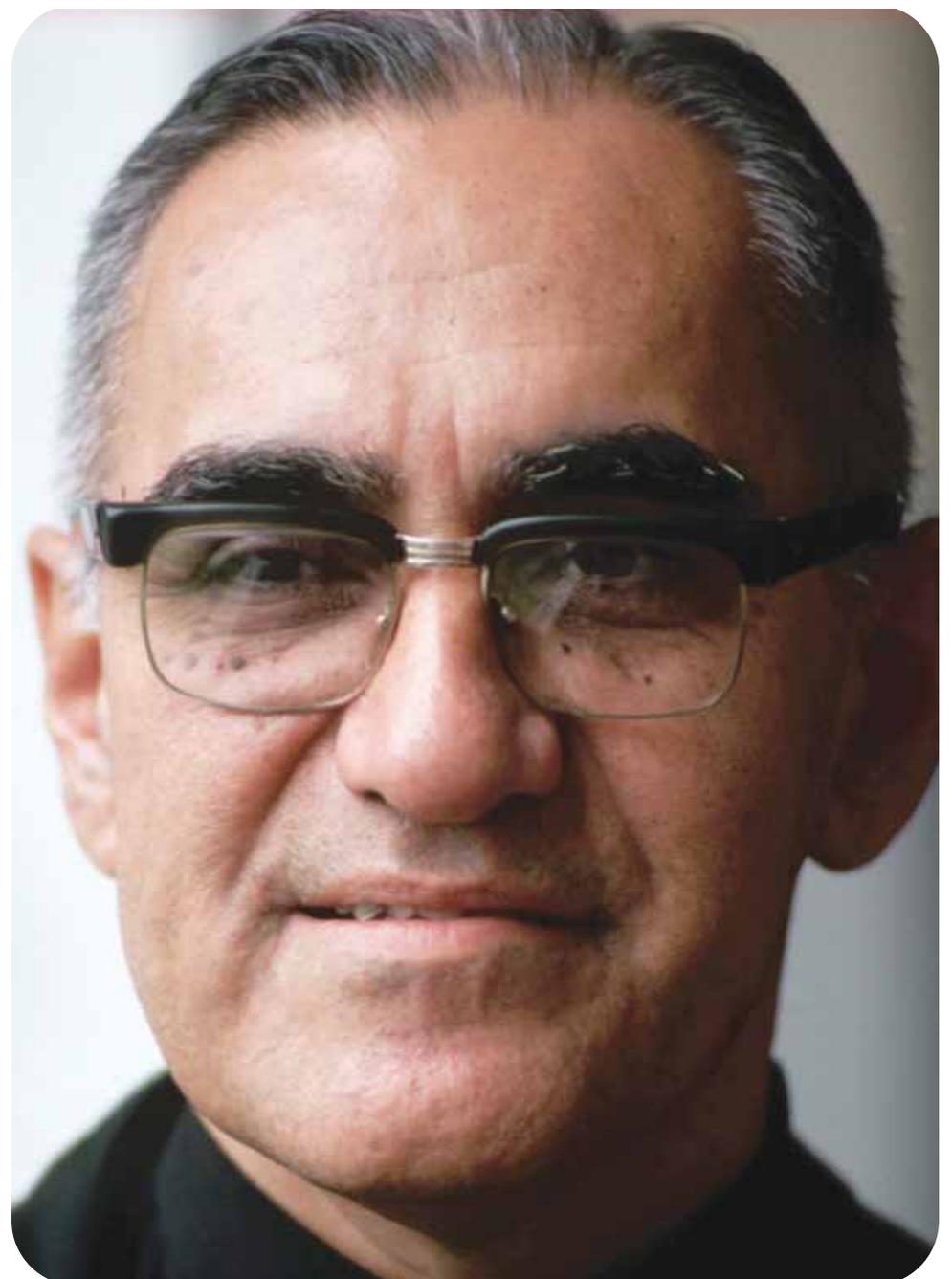
## Óscar Romero – Saint & Servant of God

**Óscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez** (15 August 1917 – 24 March 1980) was a prelate of the Catholic Church in El Salvador, who served as the fourth Archbishop of San Salvador. He spoke out against poverty, social injustice, assassinations and torture. In 1980, Romero was assassinated while offering Mass in the chapel of the Hospital of Divine Providence.

Pope Francis stated during Romero's beatification that "His ministry was distinguished by a particular attention to the most poor and marginalized." Hailed as a hero by supporters of liberation theology inspired by his work, Romero, according to his biographer, "was not interested in liberation theology", but faithfully adhered to Catholic teachings on liberation, desiring a social revolution based on supernatural interior reform.

In 1997, Pope John Paul II bestowed upon Romero the title of Servant of God, and a cause for beatification and canonization was opened for him. The cause stalled, but was reopened by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012. He was declared a martyr by Pope Francis on 3 February 2015, paving the way for his beatification, which took place on 23 May 2015.

Latin American church groups often proclaim Romero an unofficial patron saint of the Americas and/or El Salvador. Catholics in El Salvador often refer to him as "San Romero". Even outside of Catholicism, Romero is honoured by other Christian denominations, including Church of England and Anglican Communion through the Calendar in Common Worship, as well as in at least one Lutheran liturgical calendar. Archbishop Romero is also one of the ten 20th-century martyrs depicted in statues above the Great West Door of Westminster Abbey in London.



# Little Peace



**INSIDE**  
 What presents will you give? Page 2

**INSIDE**  
 Christmas things to make ...!  
 Page 3

Put the flat edge of the template next to the fold, draw round it and cut it out

Create 3 identical shapes

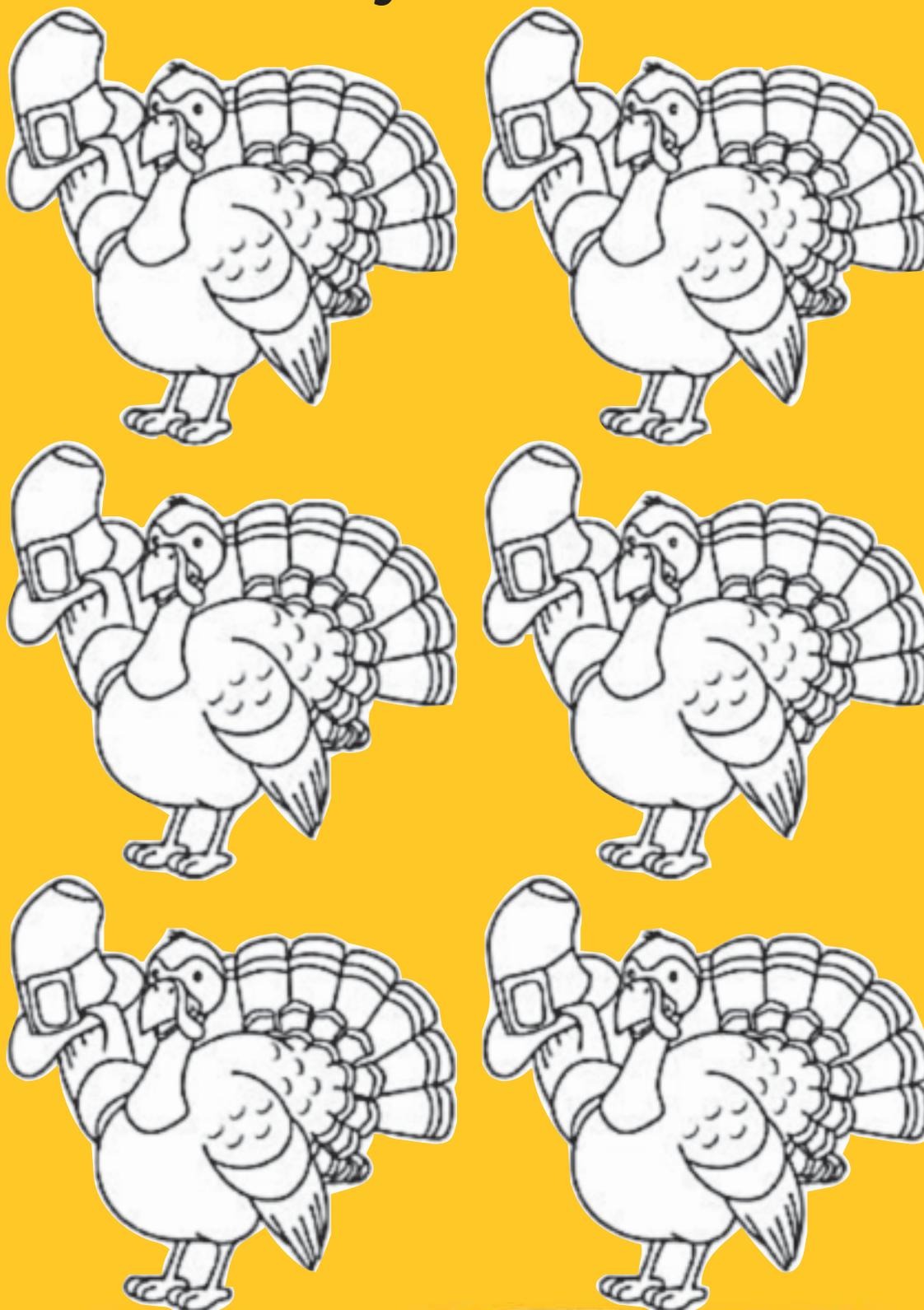
Take one shape and glue the back of ONE half

Take a second line up the fold them together

**INSIDE**  
 53  
 Join the Dots ...  
 Page 4

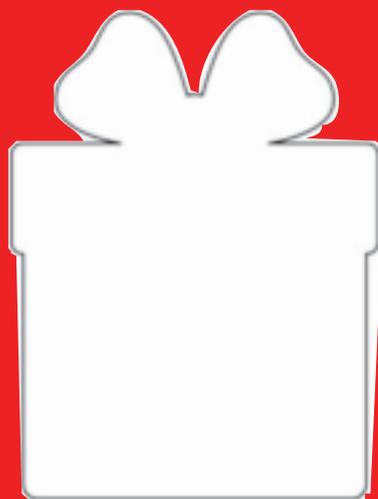
## Look very carefully...

Which turkey is the odd one out?



**As followers of Jesus, what will you give to those you love this Christmas?**

**Write your special gift in each present...**

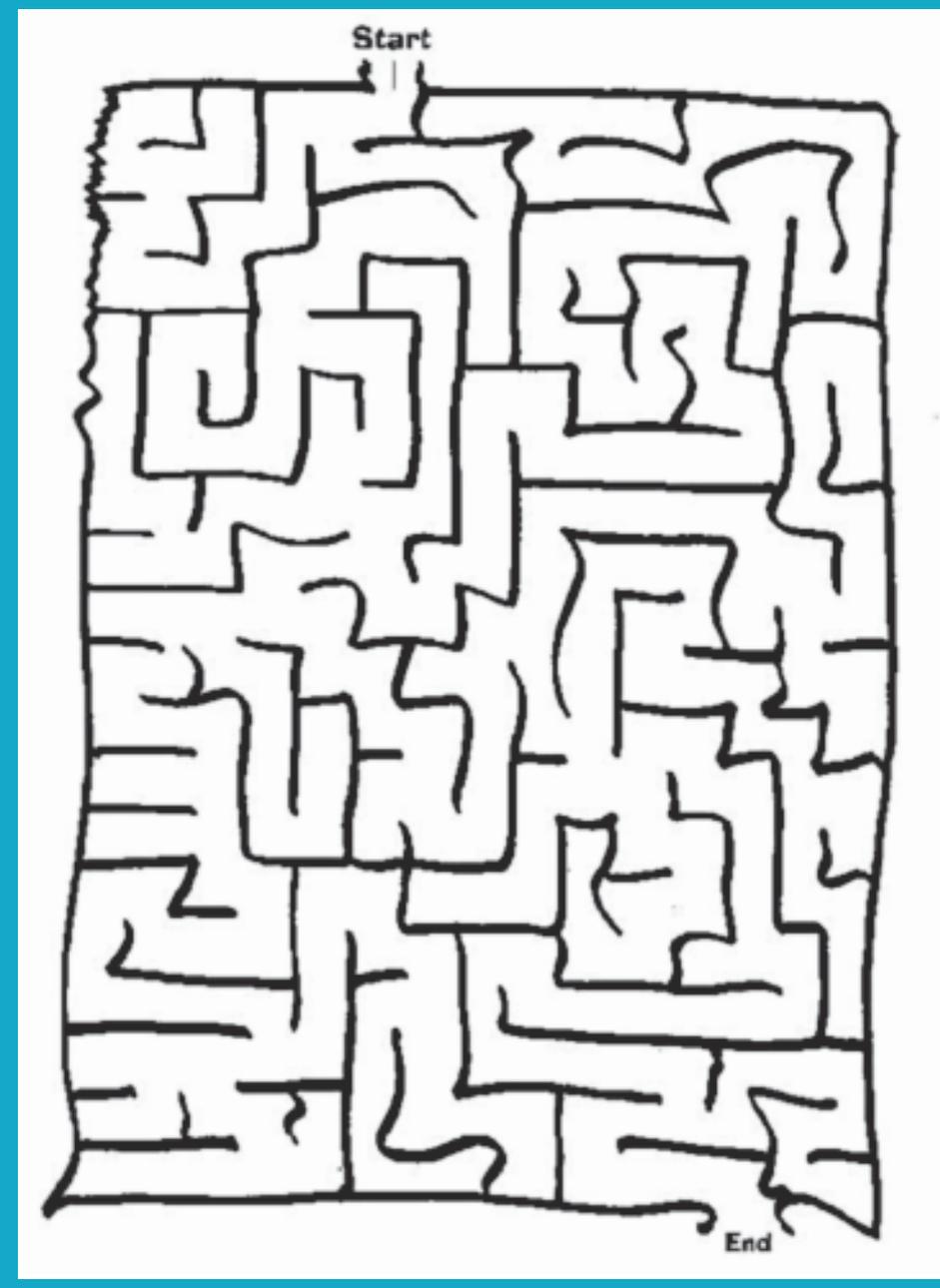


**...and then colour in your presents making them look really Christmassy!**

# A-maze all your friends!

This maze is tricky

Can you make it to the end?



## Make your own Christmas Baubles

**Step 1:** Cut out a semi-circle on a piece of card to be your template

**Step 2:** Fold another piece of card - maybe from a cereal packet

**Step 3:** Put the flat edge of the template next to the fold, draw round it and cut it out

**Step 4:** Create 3 identical shapes

**Step 5:** Take one shape and glue the back of ONE half

**Step 6:** Take a second shape, line up the folds and stick them together and put them to one side

**Step 7:** Take the 3rd shape, unfold it, put it face down and cover the back in glue

**Step 8:** Put some string in a "J" shape making sure it comes out of the top by the fold.

**Step 9:** Take the two shapes you glued earlier, line up the blank sides with the shape on the table and then press it onto glue

**Step 10:** Bend back the piece that was flat on the table and then leave it to dry

**Top Tip:** You could use old Christmas Cards or glue wrapping paper to the card and you could use more than 3 shapes to create more sides.

# Christmas Dot to Dot



# Book Reviews

For Young and Old

## Fasting and Feasting

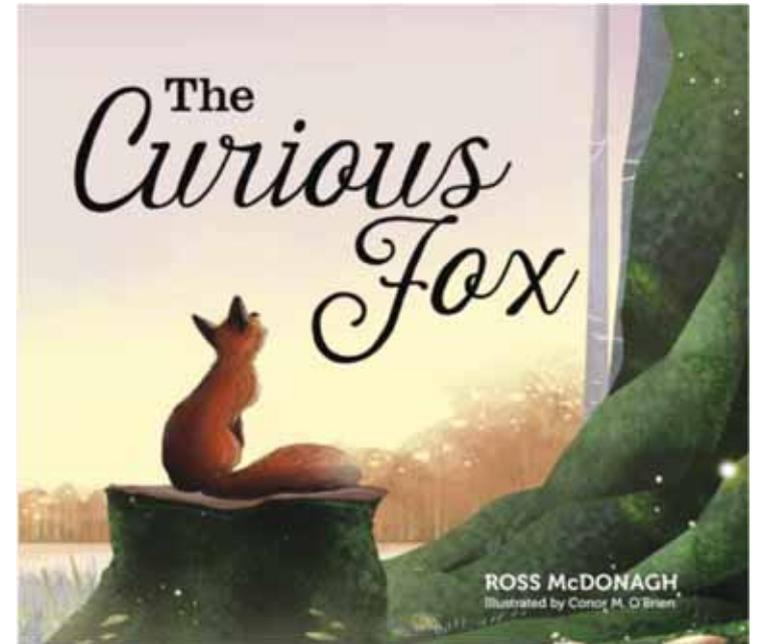
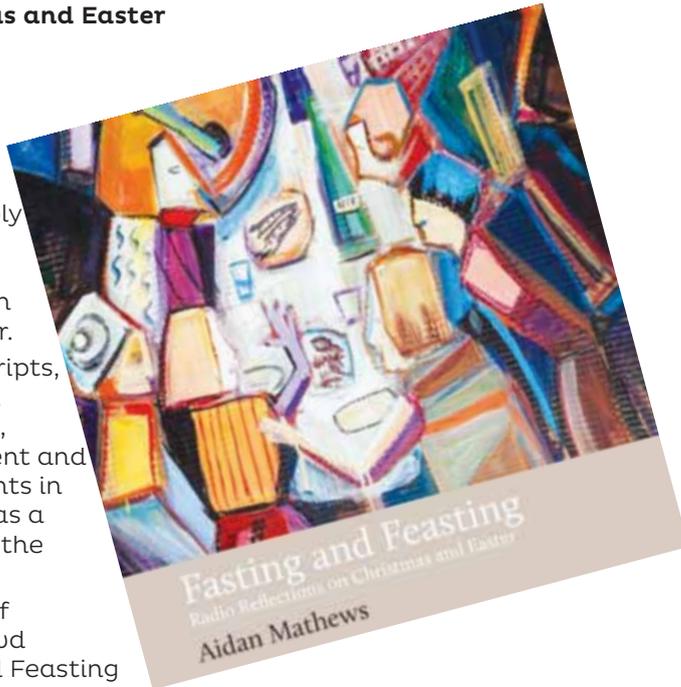
Radio Reflections on Christmas and Easter

Aidan Mathews

In *Fasting And Feasting*, Aidan Mathews, the Irish poet and playwright, deploys his inimitable prose style in a deeply personal and heartfelt consideration of the two most inspiring events in the Christian calendar: Christmas and Easter.

Comprising a series of radio scripts, broadcast at the two liturgical seasons over the last ten years, *Fasting And Feasting* is an urgent and earthy examination of key events in the Catholic tradition, as well as a profoundly moving account of the author's own faith journey.

A seamlessly executed hybrid of confessional writing and shrewd scriptural analysis, *Fasting and Feasting* is a thought-provoking and necessary volume that takes a refreshing flesh-and-blood approach to its understanding of the Gospels and the core values of Christianity.



## The Curious Fox

Ross McDonagh

“Once upon a time there was a fox cub, who awoke one morning with 'something puzzling on his mind!...'”

In this exquisitely illustrated story, told in rhyming couplets, a curious little fox cub embarks on an extraordinary journey to discover his own unique attribute. Following touching encounters with a colourful peacock, a speedy hare and a stunning tiger – among an unforgettable host of wild creatures – our hero learns an invaluable life lesson, and makes some delightful new friends.



## Give us your views...

'Reach' will be running a series of articles which studies so-called Catholic myths and traditions and explores the truth behind them. Under investigation will be subjects such as:

- Why do Catholics worship Mary?
- Why do Catholics go to Confession?
- Why are Catholics obsessed with guilt?
- Why do Catholics go to Mass?
- Why do Catholics have to have the 'Last Rights' before they die?

The next issue will look at the topic:

### 'What is the point of praying?'

Please send your questions and comments on this subject to:

[editor@cathcomreach.com](mailto:editor@cathcomreach.com)

- with a subject header of 'Catholic Myths'.

## A Reader's Initiative – Reaching into the Light

**'I TEACH AT Stonyhurst, St Mary's Hall, and through Jesuit Missions we were twinned with St Paul's Musami, another Jesuit school in the Zimbabwean bush. With support from the British Council's 'Connecting Classrooms' initiative, I visited St Paul's, Musami in 2010, and there met an inspirational young woman, who was the wife of the English teacher.**

She and I remained in contact, and she eventually set up a children's centre for the most destitute of Harare's AIDS orphans, most of whom are living on the streets. With the assistance of my husband and sister, we created the 'Ray of Light' charity. It has raised a considerable amount of money since September 2012. Full details can be found at: [www.rayoflightafrica.org](http://www.rayoflightafrica.org).

The children we're trying to help lack not only food, clothing and education, but also parental love and guidance.' Catherine Robinson



# ○ Christmas Tree, ○ Christmas Tree...

## By Julia Beacroft

**MUCH AS I love the Christmas season, for some reason I don't seem to have much luck with Christmas trees. You may be scratching your head at this and wondering how on earth you can be unlucky with Christmas trees, so I'll tell you...**

In the first year of our marriage, I decided that my husband's artificial tree would simply not do. No, it had to be a 'real' tree – a Norway Spruce or a maybe a Scotch Pine would do nicely, I thought. So full of enthusiasm, I ordered what I felt was a reasonably sized tree from our local shop. All well and good. Except that at the time we lived in a small terraced house and when the tree was delivered it was huge in comparison to the size of our rooms. In fact, this is an understatement. It practically filled one of our rooms, which rendered it a total disaster and a waste of money. Sadly, the old artificial tree had to come back out of retirement instead, for that festive season.

### ACCIDENTS

And then there have been those classic incidents, or should I say accidents, involving some of my other trees. One memorable year when we were all gathered around the dining table eating our Christmas meal, I noticed that my eldest son, who was probably about ten years old at the time, was rocking



backwards and forwards on the legs of his chair. Naturally I told him to stop but you've probably guessed what happened next. One rock backwards too many and too far and the chair toppled over. And so did my son. And so did my Christmas tree which was behind him. I'm sure you'll be relieved to hear that he was fine as was the chair. I'd like to be able to say that the tree was too, but that wouldn't be strictly true, I'm afraid. In fact the truth was that the tree was trashed and on Christmas Day too...

And just in case you're in any doubt about the fact that I am truly unlucky with my festive trees, an almost identical incident happened again a few years later. The only difference was that this time a friend seemed to lose his balance and sent the tree flying. Not quite such a disaster as before, mind you, as a flying tackle from my mother did save the poor thing from total annihilation.

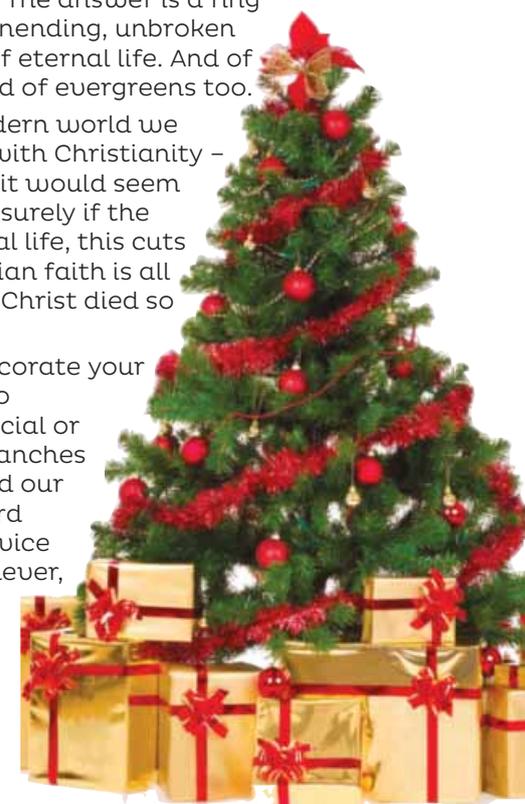
### EVERGREENS

The Encyclopaedia Britannica states that: 'The use of evergreen trees, wreaths, and garlands to symbolize eternal life was a custom of the ancient Egyptians, Chinese, and Hebrews.' Of course, the notion of the Advent wreath is partially associated with this idea. If we set aside the fact of the five advent candles, each representing one of the Sundays in Advent plus the extra one for Christmas Day, what are we actually left with? The answer is a ring of evergreens which symbolise the unending, unbroken ring of eternity and the evergreens of eternal life. And of course Christmas trees are composed of evergreens too.

It is really interesting that in our modern world we rarely associate the Christmas tree with Christianity – specifically the birth of the Lord. Yet it would seem that we may be mistaken in this, for surely if the evergreen branches symbolise eternal life, this cuts right to the heart of what our Christian faith is all about. Because we know that Jesus Christ died so that we may have eternal life.

And so I wish you great joy as you decorate your Christmas trees this year. It makes no difference whether your tree is artificial or real, large or small, the evergreen branches continue to symbolise eternal life and our eternal life is the great gift of our Lord Jesus Christ. Just a few words of advice though – measure up carefully and never, ever let anyone who is accident-prone on the loose near your tree!

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# 'Now is the favourable time...'

by Fr. Brendan Grady, O.Carm.



**PERHAPS ONE OF the many appealing characteristics of Pope Francis is his natural and often spontaneous ability to open doors and broaden horizons.**

Many people have said that he demonstrates a warm humanity that somehow facilitates a deeper appreciation of the Christian mission to proclaim the mercy of a God who desires to be intimately involved in the lives of very ordinary people. Of course, it can be rightly said that he has not defined any new doctrine; rather, it is a matter of approach and perspective. He seems to have the freedom to be able to connect with lived experience and, for those who listen to and observe him, he inspires actions which speak more eloquently than words. He himself would be the first to declare that he is merely a messenger, not the message.

## OUR LOVING PRESENCE

As we journey through the season of Advent and come to the celebration of Christmas we may hear conflicting messages, and we may be confronted with competing demands. It is good to celebrate what is important to us and to demonstrate our affection for those we value. Christmas is traditionally a time of giving and receiving. But is bigger really better? Does the more expensive actually mean more valuable? Do we need to allow clever advertising to condition our choices and decisions – what we

offer to others and expect in return? There are many in our society and beyond who may not be able to buy expensive things – refugees, prisoners, the sick, the poor, the vulnerable, children. They can remind us, when we have become easily overwhelmed by the commercialism of the season, that what truly matters is the gift of our loving presence, however ordinary the means of its expression.

The world into which Jesus was born shares some similarities with the world today. Greed and exploitation were commonplace; there were vast inequalities between rich and poor countries, wealthy and struggling people; politicians limped from one catastrophe to another; vested interest covertly influenced local, national and world events; with wars ravaging huge territories. Thousands were left homeless and were displaced; children starved, and disease afflicted many people. Sounding familiar? Not the usual romantic image of the first Christmas perhaps! But it is precisely into this messy situation that a message of hope and liberation comes. God speaks and God moves into action... but in the most unexpected of ways.

## EXPANDING THE SPACE

God's message is an action that affirms all that is good, beautiful and authentic about humanity. God rejoices when life is lived to the full

and when human beings recognise each other as sharers in a divinely-graced dignity, no matter what their creed, colour, nationality, orientation, social status or past record of sin and virtue. After the birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph shared the gift they had received by welcoming shepherds. Like the tax collectors and prostitutes of the time, shepherds literally lived on the fringes of their society. The Christmas message of hope and compassion proclaims that in God all are made acceptable, all are given welcome, all can find a home. No matter where we have been, what we have done, God makes space for us... and Christmas invites us to expand the space we make for God.

Just as the story of the birth of Jesus marks a new beginning for the whole of humanity, so too new possibilities open up for each of us when we gaze deeply into the true meaning of the Incarnation, and allow it to give us a new perspective on others and ourselves. Perhaps we are to be like those three pilgrims in the Nativity story who follow a star of enlightenment without being able to name it or fully understand what it is, but find ourselves led into a situation of vulnerable affection and love. As the three seekers were led to an exposed baby in a simple shed in a conflict-torn territory, we too may find ourselves being led to the most vulnerable in our society and world, to discover the depths of what it means to love fully and be fully

human. It is in simplicity and in the humblest situations that the gift of love can be exchanged... and there is no price that can be placed on that.

## TOUCH OF GOD

Although God's Word was sent into our world in a specific time and place and became flesh in the person of Jesus, the message of God's love continues to knock at the doors of people's hearts, reshaping human horizons. As we allow our personal storms, fears, prejudices and defences to be transformed, maybe God will be given an opening to expand our hearts and re-define our limiting boundaries. As God can see the Christ in us, maybe we might see the Christ who comes to us in disguise in the multitude of vulnerable others, as we surrender to the impact of God's love this Christmas.

Pope Francis has seized the moment. What are the opportunities that we can identify and develop that will benefit others? How can we continue developing that warm sense of welcoming humanity in our homes, our churches, schools, our neighbourhoods? How will we recognise the summons and touch of God in every encounter? What will strengthen our commitment to a way of authentic prayer that takes us beyond our self-preoccupation to an inclusive outreach to all people? Carpe diem!

# Chocolate Snowcap Cookies

**This fudgy chocolate cookie recipe is a hit with children! It's also great fun to make and just right for the Christmas season!**

Makes: 4 dozen cookies  
 Serving Size: 1 cookie  
 Active Time: 1 1/2 hours  
 Total Time: 2 1/2 hours  
 (including 1 hour chilling time)  
 Equipment: Parchment paper or nonstick baking mat

## INGREDIENTS

- 225g best-quality semisweet or bittersweet chocolate, chopped
- 160g white whole-wheat flour or plain flour
- 60g unsweetened cocoa powder
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 110g unsalted butter (1 stick), at room temperature
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 220g firmly packed dark brown sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 60ml semi-skimmed milk
- 65g icing sugar for rolling

## PREPARATION

1. Melt chocolate in a double boiler

over barely simmering water or microwave on medium until just melted.

2. Whisk flour, cocoa, baking powder and salt in a medium bowl. Beat butter, oil and brown sugar in a mixing bowl with an electric mixer on high speed, scraping down the sides once or twice, until light and fluffy. Add eggs and vanilla and beat until well combined. Stir in the melted chocolate. With the

mixer on low, alternate adding the dry ingredients and milk, starting and ending with the dry ingredients. Cover and refrigerate until chilled, at least 1 hour and up to 8 hours.

3. Preheat oven to 350°F. Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper or a nonstick baking mat.

4. Place icing sugar in a shallow bowl. Roll the dough into 1-inch

balls (about 1 tablespoon each). Roll each ball in the sugar to coat. Place the cookies 2 inches apart on the prepared baking sheet. Refrigerate the remaining dough between batches.

5. Bake the cookies until the sugar splits, about 12 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack to cool. Repeat with the remaining dough.

## TIPS & NOTES

- Make Ahead Tip: Prepare through Step 2 up to 8 hours ahead. Store cookies in an airtight container for up to 5 days.

## NUTRITION

Per serving: 83 calories;  
 4 g fat (2 g sat, 1 g mono);  
 13 mg cholesterol;  
 12 g carbohydrates;  
 8 g added sugars;  
 8 g total sugars;  
 1 g protein;  
 1 g fiber;  
 38 mg sodium;  
 47 mg potassium.  
 Carbohydrate Servings: 1  
 Exchanges: 1 other carbohydrate, 1/2 fat



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# Sticking Together



## Secondary school teacher Gemma Watson gives her perspective on her pupils' participation in the shoebox appeal

AT THE SCHOOL where I teach, we encourage the students to get involved in an annual charity project called 'Love in a Box'. Organised by the Mustard Seed Relief Mission, 'Love in a Box' aims to send around 40,000 boxes each year to underprivileged children across Eastern Europe at Christmas. My school particularly likes to get involved with this initiative, as not only does it enable the students to give something back to those who are less fortunate than them, but it also puts their lives into perspective and shows them how lucky they are to have a Christmas filled with family, friends, presents, food and celebration.

## DISASTER

This year, I decided that I would encourage my year 11 tutor group to participate and try to produce some boxes for these children. However, despite thinking that they wouldn't be keen, I was overwhelmed with their response. Empty shoeboxes started arriving in my classroom the next day and we began the task of wrapping them in decorative paper. This, I have to confess, was an unexpected hurdle. It turns out that wrapping paper in the hands of teenagers is basically a recipe for disaster. Each morning as the students filed out for their first lesson, my classroom was littered with torn bits of paper and screwed up balls of Sellotape. The boxes themselves... well, let's just say that they looked a little worse for wear. Some had random unwrapped sections

where the students had missed parts; some had a mish-mash of wrapping paper that didn't match up at all, and some of the boxes themselves had ended up being destroyed in the process, with all sorts of holes and rips appearing.

## FEEL BETTER

After replacing the boxes and eventually getting them all wrapped, we finally started to fill them with acceptable items. I popped a list up in my classroom and the students began to load up the boxes with all sorts of gifts, ranging from cuddly toys to toothbrushes, colouring crayons to gloves, and all sorts in between. Of course, we also had some items that weren't on the list. We had a Plymouth Argyle shirt (I think the student was trying to increase their fan base!), an old PlayStation 3 game, (I had to politely explain that if they didn't even have a toothbrush, they were unlikely to have a PlayStation!) and, my personal favourite, some loose teabags because, as the student told me, a cup of tea might make them feel better.

Despite some of the difficulties faced, my tutor group wrapped and filled a total of ten boxes for young children who will have nothing else this Christmas. Their charitable spirit was outstanding and I could not have been more proud over the selfless attitude that they have shown. It's really shown me that wrapping paper, Sellotape and scissors in the hands of teenagers may not necessarily be a good idea, but charity, kindness and generosity most certainly is.

**LOVE**  
in a box

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# Going Cold Turkey

**Sarah, a young new bride, calls her mother in tears. She sobs,**

"Richard doesn't appreciate what I do for him."

"Now, now," her mother comforted, "I am sure it was all just a misunderstanding."

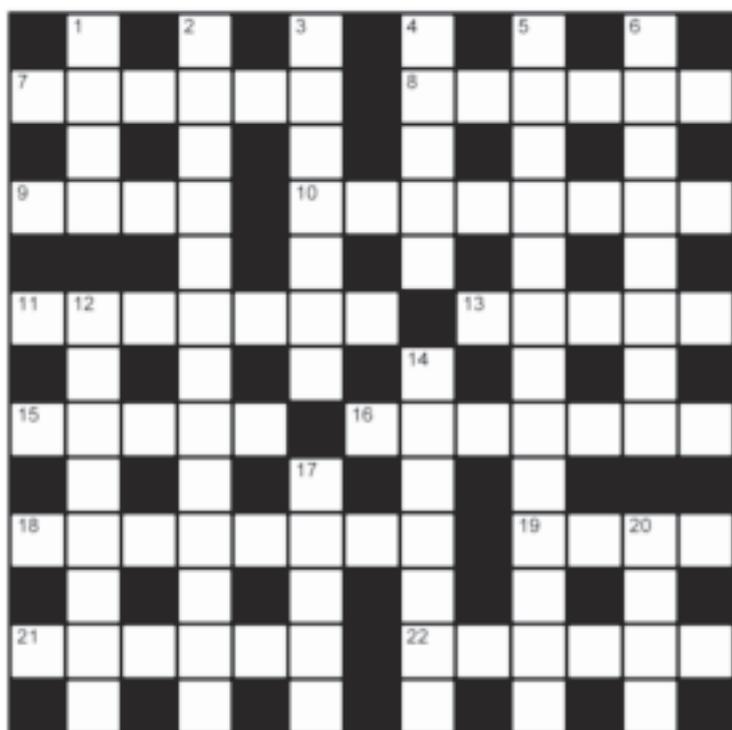
"No, mother, you don't understand. I bought a frozen turkey and he yelled and screamed at me about the price."

"Well, that's just horrible," says her mum. "Turkeys aren't that expensive!"

"No, mother it wasn't the price of the turkey. It was the aeroplane ticket."

"Aeroplane ticket...." her mum said, puzzled. "What did you need an airplane ticket for?"

"Well mother, when I went to prepare it, I looked at the directions on the package and it said: 'Prepare from a frozen state'. So I flew to Alaska."



## Reach Crossword

### CLUES

#### Across

- 7 Food that fulfils the requirements of Jewish dietary law (6)
- 8 Ridge raised in knitwear: ridiculed (6)
- 9 Norse god of discord and mischief (4)
- 10 In a cultural or honourable way (8)
- 11 Bishop of Winchester from 852 (7)
- 13 Gamble (5)
- 15 Monotheistic religion articulated by the Quran (5)
- 16 Missionary (7)
- 18 Traditionally one of the Magi, represented as a king of Nubia (8)
- 19 Chances; advantage (4)
- 21 Tower room (6)
- 22 Black and white Eurasian long-legged wading bird (6)

#### Down

- 1 Napoleon ----, The Man from UNCLE (4)
- 2 season's greeting (9,4)
- 3 Terse (7)
- 4 Very short time (5)
- 5 Place where the just repose in death, as referenced in Shakespeare's Richard III (8,5)
- 6 With undue hurry and confusion (4-4)
- 12 Adherent of a branch of Methodism (8)
- 14 After Rheims, the main centre of Champagne-making (7)
- 17 Ancient Britons based north of Antonine's Wall in Roman times (5)
- 20 Affaire d'honneur (4)



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