

Christmas Pageant

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Dates to Remember

Sunday, December 19th was the 4th Sunday of Advent. The day also saw the presentation of the Annual Christmas Pageant by the children of the church to an audience of over 80 adults and children, including a number of visitors. The Pageant was comprised of a skit, "B is for Bethlehem" by the Junior Class, a Christmas Prayer (#67 VU) read by Jillian, the song, "In a Little Stable" by the Church School, and an action rhyme, "Three Great Kings" by the Nursery Class. The pageant concluded with the congregation singing the hymn "Joy to the World," with instrumental accompaniment by the Church School. Following that, there was a presentation of gift bags and a pizza party for the children in the Community Room.

"B is for Bethlehem" was adapted from the children's book by Isabel Wilner by Amy Wells and Stephanie Tanner. Amy and Stephanie directed the production, and Kim and Sue Ann assisted at rehearsals, looked after costumes and helped with directing. ▶

Christmas Eve Service

Jeff assisted Cynthia Hiebert on the piano during the Prelude and Ryan added to Cynthia's playing with the music of the recorder during the hymn, Away in a Manger. The service included a staged reading of the playlet, "Teen Angel Goes to Nazareth" which was written by Chris Redmond and directed by David and Jill. Chris Redmond played the part of the narrator, David played Fred, the angel and many other members of the congregation took part. As part of the presentation, Terry sang a solo, "The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came", a Basque carol arranged by Edgar Pettman.

A staged reading is a way of presenting a play without the complications of building a set. The narrator reads the stage directions from the side. When an actor is "on stage" he stands; when he sits down, he disappears (in your mind). Costumes are kept to a minimum, just enough to let you know who they are. It is very like a radio drama.

Chris Redmond wrote:

This "staged reading" directed by David and Jill is the perfect way to present the playlet "Teen Angel Goes to Nazareth", which I wrote last winter based on an idea that Mary Savage didn't realize she had given me. In a children's story during Advent 2009, she posed a Christmas quiz, including this question: "What was the name of the angel who came to Mary? Was it Gabriel, Raphael, or Fred?" Well, I thought, what if there had been an angel named Fred, a second-string seraph who somehow got the world-changing assignment of bringing that message? So here's the story of Fred...a retelling of the familiar Christmas events, accurate (I like to think) in all the important details, with an emphasis on how God can make use of any one of us, even the most unpromising angel or the most unlikely human being.

At the conclusion of the service, Jacqueline and Claire each played "Ukrainian Bell Carol" on the piano. ▶

Baptism

Hana Beth Holroyd Coates was born on 11 January 2001 in Thai Nguyen City, Vietnam, a city about 2 hours north of Hanoi. She is the daughter of Carin Holroyd and Ken Coates, and the sister of Marlon Coates, Nikki Shadbolt, Bradley Coates, Mark Coates, Laura Coates-Griffiths, and Josh Griffiths. Hana joined the Holroyd-Coates family in August 2001 and moved with them to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan before coming to Waterloo. She is currently a Grade 4 student in L'Ecole L'Harmonie in Waterloo. Hana studies ballet and jazz dance, participates in synchronized swimming and kung-fu, and loves horse-back riding, canoeing and playing with her friends.

Hana was baptized and officially welcomed into the Christian family of faith in a special ceremony conducted by Rev. Mary Savage during the service on Sunday, January 16th. During the singing of "Teach Me, God to Wonder" Rev. Mary called all the children in the church to the front platform for the ceremony, which took place during the regular Time for the Young and the Young at Heart. Earlier, each of the children and others participating in the ceremony had been given a small container of baptismal water to cup in their hands so that it could be deposited into the baptismal font with a nice warm temperature when it was required for the ceremony.

Cheryl, Chair of Church Council presented a candle lit from the Christ Candle to Hana to commemorate the baptism. She also presented the baptismal certificate to Hana and Dianne presented her with a prayer shawl made by the Prayer Shawl Group that Hana had chosen herself.

Rev. Mary's sermon, which was entitled "Beloved" included references to Matthew 3: 13-17 and the baptism of Jesus as well as other baptisms. Other hymns sung during the service included, "Praise the Lord with the Sound of Trumpet," "May God's Sheltering Wings," "I Have Called You by Your Name," and "I Was There to Hear Your Borning Cry." ▸

Why I Want To Be Baptized

By Hana Coates

Hana prepared the following note which was included in the Sunday Bulletin of the day she was baptized.

I have been going to church for three years. I like church a lot. People are friendly and welcoming. I like how we learn about Jesus and God in Sunday School. It is fun to put stories into plays.

Last summer, I went to Muskoka Woods summer camp. At the camp, the leaders would tell a story about their lives. After the story time, we went into a cabin chat and we talked about how God helped the leader with their problem. My oldest brothers and sisters are baptized. I wanted to be like them. I saw the baptism of my niece, Katie. I thought it was really cool and I liked what they were doing.

Baptism is important to me. It makes me a real member of the church. It makes me feel that I am closer to God in a special way. I know I will feel like part of the church family when I am baptized.

I really like the prayer shawl. I will love it forever. I looked at all of the prayer shawls. They are very beautiful. I picked one that is like the blanket my Grandma made for me when I was a baby. The shawl will remind me of the baptism and make me feel connected to God and to Grandma Beth.

Thank you all for being so welcoming and friendly. It makes me feel very good

that you are so excited that I am being baptized. I also want to thank you for wanting me to be part of your church and for saying that you will help raise me in the church. I would also like to thank Reverend Mary for making all of this work out and for being so excited about my baptism. She gave me a special time to explain baptism and to get me ready for today. ▸

The Vietnam Education Society

Hana's mom, Carin Holroyd, created the Vietnam Education Society in 2005, with a goal of building schools for communities in rural Vietnam. Hana has been a big supporter of this effort, and has asked kids coming to her birthday parties to make donations to VES instead of providing presents for her. She has raised over \$1,000 in this manner over the past four years. VES started with building a school complex (ten classrooms, multi-purpose room and early childhood development centre) in Cat

Ne, a small community about 1 1/2 hours from Thai Nguyen, where Hana was born. Another school recently opened in Central Vietnam and funds have been raised for the next project.

Hana is very proud of her mom for helping the people of Vietnam. For more information, including pictures of the VES schools, see www.vietnameducation.ca. Donations to support the construction of schools in rural Vietnam will be gratefully received. ▶



Carin & Hana with the kids at Cat-Ne-School



One of the schools



A classroom in Cat-Ne-School

Volunteering with **Out of the Cold**

By Scott

On January 21, the Youth Group helped out at First United Church's evening to provide a warm place to sleep and a nourishing hot meal. First United is one of eight churches in the Kitchener-Waterloo corridor that take turns on different nights to do this.

Unfortunately, this year our Youth Group is a really busy bunch. Sports tournaments took their toll, but Melanie and Scott did manage to attend. Nevertheless, the warm clothes dropped off in the box in the foyer were quickly snapped up by the guests, almost before they could hit the table!

Our help was welcome too. Their industrial dishwasher broke down just moments before we arrived, so there was a lot of frantic washing by hand going on that night!

The youth always find the subsequent social time very illuminating. Euchre is probably the most popular game played by the guests, but some like to just read, or do a puzzle, or just sit with friends and chat. Melanie and Scott played crazy eights with one very talkative fellow up until it was "lights out" and time for us to leave.

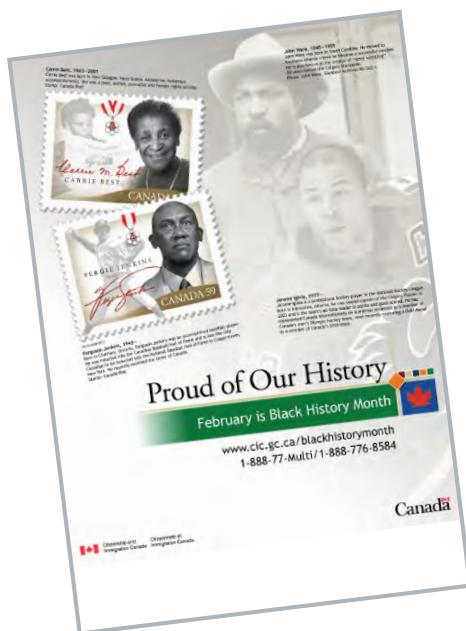
Scott must have had too good a time, for he completely missed his alarm the next morning and so rushed in 20 minutes late to help with the Out of the Cold cleanup work in the morning. The rest of the Westminster volunteers were already there, and the work was well underway. Cleanup started at 7 am, and was finished by 8:30 am.

Two weeks later, on February 5, a group from Westminster descended on First United again to help clean up on Saturday morning. The dishwasher was still broken, but the workflow was settling into a new groove, gained from practice. A second delivery of warm winter clothing was just as gratefully accepted as the first one.

According to Jessica from Erb Street Mennonite, the morning cleanup crew is often nowhere near as well staffed as it is on the two days that Westminster helps out. We will definitely organize a few more Saturday cleanups, as they really need the help. But you don't have to wait for that, just go over there and lend a hand. You'll likely see a familiar face or two, as John and Jill often help.

All work and no play is no fun, so some of the crew went out for breakfast afterwards. The first Saturday, breakfast was at Cora's, and the second Saturday it was at Angie's Kitchen. The breakfast out gave the crew a chance to wind down, then chow down on some good food and take in some good conversation.

Many thanks to all the volunteers who came out – John, David and Jill, Alison, Paul, JR, Bryce, Cheryl, and Clyde and Janet. ▀



Black History Month **Bring on the Sunshine!**

To commemorate Black History Month, the Forest Hill United Church, Zimbabwe Canada Association is presenting "Bring on the Sunshine!" on Monday, February 21 from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. You are invited to join them for a day of African dance and singing groups, drumming, ethnic food, artists and artisans, clothing and fashion, including games and workshops for children. Admission is by donation. ▀

The Blind Side

During the summer season, Rev. Mary presented a series of sermons each of which referred to a certain film, which had been made available to those interested in seeing it on the Thursday evening prior to the service. There was even hot buttered popcorn available! Westwords is pleased to publish the sermon that was presented at the service on Sunday August 22, 2010. The Bible readings that day were from Luke 6:32-38.

Drop kick me, Jesus through the goal posts of life

End over end, neither left nor to right

Straight through the heart of them righteous uprights

Drop kick me, Jesus through the goal posts of life.

In 1976, that catchy little song, 'Drop Kick Me Jesus', sung by Bobby Bare, made it to #18 on the Canadian Country Music Charts and #17 on the American charts. I've always thought it would be a wonderful sermon reference. And I suspect that today, as we talk about the movie *The "Blind Side,"* it might be the best and only chance I'll ever get. So:

Make me, oh make me, Lord more than I am

Make me a piece in your master game plan

Free from the earthly temptations below

I've got the will, Lord if you've got the toe.

Let me begin with a question. Have you ever been blind-sided? Sooner or later it happens to all of us. One day, out of the blue, something comes at you that you had no idea was even there. You are living your life, going along, and getting along, minding your own business, and WHAM, out of nowhere, something throws you completely off balance. We get thrown "off kilter", your sense of equilibrium is disturbed, the way you do things, the way you think, how you react and respond either doesn't work or doesn't seem to make sense anymore – the results come back from a medical test; your company announces that it is downsizing; your spouse decides to move out. Things happen over which we have little or no control and make us shake our heads and cause us to mutter, "I didn't see that one coming". Yup, at one time or another, to a greater or lesser extent, we have all been blind sided.

The title of today's summer cinema movie is "The Blind Side". On the cover of the DVD you will see a very big football player towering over a very small woman whose hand is gently placed upon number 74's back.

The movie begins with the play by play from a Red Skins/Giants football game, (the one where quarterback Joe Theismann received his career-ending injury.) The voice explains what happens on a football field as the offence and defence line up, the ball is snapped and the play begins.

The voice explains that the most valuable, highest-paid player

on a football team is, of course, the quarterback, but the second-most-valuable player is the left tackle. That's the person who protects the quarterback from what he can't see coming. The job of the left tackle is to protect the quarterback's blind side.

The voice is that of Leigh Anne Tuohy, a sharp-shooting Southern woman (played by Sandra Bullock) who is used to getting her way and is a force to be reckoned with. With her husband Sean, her daughter Collins and son SJ, Leigh Anne lives a more-than comfortable life in Memphis. Money is no object. They live in a massive home. The children attend a private "Christian" school.

One night, after watching SJ's Thanksgiving play at the school, Leigh Anne sees a big Black kid walking in the pouring rain. It is a cold November night. The kid is dressed only in a polo shirt and shorts. Leigh Anne asks the kid, whom her son tells her is "Big Mike", where he is going. It is clear that Big Mike has nowhere to go; that he has no one looking out for him; that he is carrying everything he owns in a plastic shopping bag.

And so, Leigh Anne tells Big Mike to get in their car and takes him home for the night. They make up the couch for him in the living room. Then afterwards, upstairs, in the privacy of their bedroom, husband Sean asks Leigh Anne, "It is for just one night, right?" But he knows the answer before he even asks the question.

Michael, it turns out is the son of a drug addict and his father is dead. He grew up in Hurt Village, the abandoned poverty-stricken projects of Memphis. He is a product of the Social Services system and has been to 9 different schools and lived in a bunch of foster home.

But Michael is a gentle giant of a boy whose hard life has taught him powerful protective instincts, measured by the school board to be in the 98th percentile. He has the size, agility and speed that could

make him an exceptional athlete. With those protective instincts, he is a 'left tackle' waiting to happen.

That fall Big Mike started attending, on a scholarship, the same Christian school as the Tuohy children. His coach sees a big kid with tremendous athletic potential. His teachers see only a poor student with a measured IQ of 80 and a GPA of 0.6. Big Mike is at



continued on next page

The Blind Side *continued from previous page*

the school largely because the coach reminded the admissions committee that they need to admit him not because of his ability with sports, but because this is a Christian school and they need to do what is right; to give the kid a break. The motto over the school arch reminds them that... "with God all things are possible."

As the story unfolds, Michael, (he hates being called "Big Mike"), struggles to live a very different life than he has ever experienced before. While he will forever be what Leigh Anne describes as a "fly in the milk" of the school, a black student in a sea of white, affluent faces, Michael does become part of the Tuohy family. And we see all kinds of scenes during which Leigh Anne gives him a room of his own and a bed big enough for him, takes him shopping for clothes and includes him in the family picture for the Christmas card.

And when Michael starts to receive inquiries from university football programmes, Leigh Anne realizes that Michael's chances for a scholarship are nil unless he raises his GPA to 2.5. She knows that most inner city kids who attend junior college drop out in the first year. It is a tough, uphill battle for a student like Michael who, only a few months ago could barely read or write, has been passed along from year to year in an uncaring educational system. So, they hire a tutor for Michael.

And together with the unwavering support of little SJ who becomes Michael's work out coach, booking agent and best friend, they go to work to try to help him make the grades to qualify for a scholarship.

Of course we all know, because of all the advertising hype, that this movie is based on the present day true-life story of Michael Oher who becomes an All-American and a first-round NFL draft pick. His position? Left tackle. The one that protects the quarterback on his blind side.

The Blind Side is a story about change, about how lives can be transformed when we don't see it coming; in ways we can never anticipate because we have given to another one moment of kindness, one offer of mercy, one drop of God's grace that we know in our own lives.

Today's scripture reading is a segment from the Sermon on the Plain, Luke's record of Jesus' sayings that are also recorded in Matthew as the Sermon on the Mount. But Luke takes Jesus off the height of the mountain and puts him on the plain. It is a great levelling, a great equalization where those who are poor receive the riches of the kingdom and where those who weep will laugh.

Here Jesus tells his listeners "to love their enemies; to do good to those who hate you." Enemies are put on an equal footing with friends in the realm that Jesus envisions, that Jesus works to create. "Turn your cheek, give your coat, hand over your shirt," Jesus tells all those who would listen. "If you love those... If you do good... If you lend to those..." then you are moving ever so gently, ever so swiftly, to the world that Jesus calls into reality. "Give and it will be given back to you," Jesus promises. "A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over."

That's what Leigh Anne Tuohy, Leigh Anne's family and Michael

Oher receive from each other: a good measure. Pressed down, shaken together, running over. From doing good. From loving and lending and not expecting anything in return.

It is easy to see the difference that the Tuohy family makes in Michael's life. There is a good probability that Michael would end up like those other kids who grew up in Hurt Village – victims of violence, of life addicted to drugs, of the poverty caused by societal neglect and indifference. How would Michael, a gentle giant who has to be shown how to act aggressively on the football field because it is not in his nature; how would he have survived in that world?

It is Leigh Anne who comes to know this lost child whom she takes into her home, this child whom she loves and comes to call her son. She reminds him of the day they went to buy some new clothes, back in Hurt Village. She reminds him of how she was scared but he promised to watch out for her, that he "had her back". She reminds him of how he protectively reached out and took the brunt of the exploding air bag when he and SJ were in the traffic accident. She reminds him that he is a young man with a protective instinct. Leigh Anne is the one who pays attention, a mother looking out for her boy. She learns how to nurture Michael's potential. Yes, the Tuohy's make an amazing difference in Michael's life.

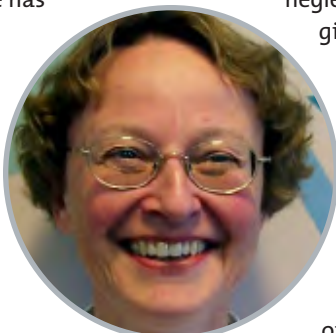
But Leigh Anne Tuohy sees the story differently. When her girlfriends back-handedly tell Leigh Anne that "You're changing that boy's life", Leigh Anne replies, "No. He's changing mine." In a quote from beyond the movie Leigh Anne says, "I think Michael had a much greater impact on our lives than we did on his. You take so much in life for granted but when Michael moved in with us he made us realize how blessed we are. We viewed life differently after he joined our family."

That's what happens when you get hit on the blindside. Like the quarterback who is not protected by his left tackle, Leigh Anne could not have known what was coming that night when she saw Big Mike walking alone in a cold November rain storm. She could have done a good deed – giving him a few dollars. She could have lent him a coat to protect him from the rain.

It could all have stopped there, but it did not. She did the outstanding, unexpected, Jesus "on the plain" thing. She did a good thing, expecting nothing in return. She gave – and her giving was given back to her in a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over. She is the first one to say that her reward was great.

The Blind Side helps us to see how a simple act can make a big difference. We don't all have to take in a perfect stranger. But we can do little things, simple things. Do good. Show love. Lend and act without expecting in return. Give from the abundance God has given to you – and it will be given back to you in a good measure.

Do what you can. But remember that when you do these things, your life might be changed. You might be drop kicked through the goal posts of life. Look at Leigh Anne. Hit blindside. And she never saw it coming. ▀



Rev/ Mary Savage

HOME ...BY ANOTHER WAY

By Rev. John Lougheed

January 2 was Epiphany Sunday and the Voluntary Associate Minister Rev. John Lougheed was the Worship Leader. Westwords is pleased to publish the sermon he gave that day. The Bible readings were taken from The Epistle to the Galatians 4: 4-7 and Matthew 2: 1-12.

Among the timeless traditions in my immediate family is to watch “The Queen’s Message” at noon on Christmas Day. I appreciated her offering again this year, and celebrate the wedding of our future King and Queen, Prince William and Catherine in this New Year. (As you may not know, it was Beth Lamont – who hails originally from Waterloo, but now dances with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet – who told CBC TV she was so disappointed by news of the engagement quipping “because I thought he was going to marry me!”) But it was Her Majesty’s Message several years back that haunts me still. Now twelve years ago, the Queen said:

“No age group has a monopoly on wisdom, and indeed I think the young can sometimes be wiser than [their elders] [Indeed, adults] must learn to trust [the younger generation] as they seize opportunities, but can, at the same time caution and comfort if things go wrong, or guide and explain if... needed.”

I also appreciate what the Queen had to say about voluntary organizations – including Churches. About how they provide:

“... bridges across which the generations travel, meet and learn from one another. They give us, with our families, our sense of belonging.”

Here at our Westminster Church home, I celebrate the Dare to Dream Campaign this past Fall, so ably led by Dona and her team, which has already reached more than 2/3 of its goal of \$100,000 to sustain our budget here without grants, and to maintain our home here, with Temple

Shalom.

The generosity of Westminster members, and the openness of the Queen is certainly a far cry from the jealousy of ancient King Herod. From his throne in Jerusalem, he is threatened by news of Jesus’ birth. When he is reminded that the prophet Micah had said a new ruler – the shepherd of the people – would be born in Bethlehem, Herod asks the Magi – the wise ones who had seen the star – to find the new born King, in



Rev. John Lougheed

order that Herod himself “might go and pay homage” (:1-8)

We are reading in the Gospel according to St. Matthew, written by a Jewish convert to Christianity, for other Jews, in an attempt to persuade them that Jesus is the long awaited Messiah. (Thank goodness that – out of mutual respect – we are beyond trying to persuade our Jewish neighbours.) But in Matthew’s version of the story, such an emphasis is placed on the Magi precisely because they are not Jewish, as if to say, “Even they are persuaded.” But persuasive?

As preacher/theologian, Barbara Brown Taylor observes: “much is made of a story about which we know so little ... [but] the facts don’t matter as much as the [story does, because] stories can be true, whether they happen or not.” (Home by another way, p. 28)

That pearl of wisdom – about much more than the Christmas Story – comes from a collection of Taylor’s sermons, including one she named after a James Taylor song, that was itself inspired by this story, and in turn has given this sermon its title:

“Home ... by another way”.

Though the Christmas carol – played so beautifully by Cynthia and Jeff this morning– sings of “We Three Kings of Orient Are” the exact number and origin are not specified anywhere. Perhaps they were Persians; even magicians (hence the name Magi), though more likely Zoroastrians – a religion more ancient than Christianity, and which several hundred neighbours right here in increasingly diverse Waterloo Region claim as their own faith.

Guided by a star, these Magi found the baby Jesus, his mother Mary, and presumably Joseph (!) and they were “overwhelmed with joy” kneeling down to pay him real homage: gold (for a King); frankincense (from the Temple); and myrrh (for the anointing...of the dead) (:10, 11) By their gifts, the Magi recognized both the divinity and the humanity of Jesus. God is with us. Emmanuel. An epiphany!

And then, like Joseph who had been told in a dream to stay with Mary (1:20), the Magi had a dream of their own. They had been transformed by their experience in the presence of the Christ Child, and realized the deadly homage that Herod intended, so literally – and figuratively – they went home by another way. It was a ‘game-changing’ detour in their lives – and ours – to keep that epiphany out of harms way.

In the wonderful Christmas Eve Pageant debuted here at Westminster last weekend, written by our own Chris Redmond and directed by David – alias Fred the Angel – in the voice of Mary, we were reminded that “Bethlehem [may be] a tiny village, but is has a larger place in God’s plan.” It is as if the Magi were transformed by the gifts that the Christ Child had given them. (Home ..., page 31)

While in the charming Pageant presented

continued on next page

by the Westminster Sunday School, written and directed by Stephanie Tanner and her friend Amy the week before Christmas, the Nursery children sang, as if in the voices of the Magi: “we’ve come so far”; “we follow the star”; and “like this we pray”. Ah, from the mouths of babes! As if to say, among the epiphanies of Christmas can be a renewed sense of where we are and from whence we’ve come as well as a renewed sense of perspective, including our own mortality.

Or, as that great ‘country and western’ theological troubadour John Denver (!) sings, about the “simple things [that are] hard to comprehend ... coming home to a place [we’ve] never been before.” (“Rocky Mountain High”)

As another writer has put it: “when we follow the light, we extinguish the night.” (Itsuka, p 248). It is in our following of the light – that is always there, even when we can’t see it – that the night is extinguished. “When we follow the light, we extinguish the night.”

The writer I speak of is Joy Kogawa, whose novels *Obasan* and *Itsuka* trace the lives of Japanese Canadians who were unjustly interned and harshly persecuted during the Second World War by the governments of their adoptive home, Canada. In *Itsuka* – which means someday – Kogawa describes home as a space more than a place. (252)

Of particular interest to me in hospital

ministry, and in solidarity with those who struggle with illness – as the patient, their family, or friend like family – Kogawa names a quandary: “when the body betrays us, where then is home? (252) “When the body betrays us, where then is home?”

When the bodily home of our spirit is besieged by illness, whither than spirit? As followers of the light of Jesus Christ, we can have assurances for both our mortal journey and our eventual destination. We are not alone; God is with us. And that epiphany is ‘the light we follow, that extinguishes the night’.

Back in the recent Christmas Eve pageant here, in the voice of Caspar – one of three ‘wise guys’ – we are reminded that “When we go home, we will certainly tell the story of this baby.” As the Letter to the Galatians puts it: “in the fullness of time, God sent [a] Son, born of a woman ... that we might receive adoption as children [of God]. (:4,5)

My extended family has had an epiphany of love – manifest in adoption – with the arrival of Abeti this Fall. Aged three and a half, from Ethiopia, he joins the family of my cousin and her husband. This remarkable little boy – whose Semitic Christian roots and pigmented skin closely resemble the historic Jesus – speaks three languages (including English). Four, if you count the universal language of kindness. Abeti has a great

facility for names (“Hi John” he greeted me unbidden only the second time we had met), and gratitude. At our family Christmas party, Abeti made a point of thanking a very believable Santa for his gift, three times! Later, my cousin explained that for these children – who spend time in orphanages surrounded by other children and needing the attention of adults – become ‘old souls’ of kindness and gratitude. Fittingly, Abeti arrived in Canada – and our lives – at Thanksgiving. And his presence has helped to make it an especially Happy Christmas.

It was King George the Sixth – father of the Queen – who, in a radio broadcast of one of his Christmas messages during the Second World War, cited the poet’s words:

*I said to someone at the gate of the year:
“Give me a light that I may tread safely into
the unknown.” And they replied: “Go out
into the darkness and put your hand into
the hand of God. That shall be to you, better
than light and safer than the known way.”*

And as we do so, let us not be surprised if we find that we’re holding the hand of a little child.

So, as the Christmas Pageant here concluded last Friday night, in the words of Fred the angel: “The message begins.” ▸

Library Limelight

By Maureen

Here is a book that might pique your interest. Please take a moment to look in the library. Enjoy!

GROWING UP AGAIN by Jean Illsley Clarke and Connie Dawson

The authors provide the information every adult caring for children should know about ages and stages of development, ways to nurture our children and ourselves and tools for personal and family growth. This edition addresses the special demands of adopted children and blended families. ▸



SALUDOS WESTMINSTER DE MEXICO

By Lynn Macaulay

On my commissioning Sunday, Mary preached about fear and that the opposite of fear is faith. This is definitely something that I have been exploring during my past two weeks in Mexico. As you may recall, the United Church, Partners in Mission program arranged for me to go to five weeks of Spanish language school in Cuernavaca, Mexico. I arrived here on January 21st and will move on to El Salvador on February 26th. Just about everything is different here. Some things, like the weather, are a definite improvement over Canada. Many things are not better or worse, but are just very different. For example, after having lived on my own for 20 some years, I find myself not able to help with even the most basic of household tasks. The food, while mostly delicious, is very different and I have no idea how to prepare it or to help in the kitchen. As strange as it seems, I haven't yet been able to figure out how the dishes get washed as there is no running water in the kitchen.

This is also the first time that I have lived in a place where I only have a basic understanding of the language. In the past two weeks I have developed enough fluency to mostly meet my basic needs. I am able to communicate about schedules, food, bathroom times and a number of other small problems or needs that have come up. I am also able to express likes and dislikes and communicate some basic information. However, when a conversation is happening that is not explicitly structured for me (slowly and simply) I find myself only able to recognize some words and not able to follow the entire thread.

Given this reality, I am learning many new things. For example it is a very new experience for me to blend into a room,

so much so that people forget I am there because I am so quiet. (I know this may be hard for many of you to believe!). Being able to observe is a wonderful gift that allows me to pay attention to many things that I would never have noticed when I am being my usual self. Also needing help with almost everything and needing to accept help have been deeply enriching experiences. I feel such a sense of accomplishment when I am able to figure something out or do it right for the first time. This week I had a bit of a conversation with Bryan, the 18 year old grandson of my houseparents. I made a bit of joke and he really laughed. It was the first time I knew he understood anything I was trying to say. That was the highlight of my day...being able to make someone laugh in Spanish!

Since being here I have attended two formal worship services, both Catholic, one in a prison and one in a lovely church. Other students and I have also had the opportunity to visit a number of other churches. As I am the one with the most "church" background, I am often asked to explain some basic things to people who have had limited or no church exposure. We also had a discussion group at my school about liberation theology. While I didn't understand it all, I gained new knowledge about just how profound a change Vatican II was for many Catholics. Until that time, the Catholic Bible was only in Latin and so few Mexicans would have been able to read it. Before this time, in Cuernavaca, a progressive Bishop had petitioned for approval to use the

Protestant bible in small study groups as it was translated into Spanish. I am using my bilingual bible but really understand very little scripture in Spanish. Until this week I had never given much thought to what a gift it is to be able to read scripture in my own language and to belong to a Church that encourages personal interpretation. In my quietness, I am noticing a lot more truly "holy" moments than I ever would have seen in Canada.

It was in one of these quiet moments, that I received an inspirational idea. Shortly after arriving it became very apparent to me that while I will never be able to truly repay the kindness of Angeles (my host mother), the maple syrup and the few other little gifts I brought with me would not feel like adequate thanks. The idea to make a prayer shawl seeped into my thoughts. Finding the crochet hook took a bit of time as the people in Cuernavaca seem to only crochet lace with very small hooks. However, with the help of my maestra (teacher) at my school I was able to find a store that sells larger hooks. It is really special to work on the prayer shawl and to weave in good thoughts and thanks for all that Angeles has given to me. I will be very pleased to share our church tradition with Angeles, a woman who volunteers essentially full time for her church and community.

If you have questions or want any to follow my travels more closely, feel free to e-mail me at lmacaulay2@gmail.com or read my blog at <http://macaulaycalling.blogspot.com> ▶



Lynn Macaulay

read my blog at <http://macaulaycalling.blogspot.com>

ANNOUNCEMENTS

OPEN CLOSET

The Sexual Assault Support Centre of Waterloo Region is hosting its 5th Annual Open Closet in celebration of International Women's Day. This year's event takes place on Tuesday, March 8th from 11:30 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. at Trinity United Church, 74 Frederick St., Kitchener. During this time, women in Waterloo Region are invited to shop through the selection of gently-used, free clothing and take what they would like while enjoying complimentary refreshments.

ELMIRA MAPLE SYRUP FESTIVAL

Winter will soon be over! Know how I can tell? I had to send in the application form for our Elmira Maple Syrup Festival Booth fundraiser! This year's event will be held on Saturday, April 2. We need a good turnout from you, our pool of volunteers. At full throttle we need 13 people in the booth at one time, cooking, taking money, preparing buns, and running orders to the cashiers. We are organized into three shifts of roughly 3 hours each. Signup sheet is in the hall. No prior experience required, on the job training provided. Fun guaranteed!

KAIROS-GRAND RIVER JUSTICE FILM FESTIVAL

Saturday March 5 at 7 pm—Finding Dawn at St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church, 317 Franklin Street North, Kitchener. Five hundred Aboriginal women have gone missing or been murdered in Canada over the past thirty years. This film is a compelling documentary that puts a human face to this national tragedy.

Saturday April 9 at 7 pm—Our Land, My People at Calvin Presbyterian Church, 248 Westmount Road East, Kitchener. The film tells the story of the decades long struggle of the Lubicon Cree for control of their own traditional lands.

2011, INTERNATIONAL YEAR FOR PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT

On 18 December 2009, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the year beginning on 1 January 2011 the International Year for People of African Descent. The Year aims at strengthening national actions and regional and international cooperation for the benefit of people of African descent in relation to their full enjoyment of economic, cultural, social, civil and political rights, their participation and integration in all political, economic, social and cultural aspects of society, and the promotion of a greater knowledge of and respect for their diverse heritage and culture.

THE **WANTED** LIST

DONATIONS REQUIRED FOR OPEN CLOSET

Please consider donating your gently-used clothing in support of OPEN CLOSET. Drop off time for donations is Monday March 7 from 5 – 8 p.m. at Trinity United Church, Kitchener. The Open Closet event is in celebration of International Women's Day. ▶

DATES TO **REMEMBER**

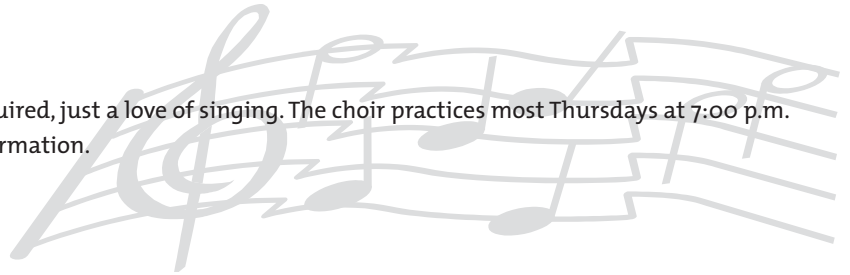
DATE	DAY	TIME	EVENT
February 20	Sunday	11:30 a.m.	Westminster Annual Congregational Meeting in the Sanctuary
February 21	Monday	10:00 a.m.	Family Day "Bring on the Sunshine!" at Forest Hill United Church on Westmount Road E.
February 27	Sunday	9:30 a.m.	Prayer Shawl Circle in the Sanctuary
February 27	Sunday	7:30 p.m.	Taize Ecumenical Worship Service at St. Joseph Catholic Church on Madison Avenue
March 7	Monday	5:00 p.m.	Drop off for gently used clothing at Trinity United to support Open Closet
March 7	Monday	6:30 p.m.	Church in the City at the Symposium Café in Waterloo
March 8	Tuesday	11:30 a.m.	Sexual Assault Support Centre hosts the Open Closet event to 2:30 at Trinity United
March 15	Tuesday	7:45 p.m.	Westminster Church Council meets in the Community Room
April 2	Saturday	7:00 a.m.	Westminster at the Elmira Maple Syrup Festival

WESTWORDS **DISTRIBUTION**

An electronic copy is distributed electronically in colour as soon as it is available to everyone for whom we have an email address. A black and white printed copy is placed in the nametag box at church for those who have requested a printed copy or for whom we do not have an email address. A limited number of additional paper copies are available for visitors and those who would like an extra copy. ▶

JOIN THE **CHOIR**

Join the choir for fun and fellowship. No audition required, just a love of singing. The choir practices most Thursdays at 7:00 p.m. See Steve Boothby or any choir member for more information.



The final submission date for the next issue is Sunday, April 10. Please e-mail any articles, announcements and news items to <gmelnik@gto.net> or contact him to have them picked up. Scheduled publication date for the next edition is April 24.



westwords

THE NEWSLETTER OF WESTMINSTER UNITED CHURCH

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Westminster United Church relies on the support of its people.