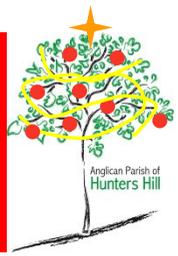


# The Fig Tree

*"Nurturing the seed of faith"*



Welcome to our fifth edition of "The Fig Tree". It is hoped that parents, caregivers and grandparents will use this as a tool to build upon the faith of their family.

We strongly believe that the home is the place where faith is best caught, taught, practised, nurtured and lived out. The role of the Church is to nurture and resource you in living this out, and be a place where we come together to share life with all its ups and downs.

The word holiday is believed to be an abbreviation of the phrase "holy day". Holy days are special days set aside throughout the year to celebrate great events in the life of the church. Christmas day is one such example.

As Christianity expanded it became tradition that some of these days would become a day off work, just like a Sunday, so that people could worship together and have a rest. These holy-days eventually became known as holidays.

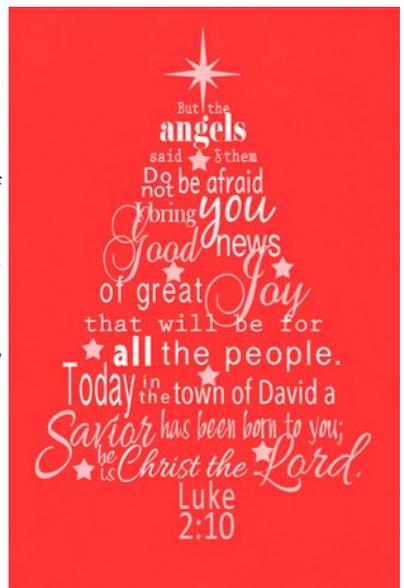
Christmas is 12 holy-days starting from Christmas Eve to Epiphany (where we recall the coming of the Magi) on January 5th. Only a couple of centuries ago Christmas was 40 days long, ending with the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple (Candlemas) on 2nd February.

We encourage you to make these school holidays into a most holy time where we listen to each other, hear one another's hopes and dreams, share in each other's fears and pain, and celebrate all of life's joys. In the midst of all this is the Holy One, the Lord God. May you come to know God's presence in your family these holy-days.

Enjoy the time while you can—it will quickly disappear.

With every blessing!

*Rev'd Michael Armstrong.*





*In this edition of  
The Fig Tree we will be  
exploring some of the  
traditions of Christmas.*

### *Christmas Crackers*

Christmas can be “crackers” at times, but the tradition we wish to explore are the items often found on your table at Christmas Dinner, commonly called “Crackers” or “Bon Bons”.

We understand the first “crackers” were created to tell the story of Christmas, and the following is our understanding of this tradition.

The story begins with the wrapping which is a symbol of Mary, who bore Jesus, who is the greatest gift of all.

We enter into a tug of war to remember that the world that Jesus came into was one of chaos, with competing ideas about how to live as God’s children. God enters this world in a surprising manner (pop!). He comes as a little child, Jesus.

It is through Jesus that we are made heirs of God’s kingdom (the crowns), and receive the good gifts of that kingdom (hope, love, joy and peace). On Christmas Day we particularly celebrate with Joy (hence the joke) the great gift of Jesus himself.



## esus

According to the legend, there was a candy maker who wanted to invent a candy that was a witness to Jesus. The result was the candy cane. First of all he used a hard candy because Christ is the Rock of all ages. This hard candy was shaped so that it would resemble either a “J” for Jesus or a shepherd’s staff. He made it white to represent the Purity of Jesus. Finally a red stripe was added to represent the blood of Jesus. Sometimes a green stripe is added as a reminder that Jesus is a Gift from God. The flavour of the candy is peppermint which is similar to hyssop. Hyssop is in the mint family and was used in the Old Testament for purification and sacrifice.



## *Hanging Stockings*

Saint Nicholas (Santa Claus) was born in the Middle East. He grew up to become the bishop of Myra (now Kale). His

hometown Lycia is near the coast of what is now Turkey. Legends tell of his love for children, his kindness and of many miracles.

Perhaps the most famous story of all tells how he helped three unfortunate young sisters, who all had suitors but had no dowries because their father, a poor man, could not raise the money, and so they could not marry.

Now Bishop Nicholas was a shy man and did not like to give money directly, so he

thought of a way to give it anonymously. When the first daughter was ready to marry, the good bishop tossed a bag of gold into the house at night. Later when the second daughter prepared to marry, she too received a mysterious bag of gold. When the third daughter prepared to marry, the poor nobleman was determined to find out who had been so generous. So he kept watch and saw the bishop drop another bag of gold into the house. It has been said that Saint Nicholas climbed on the roof and dropped the third bag of gold down the chimney where it landed in a stocking hung to dry, giving us a reason to hang up Christmas stockings today. When the father saw what had happened, Nicholas begged him to keep the secret but, of course, the news got out. From then on, whenever anyone received an unexpected gift, they thanked Nicholas (you may find a gold coin in your bag).

## *We Three Kings of Orient Are ... One on a Motor Bike, Two in a Car :)*

Gift giving is indeed part of the Christmas tradition, begun by the Magi (Wise Men) who brought Jesus gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. These were symbolic gifts representing the purity of God, the offering of worship, and a reminder of sacrifice (ultimately made by Jesus).

As you unwrap your gifts this year, take a moment to pause in between each gift to remember something that you really wish to be thankful for—something that cannot be purchased. Perhaps something pure, such as love and friendship, something greater than us, such as the gift of peace, or something that has required sacrifice.

The Magi travelled far to bring their gifts, but what they soon discovered in that Manger was the greatest gift of all. Priceless!



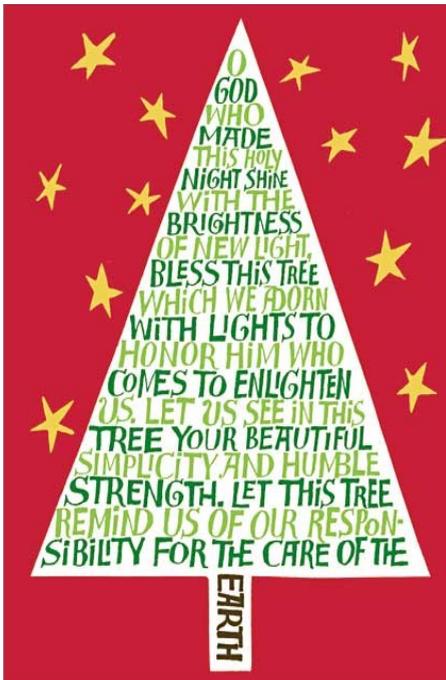
## *O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree*

Our Christmas Tree has many different origins. Probably first brought in as part of the Mid-Winter Festivals of Northern Europe, the Christians adopted it as a symbol of Christianity.

For Christians the tree was a reminder of the tree on which Jesus hung and died, and gave his all. Unlike that first tree, this is an evergreen tree to remind us that God gave once and for all to bring new life.

The tree is decorated with various items that are Christian symbols. Tinsel or a paper chain is placed on the tree to remember the line of Holy Men and Women who passed on the good news of Jesus across the generations. In some places each link in the chain has a prayer written on it.

Originally fruit was hung on the tree as a reminder that they were half way through winter, and new life was not far away. We now hang baubles which are symbols of the fruit of the Holy Spirit, which fills the world.



Candles were added to the tree as a reminder, in the dark of winter, that the light of God still shines. For Christians it became a reminder of the Easter (Paschal) Candle which is a symbol of Jesus who shines in the darkness.

A star is placed on top of the tree as a reminder that we, like the Magi (Wise Men) continue on our journey to seek God. Others place an Angel on top to remember the rejoicing with the shepherds as the Angels shared good news.

The Christmas Tree is usually kept in place until January 5th (Epiphany) as a reminder of the great gift we have received, and that as bearers of this gift we have a great responsibility.

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