

St James the Less Penicuik and St Mungo West Linton

Scottish Episcopal Churches

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Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Rector's letter for January 2025

Personal Notes

Today we have celebrated the first Sunday of the twelve-day season of Christmas. We have jumped from the Nativity to Jesus being twelve years old in the space of four days! Throughout Epiphany the readings reflect the revelation of Jesus as the Messiah, but it does mean we time travel quite a lot between the naming of Jesus and his baptism in the River Jordan.

This Christmas, as last Christmas, we have been very mindful of the situation in the Holy Land, and the suffering of the people of Gaza in particular. Jesus taught us to side with the oppressed and to seek justice for all. I pray that the suffering and oppression comes to an end soon.

Today we have three and a half minutes more daylight than on 21st December, even though the sun rises two minutes later! Such are the wonders of the internet that we can find such facts out, which for some of us are fascinating. Many centuries ago people knew the turning of the year, the Winter solstice, was on 21st December, and at places like Maes Howe, they constructed buildings or stones that aligned with the sun rise or sunset on the Winter Solstice. Our bodies do react to the changing seasons and despite living in comparative comfort with artificial lighting, we are not immune to the influence of the seasons. It is a reminder of our connection to all of creation.

We have had an incredibly mild Christmas this year, part of the pattern of global warming. Of course, for Scotland and the UK as a whole, climate change may lead to the degradation of the warm ocean current flows, causing us to have much harsher winters in the years to come, and hotter summers, with many more rainstorms dumping far more water in shorter periods of time than our river systems can currently cope with. We can do our small part to make things better; letting our grass grow slightly longer, not paving over driveways but making permeable surfaces, using water butts to collect rain from our roofs, etc.

I have just finished the book I mentioned in my last letter ('This Here Flesh', by Cole Arthur Riley). It was a good and easy read, with some points worthy of further consideration. As my 'books to be read' pile seems to mysteriously grow, I am somewhat behind on reading books I bought earlier this year. So, I think I might start 'Tarry Awhile: Wisdom from Black Spirituality for People of Faith' by Selina Stone, which I bought last February.

I have also been reading a book on a sadly topical subject. It is called 'Escaping the Maze of Spiritual Abuse: Creating Healthy Christian Cultures', by Dr Lisa Oakley and Justin Humphreys. It is an important read in terms of issues of safeguarding, especially relating to coercive behaviour coupled with spiritual abuse. The recent issues relating to safeguarding in the C of E, including John Smyth and the Soul Survivor church, show how important it is to be aware of, and seek to ensure that no one should be exposed to these types of abuse.

Some of you will know that I joined a community choir, called 'Crescendo' earlier this year, after encouraging them to use St Mungo's as a rehearsal space every Thursday evening at 7pm. We joined forces with the other community choir, 'Wednesdays', for four concerts this year. The largest (and in my opinion, the best) was held in St Mungo's on Sunday 24th November, where we held a sell-out concert. Half the proceeds went to the Mission to Seafarers Scotland, a charity both our churches support each year. Singing is a very healthy thing to do; research shows endorphins are released and singers have to focus so any other worries don't have a chance to intrude for a while. Why don't you consider joining a choir? St James the Less could do with some more singers, particularly tenors and basses, and the Crescendo choir is always welcoming to new members, no audition is required.

The services held at both our churches over the Advent and Christmas seasons have been excellent examples of worship and encouraging people into our

churches who may seldom come. I pray we may be able to continue to be open and welcoming as we hear the important stories of the season of Epiphany. The Lesson and Carols service at St James the Less brought in some people to strengthen the choir, so there were 33 people robed and in good voice, as well as about 110 in the congregation. The singing was wonderful and the musical accompaniment by David McGavin on organ and piano was superb as always, with support from Alan Murray on guitar. The Crib Service at St Mungo's was well attended and it was great fun to spend time with children, full of awe and a decent dollop of excitement, as we sang songs and a story of the birth was told.

As this calendar year draws to a close, I would like to acknowledge the contributions of so many people to the life of our churches, from those who are 'front of house', to those who do a lot behind the scenes to make sure our services are able to run so well. There is always a need for more people to ask, 'what can I do?', or to come forward with their particular gifts and see how they can be used.

News and new things happening

St James the Less Fellowship Lunch – Sunday 5th January

The collection at the lunch will be for ... Gillian Little and James Hepburne-Scott will be providing the soup, and it will be a celebration of their engagement. I am all sure we wish them every blessing in their marriage. Wedding date to be announced – keep Saturdays in May clear!

Carol Singing

Many thanks to those who pitched up to sing carols at Aaron House, Cowan Court, John Street in Penicuik, and in the Old Crown Inn in Penicuik. I promise next year to plan the 'Beer and Carols' a lot better and see if we can do this in the Gordon Arms as well as in the Old Crown Inn.

St James' Christmas Coffee Morning – Sat 7th December

The Christmas coffee morning raised over £900 for church funds. A truly excellent sum, given how horrible the weather was. Many thanks to all who provided baking and gifts to sell.

St Mungo's AGMs

St Mungo's AGM is on Sunday 12th January, directly after the service.

Tuesday afternoon Bible Study for all – Romans

Commencing on 7th January we shall be studying Paul's Letter to the Romans. Do join us and engage in this study, as we explore a unique letter, as it was to a community that Paul hadn't initiated. We shall study this over eight weeks, completing the week before Lent.

Monday Evening Faith Development – The Bible in the Early Church

Starting on 13th January we shall explore the Bible in the early church, based on the book of that name by Justo Gonzalez (ISBN 978-0-8028-8174-8). It would help to have a copy of the book. www.bookfinder.com is my usual place to find used copies of books. We shall explore the first six chapters, which is part one of the book. We may pick up part two of the book after Easter.

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity -18th to 25th January

This yearly week of prayer has materials prepared by the ecumenical community at Bose in Northern Italy. As we celebrate 1,700 years since the Council of Nicaea, the worship service has at its heart, the Nicene Creed. Reflecting this, the scripture readings for this year focus on belief. We are invited to reflect on the story of Martha's confession of faith in Jesus as narrated in John 11:17-27. Each is called to sit with Jesus' provocative question to Martha: "Do you believe this?"

There will be a joint service between St Mungo's and St Andrew's in West Linton on Sunday 19th January, being held this year at St Andrew's Church. I am communicating with the Penicuik Churches Together ministers to consider how we may do a joint service, maybe mid-week.

Burns Night Event – Friday 24th January

There will be a Burns themed storytelling event in St James' Hall at 7pm on 24th January. Contact Sue Owen for more information.

Monday Study Group – 'The Bible for Normal People' – Mondays 27th January, 3rd, 10th, & 17th February, at 10:00 am

We shall be running a discussion group, based around some of the podcasts in the 'Bible for Normal People' series. The idea is that you will listen to each podcast in the week leading up to the Monday and come ready to discuss what we have heard. Most of the podcasts are about 55 minutes long. You can access them direct from the Bible for Normal People website, or by searching on YouTube, to listen on that platform. There are other podcast platforms that I am sure will also provide access to them.

27 January: Interview with Walter Brueggemann.

<https://thebiblefornormalpeople.com/b4np-podcast-episode-4-resurrecting-the-bible-in-the-mainline-church-with-walter-brueggemann/>

3rd February: Interview with the late Rachel Held Evans

<https://thebiblefornormalpeople.com/b4np-podcast-episode-3-unraveling-and-re-raveling-the-bible-with-rachel-held-evans/>

10th February: Two podcasters discussing the topic of teaching the Bible to Children

<https://thebiblefornormalpeople.com/b4np-podcast-episode-7-teaching-bible-children-pete-jared/>

17th February: interview with Diana Butler Bass

<https://thebiblefornormalpeople.com/b4np-podcast-episode-20-reading-bible-experience-relationship-diana-butler-bass/>

These meetings will be held in the church hall at 10:00.

Shrove Tuesday and Lent

This year Lent starts on 5th March. This means the Shrove Tuesday pancake party in St Mungo's undercroft will take place on Tuesday 4th March. Put it in your diary now and let other people know about it.

Monday Study Group – 'Superstar' – Mondays 28th April, 5th, 12th, 19th, 26th May, & 2nd June

Lots of advance notice that we shall be running a discussion group using the York Course called, 'Superstar' commencing on 28th April. It is being held in the church hall at 10:30. If you wish a copy of the course booklet, please let Nick know. The cost will be £5.

In Other News...

As this year draws to a close, I am taking this next week off. A chance to recharge my batteries, read some books, catch up with friends, attend a concert, and ugh, do my tax return! I am not sure I will get a chance to lie-in though. Misty's body clock is unerring, and she is at my bedside demanding a walk at what feels like an early hour on a week off. She doesn't understand the concept of holidays and days off.

I wish you all a happy and peaceful New Year when it comes. May we all know God's peace and love and share it with everyone we meet.

Nick Bowry

Regular Activities

Ministry in Care and Nursing Homes

Cowan Court, Penicuik: We have been part of a rota with the other Penicuik churches, visiting Cowan Court on a Sunday afternoon for the last year. We visit Cowan Court about once every 5 or 6 weeks. Our next visit is on 26th January.

Aaron House, Penicuik: We are part of a rota with the other Penicuik churches, visiting Aaron House on a Wednesday afternoon at 2pm. As with Cowan Court we will visit once every 5 or 6 weeks. Our next visit is on 29th January. If you are able to join the team offering this ministry, please let me know.

Whim Hall, Lamancha: We visit Whim Hall Care Centre on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays of each month. Our next visit is on 9th January.

If you are interested in supporting this rewarding ministry by being part of the visiting teams then please let me know. Normally three of us attend each time, so we can support and guide people through the service and have a chat afterwards with whoever attends. We use a simplified form of the Liturgy for Reserved Sacrament and sing a few well-known hymns. Your prayers are welcome for this increased activity in and for members of our local communities.

Bible Study for all

We hold our weekly Bible study at 2pm on a Tuesday afternoon, online, for up to an hour and a half. We have a break for July and August.

We come together with the common aim of exploring the texts, understanding their context, and just as importantly, exploring how it speaks to us and how it informs us today. We enjoy exploring our different understandings and learning from each other. Please do join us, we are always happy to include more people.

From 7th January we shall be reading Paul's letter to the Romans.

Monday Study Night

Starting back on 13th January we shall be exploring the Bible in the early Church. We shall be using 'The Bible in the Early Church' by Justo Gonzalez, published in 2022, as the basis for our discussions. We shall explore Part 1, 'The Shape of the Bible' in the eight weeks prior to Lent. Please join us for these discussions.

Faith Development 'Faith Books'

When we have a fifth Monday in the month, we hold a discussion at 7.30 pm about a book as a way of introducing people to different authors which may pique an interest to read more of their work (or not!). In looking for new or used books, I have often used www.bookfinder.com I am sure there are other search sites that will help people find the books on our reading list.

The books we shall be discussing in 2025 are:

31st March: *'The First Paul: reclaiming the radical visionary behind the Church's conservative icon.'* By Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan (published by SPCK, ISBN 978-0-281-06158-7).

30th June: *'Making Sense of God's Love: Atonement and Redemption'*, by Lorraine Cavanagh (published by SPCK, ISBN 978-0-281-06403-8).

29th Sept: *'A Rabbi's Bible'* by Jonathan Magonet (published by SCM, ISBN 978-0-334-02506-1)

Morning and Evening Prayer

We meet online Monday to Friday at 9.00 am and at 5.30 pm. It is a good way to start and end our day, coming together for worship, with daily readings including the psalms; a good rhythm for worship in the Anglican tradition of saying the Daily Offices. Please do consider joining us.

If you wish to access the Daily Office liturgy with the daily scripture readings, go to the Provincial Website, www.scotland.anglican.org and place your cursor on the 'Spirituality' heading. A submenu appears and you can select the appropriate Daily Office from the right-hand side of the page.

I circulated the Daily Intercessions booklet we use by email on 26th February. If you would like a paper copy, please let me know.

Mid-week evening services on Zoom

On the first Wednesday of each month, at 7.30 pm, we hold a service of Prayers for healing online. If you wish someone or a situation to be prayed for, send an email to me or Marion Mather.

At 9pm every Wednesday evening we hold the service of Compline. Please do join us for this short service of calm and settling prayers before sleep.

Continuing our Mission: Leading Your Church into Growth Prayer

Each weekday morning, we pray for growth in our church. If you are not able to join us online for Morning Prayer at 9 am, can I encourage you to pray this once a day. The prayer is given below.

God of Mission, who alone brings growth to your Church,
send your Holy Spirit to give:

vision to our planning, wisdom to our actions, and power to our witness.
Help our church to grow:
in numbers, in spiritual commitment to you, and in service to our local
community, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In Touch Magazine for St James the Less and St Mungo's

In Touch is circulated to all on email and is issued in paper format to those who do not have email. The cost of a paper copy is £2 for an A4 version, and about £1.50 for an A5 version. We print a very limited number of paper copies to keep our costs down, and to reduce our consumption of paper. If you receive an email version but would also like a paper copy, please let Sue Owen know and we invite you to make a suitable donation (preferably by bank transfer rather than in cash) to cover the cost. The deadline for content to be submitted for the next issue is 2nd February 2025. I would like to encourage you to submit something for inclusion in the magazine, a poem, a review of a book or a film, an article on a subject of interest. If you wish to submit an article, please send them to intouch@stjamesthelesspenicuik.org

Financial giving to St James the Less or to St Mungo's

If you are able, can I ask you to prayerfully consider setting up a recurring monthly payment to the church via on-line banking, to contribute financially on a regular basis. Details of the bank accounts are given below for each of the churches.

St James the Less:

Monthly donation by bank transfer (include your name in the reference line when setting this up – only the Treasurer knows the name of the donor). Bank details are: St James Episcopal Church Penicuik, acct no 17117264, sort code 80-22-60. If you wish to make a donation by cheque, please make out the cheque to 'St James Episcopal Church Penicuik'.

St Mungo:

Monthly donation by bank transfer (include your name in the reference line when setting this up – only the Treasurer knows the name of the donor). Bank details are: St Mungo's Vestry, acct no 00817851, sort code 80-09-39.

Ecumenical Relations and Community Involvement Work

The Penicuik Ministers continue to meet every month in the Storehouse for a chat. Once a month the Penicuik Churches Together (PCT) has a joint Sunday evening service. The schedule detailing where the services are each month is on the PCT website. <http://penicuikchurchestogether.org.uk/> I continue to

meet with Revd Dr Tony Foley to discuss joint services and matters of mutual interest, in West Linton.

Diocesan and Provincial Activities

I have attended one meeting of the Diocesan Personnel Committee in December. I meet the other Episcopalian priests in Midlothian once a month for a time of conversation and prayer, which helps us share ideas and support each other in our ministry.

The Ministry Team

We continue to meet monthly to plan for the coming months; planning services and faith development activities as well as exploring other aspects of what is offered to the congregations and to our local communities.

Zoom Links for Services

We have a regular pattern of services. Details of these are set out below. You can access them using the Zoom links.

Morning Prayer at 9 am, and Evening Prayer at 5.30 pm, Monday to Friday. (Zoom only)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/6289561588?pwd=aGtNeE1ZM3l1TkIuckp3bVJtZkRHQT09>

Meeting ID: 628 956 1588 Password: 040775

St Mungo, Holy Communion at 10.30 am on Sunday.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/93417190423?pwd=K1ZoS0xKUWpRVENGTzFYl3NvakFHQT09>

Meeting ID: 934 1719 0423 Passcode: 062021

St James the Less, Holy Communion at 10.30 am on Sunday.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/92002197798?pwd=REp5NHQwVEdSd3A4a09lN1lHOUnUT09>

Meeting ID: 920 0219 7798 Passcode: 040775

1st Wednesday Evening Service at 7.30 pm (not July or August) (Zoom only)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/96303841875?pwd=YmZiYkdNNzZJeWI5cmtZL2RLUWc1Zz09>

Meeting ID: 963 0384 1875 Password: 040775

Wednesday Evening Compline at 9 pm (all year) (Zoom only)

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/95345457224?pwd=TDNoT20vR2dYMVQ5STdsS0lzR0dMQT09>

Meeting ID: 953 4545 7224 Password: 040775

Zoom Links for Activities

'Monday Evening Studies' at 7.30 pm (Zoom only)

<https://zoom.us/j/97670406222?pwd=WWUzL0dLNHdWdFJOYVNnLzdvY2w2Zz09>

Meeting ID: 976 7040 6222 Passcode: 202101

Use this link for Monday Evening Studies and the 'Faith Book' discussions.

Weekly Bible Study: Tuesdays at 2pm (Zoom only)

<https://zoom.us/j/92510962481?pwd=L1hsaCtiWTh0ZFFib3N0WlluaVlaUT09>

Meeting ID: 925 1096 2481 Passcode: 040775