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*From the Ministers study.....*

Dear Friends,

Well, it's nearly Christmas again. Anyone who's battled with the traffic in Valletta recently might be forgiven for feeling that seasonal goodwill is already in short supply but here we go again, all of us consumers apparently set to spend yet another record amount in our efforts to keep the economy afloat and each other happy.

Have you noticed that many if not most of the presents that we give to each other, at least within families, tend increasingly to be non-essential items. I don't mean that we necessarily give presents that are out-and-out luxury items but that, because we generally acquire most of the things we need for our daily lives as we go along, the presents that we give are sometime the sort of thing that is not needed for our normal life. So perhaps our children no longer get a new dressing gown as a Christmas present; they've already got one. If anyone gives me the proverbially awful tie, I can smile sweetly, secure in the knowledge that I won't actually have to wear it because I've got plenty of other ties. The essential goods are mostly taken care of in the ordinary course of events and this causes problems when we come to buy presents. We all have to face that question, 'what do you give to the man or woman who has everything (they need or want)?' It's not that we or the people to whom we give presents literally have everything; it's just that in our successful materialist society many of us seem to have all that we reasonably need or want yet we still feel the necessity to give and receive

presents 'because it's Christmas.' And therein lies the central paradox for Christian people.

The material goods that are the visible hallmarks of our successful materialist society are easy to decry because we have the luxury of taking them for granted. We have probably all complained at one time or another about the increasing commercialization of Christmas but in a world of want, which is what much of this world really is outside our little corner of it, what we need is more of these goods, not fewer. In this sense, we need more commercialization, not less. The commercialization of which we complain is in some ways a mark of success which we should hope to spread to those parts of the world in which a present might be much more costly for the giver and essential for the recipient than is usually the case for us. To spread our success, we need to continue to be materially successful ourselves. As a society, we're not going to be much use materially to anyone else if we are impoverished ourselves. Yet we know that the Christmas story is about a God who didn't need or use material goods to change the world in the most dramatic fashion. He needed materiality, human flesh and blood, but not the commercial sort of material goods. The life to which the child was born was one which did not sit easily with the conspicuous consumption that was evident in some parts of his society as it is evident in some parts of ours. So we have a paradox here for Christians at Christmas – we are material and materialist creatures in a materialist world yet we celebrate the action of a God who asks us to live beyond materiality. We have to function as disciples in this world as best we can. Adopting a purist stance and decrying all that the modern Western Christmas is about will not make God's story more credible. So how do we respond to the real nature of this Christmas story while staying in touch with our world as it is?

Well, here's one way. We can invent a notional family, say mum, dad and 2.4 children, less materially blessed than ourselves. We then give to the charity of our choice as much of the price of Christmas for this family as we can afford, food, presents and all, and take that sum out of what we would normally spend on ourselves and our family so that we genuinely share our materiality with theirs. If we get the chance, we let people know what we've done and why – that way, more people might try it next year. However we do it, the important thing is to use the blessings God gives us to bless his world and its people – and enjoy it!

May God bless us all this Christmas

David

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### **THE MOST IMPORTANT GIFT!**

Sometimes the mistakes made by little children in Christmas plays carry important lessons.

A small boy was heard to recite a piece concerning the Three Wise Men. In doing so, he referred to their gifts as “gold, frankincense and ME’ Of all the gifts we can give to Christ, he wants us most of all.!

**FROM THE EDITOR.....**

Dear friends,

This year has flown by. Here we are right on the threshold of Christmas and for many of us the prospect of a holiday is just around the corner.

This is the Season when we remember as Christians not only the coming of Christ in the flesh, but also his continual coming into our lives from day to day.

Christmas is always a delightful time of the year. For the Christian it is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophetic words (Chapter 9) *"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given  
....called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father,  
Prince of Peace. He also calls him 'Emmanuel' – God with us.*

Each year at this time we are confronted with the challenge that Christ is with us. We look to the past and remember his birth, we look to the present and future, encouraged by his words *"Lo, I am with you even till the end of the age"*.

Yes, Christ is once again visible and present; seen in the eyes of the children looking expectantly at the shop windows aglitter with the festive message, in the eyes of the beggar, the thankful eyes of those who receive and those who give. It is a time when mankind is drawn together in a bond of unity and love. Where strangers meet and greet, enemies embrace and forgive, where family and friends unite. The evidence of God's presence is witnessed in many different ways. "Emmanuel" is relived and we are drawn into the blessing and wonder of it.

I pray that the light of Christ's coming may dawn on you, bringing unexpected peace, new insight, and fresh hope and encouragement. Remember that Christ wants to offer us more than the superficial merriment that so often passes for Christmas.

May Christ be the center of your festive season and your hopes and dreams be fulfilled in him.

May the Lord bless you richly this Christmas and take flesh in your everyday experience

Yours in the Christ Child,

Vee



#### CHURCH FUNNIES.....

*A little girl was sitting on her grandfather's lap as he read her a bedtime story. From time to time, she would take her eyes off the book and reach up and touch his wrinkled cheek, at the same time touching her own cheek.... then his again. Finally she spoke up: "Grandpa, did God make you?" "Yes, sweetheart," he answered "God made me a long time ago" "Oh," she paused, "Grandpa, did God make me too?" "Yes indeed, honey. God made you just a little while ago." Feeling their respective faces again, she observed: "God's getting better at it, isn't he?"*

**BOOK REVIEW.....****LAZARUS**

( a Novel by Morris West)

“I’ve always wondered about Lazarus. He had walked through the gates of death. He had seen what was on the other side. Did he want to return to life? Did he thank Jesus for bringing him back? What kind of man was he afterwards? How did the world look to him? How did he look to the world?”

So speaks the main character in Morris West’s latest – and finest – novel. The book’s theme is simple, but majestic. The Pope of Rome needs a heart bypass operation. It brings him face to face with death. He survives. And he’s a changed man. West has a Vatican prelate observe, ‘They told us he was having a bypass. Now it seems he has had a complete change of heart.’ Before, he was a traditionalist, rigorist and juridical ruler of the Church. Now he begins to see that the foundation stone, more, the lifeblood of the Christian community is love, that without love the faith and labour of bishops, priests and people will wither and die, that love is the bread of life – the only bread of life – which the Church has to offer to a starving world.

All very well in principle. When he tries to put his new insights into practice, he finds he has to confront the rigid power structures of an authoritarian community, structures which he himself had confirmed and strengthened.

Meanwhile there's a sinister sub-plot brewing. For an extremist group is bent on assassinating him.

The story sparkles with crisp, crystalline phrases. Morris West is clearly a lover of words who delights in crafting and polishing phrases and sentences to perfection. Eminently worth reading!

Jean Gray.

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TO GOD FROM THE DOG.....

Dear God: Are there mailmen in heaven? If there are, will I have to apologize?

Dear God: Why are there cars named after the jaguar, the cougar, the mustang, the colt, the stingray, and the rabbit, but not ONE named for a dog? How often do you see a cougar riding around? We dogs love a nice ride! Would it be so hard to rename the 'Chrysler Eagle' the 'Chrysler Beagle'?

Dear God: when we get to heaven, can we sit on your couch? Or is it going to be the same old story?



### **Offering Envelopes**

Please remember that the new offering envelopes will be available to be collected from the vestry from December onwards. We aim to start using them in January – please take a set and use them.

THE EYE OF THE STORM

Edmund A Steimle once said that the first Christmas was like the eye of the storm. The eye of the storm is that short space in the middle of a storm when everything becomes calm. Sometimes the sun even comes out. But then the storm begins again in all its fury.

We think of mother Mary and baby Jesus in the stable. We think too of the Christmas carol 'All was calm, all was bright'. What a beautiful and peaceful time it seemed to be. We have a picture of quiet stars and peaceful sleep – cattle lowing softly in the background. Yet those were hectic and evil times much like our own and the quietness of the manger scene was but the eye of the storm. There had been much evil, before the coming of Jesus and there would be much to follow. Already Herod was planning his slaughter of the children. Some thirty years later Jesus himself would die on the cross.

Christmas and Jesus' coming does not allow us to escape from the real world. But it does give us peace in the midst of the storms of life. If we want to forget about the real world at Christmas time – OK! Let us go home and listen to Bing Crosby dreaming of a white Christmas. But Jesus' coming is not a message of escape, or simply something for the children, or, as it has become for many, a time of sentimentality. The message of Christmas says that we can have peace like the peace in the eye of a storm, a peace in the middle of it all, a peace which indeed passes all understanding.

So at Christmas we rejoice in the hope born of the conviction that the storm, the destruction, the violence, the hopelessness does not have the last word. But God – who gives us a "silent night" in the middle of the storm - he has the last word. **V.C.**



## FRIENDSHIP CHRISTMAS CAKE

Vee picked this as her favourite recipe not only because of its delicious taste, but also because she likes the purpose behind it.

Anyone preparing this cake must separate three cupfuls of the mixture and give them to three friends, together with a copy of the recipe, thus widening the circle of friends in the process.

### METHOD

**Day 1 :** Mix one cup of flour, one teaspoon of sugar and one packet of instant yeast. Add one cup of tepid milk and stir well. Let it stand for one day.

**Day 2 :** Add one cup of granulated sugar, one cup of plain flour and one cup of milk. Stir well and cover loosely with a tea towel.

**Day 3 :** Stir well

**Day 4 and 5 :** Do nothing

**Day 6 :** As in day 2

**Day 7 :** As in day 3

**Day 8, 9 and 10 :** Do nothing

**Day 11 :** Stir well and remove separate cupfuls and give to three friends with a copy of the recipe. To the small amount of the mixture that you have left, add the following ingredients:

1 cup granulated sugar

2 tsp. Salt

2 heaped tsp. Baking powder

2 eggs

½ cup corn oil

½ cup sultanas

½ cup chopped nuts

2 tsp. Vanilla essence

2 heaped tsp. cinnamon

1 or 2 chunky cooking apples,  
chopped.

2 cups plain flour

½ cup glace cherries.

Mix everything together and put into a large, well-greased, baking tin (approx. 11" X 12"). On top of the mixture, sprinkle half a cup of brown sugar and pour half a cup of melted butter. Top with chopped walnuts and sprinkle with cinnamon. Bake for 40 – 50 minutes, Gas Mark 4 - 350 C/180 F.







### **Our Overseas Mission – Fumbo HIV/Aids Mission, Zambia**

Simultaneous with establishing Dar Tereza Spinelli as our local mission in mid March, our church has been supporting **Fumbo Mission in Zambia**.

Sister Catherine Farrugia, a nun of Maltese origins, has been our point of communication. Below, we provide a transcript of a recent letter with details of the work being done at Fumbo, as well as her expression of the concerns and joys associated with this mission.

*“ Dear Minister David,  
Your letter brought a lot of joy for your good response to the cry of our beloved people. We are very grateful to you. Extend our thanks to the people who will contribute with generosity toward our project of Home Base Care HIV/Aids.*

*From May till October, we are busy giving seminars to our Care Givers. These Care Givers are men and women that are trained how to take care of the sick people in their homes. So we continue to bring them together once a month for 3 days to implement them with knowledge, and motivate them more for their voluntary work they are doing. By coming together, they share a lot of experience of their fatigue & joy in their ministry. In between one seminar & another, I go with them to see the patient. I receive a lot from them. They enrich you with good values; like to be happy with what you have, to share the little that you have with others, and the time that is for God (Sunday Service) is a time to forget everything and to give that time to God & worship Him with gratitude and joy. These values*

*strengthen me more than what I do for them. You think that you give, but you receive more from the poor people.*

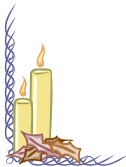
*To you and your church, my greeting, my love, and my gratitude accompanied with prayers. May grace and eternal life be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*With best wishes,  
Sr, Catherine F. ”*

The Mission has 144 patients and 70 Care Givers who care for the sick and homeless, and needs about 8000 Lm a year (more if there is hunger). Compounded with the daily symptoms of HIV/Aids, people are confronted with the consequences of unpredictable cycles of drought, flood, hunger and the destruction of crops, houses and roads.

We might be reminded again of Matthew 25 where Jesus says our kindness to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the needy, the imprisoned, is really unto Him! May we continue as a Church, to demonstrate our faith in Him, through our relationship to Fumbo Mission.

Funds may be given to Rev. David or to myself, with cheques payable to St. Andrews Church, and with the notation ‘c/o Fumbo Mission’.



Frank Wilmot

# A Christmas Samaritan

A festive tale in verse by Sandra McGruther.



It wis Christmas week and the shops were thrang,  
Wi' folks buyin' gifts the whole day lang.  
The toy shop wis doin' a richt roarin' trade  
And the gaffer wis pleased at the profit he'd made!

Wee Jeannie stood out in the cold and the rain,  
Her nose right up tae the shop's window pane,  
And she gazed at the toys so new and so bright  
At every conceivable thing tae delight.

There were robots and lego and cuddly toys,  
Dollies for girls and pop-guns for boys,  
Dart boards, train sets, remote-controlled cars,  
Footballs, meccano and monsters from Mars.

But wee Jeannie sighed at the best of them all:  
All shiny and tinselly — a real fairy doll.  
Aye, Jeannie might sigh for a dolly like yon  
There'd be nae presents for her on Christmas mo'n.

Wi' her dad in the lyle an' six others tae feed,  
Jeannie's maw wis hard pit tae afford jam and bread,  
Her washed-out wee frock was all shades of greys  
And her hand-me-down shoes had seen better days.

A man and a wumman brenged intae the store  
They'd bought plenty already but still wanted mair,  
"Stocking fillers" and trinkets and all sorts of stuf,  
If their weans didnae get them they'd go in the huff.

A Sunday school teacher was next in the shop;  
She didn't see Jeannie — she'd nae time tae stop  
A long list of names she held in her hand  
Of the children whose grand Christmas party she'd planned.

Then out of the gloom came old Sadie Brown,  
An old widow wumman, shopping in town,  
She liked tae look at the toys now and then  
Tho' her grandweans were all grown wummen and men.

She saw Jeannie's face all squashed up tae the glass  
And she thocht in her heart, "Och the pairt little lass!  
She shouldnae be out in the streets all alane  
Wi' hardly a stitch to keep out the rain."

Then Sadie she minded o' anither wee child  
The one that they said was so meek and mild:  
A bairn so good, so true and so kind ...  
Thinking of him Sadie made up her mind.

The shopkeeper lifted the fairy away  
And Jeannie's wee face was filled with dismay,  
But before her eyes could shed even a tear  
She heard, "Here's a wee present for you, my dear."

An auld wife smiled as she gave her the doll,  
Wee Jeannie could hardly believe it at all,  
She'd treasure it dearly, this moment forever,  
A real Christmas feeling: a gift from a giver.



**THE INNKEEPER WHO CHANGED HIS LINES**

Wally was big for nine years of age, was clumsy and slow both in movement and mind. But he was a kind fellow and at school became the natural protector of the younger children.

The time came for his school to put on the annual nativity play and Wally fancied the idea of being a shepherd with a flute.

His teacher, Miss Lombard, wanted him in a more important role, however – she thought that with his height he would make an excellent innkeeper. The innkeeper had very few lines and Wally's height would make his turning away of Mary and Joseph all the more forceful.

The night came, the hall was packed with all the parents and friends, and the nativity play began. Wally, big slow Wally, was caught up in the magic of it all.

The time came when Joseph appeared, slowly and tenderly guiding Mary to the door of the inn. Joseph knocked hard on the door and Wally the innkeeper was waiting. "What do you want?" Wally asked, swinging the door open. "We seek lodging", replied Joseph. "Seek it elsewhere.....the inn is full". Wally looked straight ahead as he spoke vigorously.

"Sir, we have asked everywhere in vain. We have traveled far and are very weary."

"There is no room in the inn for you". Wally looked stern as he had been told to.

"Please, good innkeeper, this is my wife Mary. She is heavy with child and needs a place to rest. She is so tired."

For the first time the innkeeper relaxed his stiff glance and looked down at Mary. With that there was a long pause, long enough to make the audience a bit tense with embarrassment. "No, begone" whispered the prompt from the wings. "No", Wally repeated automatically, "Begone". Joseph sadly placed his arm around Mary and Mary laid her head on her

husband's shoulder and the two of them started to move away, all according to the script.

The innkeeper did not return inside his inn and slam the door as he was supposed to do. He stood there in the doorway watching the couple move away. He stood with his mouth open, his brow creased with concern and to the audience's horror, his eyes filled with tears. Suddenly this Christmas pageant became different from all others. "Don't go, Joseph", Wally shouted, "bring Mary back, you can have my room."

The curtain had to be lowered, the play had been spoilt, or had it? There was a deathly hush in the hall. I don't know what you think, but I think that slow-minded and slow-moving Wally had preached the most significant sermon in the history of the Christian Church!

(this was written by George Irving)



WRITTEN BY CHILDREN.....

**Dear God,**

**-I went to this wedding and they kissed right in the church...is that okay?**

**-I think the stapler is one of your greatest inventions.**

**-I bet it is very hard for you to love all of everybody in the whole world. There are only 4 people in our family and I can never do it.**





**DATES TO REMEMBER.....**

**Sat. 6<sup>th</sup> December - 3 – 6pm crafts afternoon in the church hall**

**Sun 7<sup>th</sup> December – crafts on sale to congregation for charity**

**Sat 13<sup>th</sup> December – Pizza night for ‘teens’ at Mama Mia in Sliema at 7.30pm**

**Sat 20<sup>th</sup> December – Party in church hall from 3 – 5 pm**

**Sun 21<sup>st</sup> December – All age service involving children at 10.30am.**



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**What difference does it make?**

As Christmas and New Year draw near, there have been a number of recent events which might make us wonder about the similarities between our world and the world into which Christ was born. When we look at some recent events, we can recognize our world in the Christmas story and the Christmas story in our world. Perhaps we seem to be a bit short of heavenly choirs and wise men but there are enough similarities to make us wonder about what this story is telling us about the world and our role in it.

To take just two current issues, think about terrorism and refugees. As I write, two more bombs have just gone off in Istanbul, killing about 30

people and injuring hundreds. Earlier in the week, two other bombs devastated two synagogues in the same city. These are just the latest in a long line of terrorist outrages around the world. Nor is terrorism confined to non-state groups and individuals; some states are no strangers to terrorist action, albeit conducted in uniforms by high-tech armed forces. At the same time, the conditions which play such a large part in breeding terrorism show no sign of abating. Millions are still marginalized, underfed, underdeveloped and undervalued in a world dominated by the interests of the most powerful players. Then add in the refugee question, including all those known as 'illegal immigrants', 'asylum seekers' or simply 'aliens'. Some are on the move seeking a better economic future for themselves and their families; some are forced to move by crop failure, political circumstances, the need to escape the activities of local warlords or foreign powers or some combination of these factors. In both these issues so current for us, we can see a reflection of the story of the Christ born into a world of Roman occupation, Jewish uprising, economic and political marginalization. Our world is in these respects recognisably similar to that of the Christ who as a child was a homeless refugee, an intended victim of state terrorism, and who as a man was an actual victim of the politics of expediency. Given such similarities after 2000 years, what makes us think that Christians can make any difference to such a world? Perhaps it depends on the decisions we make.

When we make moral and ethical decisions, we do not make them consistently. What we do in one context, we do not do in another. An extreme example will make the point. There were numerous instances in the Second World War of people who in the exercise of their public duties helped to murder thousands of people but who in their private lives were loving husbands, fathers, wives, and daughters. The morality of the private sphere did not carry over into the public sphere. Similarly, leaders in our own day who declare wars in which thousands will inevitably die may be loving family people; Herod's soldiers in Bethlehem may have been decent enough men in themselves. In small matters as in great, ordinary people often feel themselves compelled to

act differently because expectations in the public moral sphere displace the normal constraints of the morality of the private sphere. The moral sphere of the private individual gives way to the demands of the public sphere.

Now think about the main characters in the Christmas story; Mary and Joseph. An young unmarried pregnant girl and an older man. Think too about the normal moral expectations of their day, expectations not so different from our own with respect to young unmarried girls and older men. It doesn't take long to realize that what is going on in the Christmas story is well outside the normal boundaries of the morality of both the private and public spheres. What God was doing was well beyond the normal range of expectations and as a result none of the people involved knew much, if anything, about the real nature of what was happening. But for anything to happen at all it was necessary that two people should make decisions which put them beyond the moral pale in the public sphere. God's story only works because Mary and Joseph stand out against the demands of the public moral sphere of their day. The very private flows into the very public and takes it over. In this story, the moral sphere of the private individual takes over the public sphere.

So when we ask what difference Christians can make to a world which still looks pretty much as it did 2000 years ago, we are asking why there have not been more people like Mary and Joseph, prepared to stand out for God against the normal expectations of their day. There have been some, of that there is no doubt – think of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, for example. But we are also reminding ourselves that this story asks us about our willingness to stand out for the things of God against the normal expectations of our world with its rampant materialism. What difference might it make, where might Christ be born again, if we could do that?





## CHRISTMAS PRAYER.....

Thank you, Father, for this loved and familiar season:

For tuneful carols  
For reunions with families and friends,  
For giving and receiving,  
For a sense of celebration everywhere,  
For all the ways of saying 'Christ is born'

We ask that the familiarity of Christmas may not smother the truth that we celebrate together.

May Christ be amongst us, as real, as close, as warm as at that first Christmas: With Mary, may we open our hearts to the word of God, that Christ may be born in us; with the shepherds, may we hear in the world of our daily work what heaven is saying to us; may our experience of Christ be as real and enduring as theirs. Save us from a faith so shallow that we put away our Christian commitment with the decorations or discard it like an unwanted present.

Father, hear our prayers for those for whom Christmas brings added responsibilities and tensions:

Those who work throughout the holidays: hospital staff, police, firemen, travelworkers, guards, all men in uniform protecting us.....

Those who find Christmas increases the unhappiness they already have to carry: the lonely, divided families, the ill, those already separated from the people they love, the depressed, oppressed and the anxious; those who face the first Christmas following a bereavement.

Father, in Christ you embrace our happiness and our need: give to us a love that shall exclude none.

AMEN