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Winter 2017

All Saints' Cottenham

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A letter from Gareth Morgan

Christmas now comes to me with a tinge of sadness. It's due to my age - being in my mid-eighties. This year we did not get a card from Margaret, an old friend. Mind you, we did not get one the year before. I had visited her in an old people's home and she was finding it difficult to have a conversation. This Christmas she had died and as I write this I am about to go to her funeral. While some of the Christmas cards we receive tell us of contented lives, others tell

of us illnesses that are restricting. Linda this year sent a computer written note - her hands now shake so much that she is unable to write. Martin, an old friend, the same age as myself, recently stayed. I was disturbed that he could not lift his overnight case out of the car and was shocked to see how long it took him to walk up the stairs. But the saddest occurrence is the cards which don't arrive because an old friend has died.

Continued on page 2

A letter from Gareth Morgan continued from page 1

All this make me wonder about my own death. It now seems much more of a possibility than it was in the past when it seemed to be far off, or even as if it might not happen. Some spiritual traditions emphasise that we need to come to emotional terms with our own death - perhaps imagining it and accepting it as a coming reality. This will help us to shape our own lives. For myself I try to make good use of the time which I have left. I try to keep fit and so most days it is a walk to the Co-op to buy milk. I go to the course for mature movers on Wednesday afternoon at the College. At first I was rather sniffy about it, thinking it would be too easy, since I saw people arrive with walking aids and that most of the exercises were done sitting on a chair. Now I find I am quite relieved when the exercises stop! Then there is the chance for a half hour chat over a cuppa. Incidentally I find this a good opportunity to socialise with others - as I do with the cup of tea after the church service and during the Workers' Educational Association courses at the British Legion. I try to keep my mind active, so I have been studying for a degree with the Open University, which can be done from home.

As I get older, I remember the past more, particularly my parents and grandparents, and look back with envy at the climbing and other sports which I was able to do when I was young. I find that I am challenged by the phrase from Lord's Prayer asking for the gift of today's bread. I understand that it means receiving help sufficient just for today. I do not need to focus on the past, whether about regrets or what might have been. I do not need to dwell on the future, whether it be dementia or death. I need to focus on today. This is the reality of life. It is best lived in the present.

Have a good New Year! Or should I say, have a good today!

HAPPY TODAY

Little Saints is a group for babies and pre-school children with their parents and carers. They meet in All Saints' hall on Thursday mornings in term-time, 10 am to 11.45 am. If you would like to know more, please contact Emma McCaughan (250827, emma.mccaughan@pobox.com).

There are currently two **Evening Discipleship Groups** which meet fortnightly on alternate Mondays and Thursdays from 7.45 to 9.30. We aim to encourage and support one another as disciples of Jesus in our everyday lives. The groups are always open to visitors on a one-off or regular basis. If you would like to know more, please contact Mick Lumsden (251371, mick@mplumsden.plus.com) or Lynda Unwin (250435 lynda.kingsfarm@gmail.com).

The **Daytime Discipleship Group** meets on Tuesdays at 1.30 pm. Anyone who is happy to study with small children present is welcome. If you are interested in joining, please contact Kirsten Burrows (kirsten.burrows@gmail.com).

The Prayer Circle meets on the last Thursday of the month at 2.30 pm in members' homes. We share a time of fellowship over refreshments followed by a time of prayer together, finishing around 4 pm. Everyone is very welcome to join us (please see pewsheet for venue). If you would like to know more, please speak to Jennie Steer (202026, dandj@steer.me.uk).

The monthly **Fellowship Tea** is an opportunity for anyone to meet for prayer and a chat over afternoon tea. It takes place on the third Monday of each month in the Community room at Franklin Gardens from 2.30 pm to 4.00 pm. If you would like to know more, or if you require transport to and from the tea, please contact Sue Hooks (250560) or Maggie Appleby (200035).

All Saints' Choir usually practises in All Saints' Hall on Fridays from 7.00 pm to 8.00 pm, but dates and times can vary. New members are always welcome. For more information, contact Frances Horgan (franceshorgan9@hotmail.com).

All Saints' Bellringers practise in the bell tower most Wednesday evenings 7.30 pm to 9 pm. New members are always welcome: if you would like to chat about it, call the Tower Captain, Simon Wilson (251105).

ATTIC is a youth group run by Christians Together in Cottenham for 11 to 16 year olds, aiming to provide fun activities with a short something-to-think-about spot. For dates and times please contact Steve Whyatt (01223 237874, stevew@genr8.org).

Regular services and groups

The 10.30 am Sunday service takes place every Sunday in church. One Sunday a month is an All-Age service, other weeks are Holy Communion. See All Saints' Diary for the schedule for each month. Services always include hymns and are followed by fellowship with refreshments in the church hall.

Sunday School, for children up to Year 2, meets in the hall during the 10.30 service (except when there is an All-Age service or a 9.30 service). There is no lower age-limit, and we have toys for tinies. Parents are welcome to accompany their children until they settle. We have stories, songs, games and craft activities, and re-join parents during Communion. For information contact: Sarah Ward (sarah@wardhome.me.uk). The **Samuel Group**, for Years 3 to 6, meets upstairs at the same time. For information contact Emma McCaughan (emma.mccaughan@pobox.com).

The 9.30 Service is designed for young families and takes place in church, usually on the last Sunday of each month. See All Saints' Diary for confirmation of the date. The service lasts about half an hour and includes songs, a story and prayers suitable for very young children, followed by refreshments.

The 8.30 am Sunday service takes place every Sunday in church. This is always Holy Communion without hymns. On alternate weeks the Book of Common Prayer is used.

Morning Prayer is held on most Thursdays at 9.15 am in church. The service lasts about half an hour.

Wednesday communion services take place at different locations in the village on a monthly pattern. We are aiming to continue all services during the interregnum. If it is necessary occasionally to cancel a service because no leader is available, people who attend regularly will be informed. If you want to check up before attending, please contact Janet Johnston (253478).

Tuesday Church is designed for families with children of primary school age, but anyone of any age is welcome. They usually meet fortnightly during term-time, with games, drinks and snacks from 3.15 pm. The service is from 4 pm to 5 pm and includes songs, a story, craft and prayers. For information, contact Emma McCaughan (emma.mccaughan@pobox.com).

From the Registers

We rejoice in the marriage of

19 November Anne-Marie Simons & Matthew Craig

We commend into God's care those who have died

12 November Janet Coles
22 November Ethel Joyce Childs

Prayer for the Interregnum

Almighty God our heavenly Father,
whose beloved Son our Saviour Jesus Christ
commanded Saint Peter to tend your flock,
and Saint Paul to be your witness in all the world,
and have charged us at All Saints'
and with all the saints to make disciples,
send us, we pray, a priest
to lead, teach and pasture your flock at All Saints'
that we, abiding in Christ the true vine,
may serve and witness in our community
and bear much fruit to your glory,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

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The venomous Bead

Introducing a new series for the interregnum

Saint Bede of Jarrow (The Venerable Bede) has been given the job of looking after the parish of Cottenham during the interregnum. He writes to an old friend for advice.

My dear Trumwine,*

Well, here I am at last, and I must say that it's good to feel useful again after nearly five centuries of gardening leave. I'm not complaining of course, and I freely admit that I could have handled Henry's divorce with a little more finesse. But there were powerful forces at work, and I don't see that I can be fairly blamed for the entire unpleasantness. Peter could have been a little firmer with the Pope, I think.

Anyway, as I say, here I am, finally rehabilitated and assigned to Cottenham. "To where?" do I hear you ask? You may well ask, Trumwine, you may well ask, and I know just what you're thinking. I thought just the same: 'homestead of Cotta's folk', and I'm not afraid to say that I shook to my sandals. You remember Cotta of course, frightful oaf, loud of mouth and small of brain, with a B.O. problem and a tendency to flatulence. I rather fancy the pigs used to hold *their* noses when they saw him coming! Well you can stop worrying right now. Whatever problems Cotta's descendants may have, their personal hygiene is above reproach. Nestled among the congregation on a Sunday morning, one might fancy oneself in a flower garden!

Allow me to anticipate your next question: "Why Cottenham?" Why indeed! I think I may say that punishment is still part of the picture. It can't be entirely accidental that they've stuck me so far from our native Northumbria where there isn't a hill in sight. The locals go on about the beautiful skies, but that's only because they've got nothing else to look at. Still, mustn't grumble. I know

* Trumwine was Bishop of the Picts from 681 and later a monk at Whitby.

In our private lives we are often so hasty to make a point that we tend to forget that someone is sensitive and it would be best left unsaid.

Few of us are perfect, with countless relationships destroyed by wanting to confess to some mistake just to get a guilt feeling off our chest. We can confess to God at any time but should we hurt the person we have wronged just to clear our own conscience? We are taught to forgive and be tolerant, but not everyone finds it that easy, so think before offloading a burden, it may be regretted.

For those not prepared to accept an apology, I would say, bury the hatchet and get on with life. Life is too short to hold a grudge. Perhaps it is safer to pass a sensitive problem over a trusting ear before going 'public.'

These thoughts are not directed at anyone in particular, academics or simple countrymen like me. We can all speak out of turn sometimes. If we think twice and speak once, the world could be a better place.

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Who will get the message? by Ken Hewitt

In the era of modern communication, no sooner than someone even thinks of passing on details, someone else is reading it at the touch of a button or key. How often are messages sent without deeply considering the possible consequences?

I was part of an organization a few years ago when one officer had a complaint about a member which needed reporting to a senior member. How was it done? Not face to face or a personal telephone call but, you guessed it, an email. Unfortunately, some days later this message was picked up by every member in a thread after another unrelated email was sent. Imagine the embarrassment and unpleasantness over a minor misdemeanour because someone was too busy to think first.

Politicians never seem to learn from the number of leaked emails and texts and, not being content with that, they choose to put libellous messages on social media.

Facebook and other social networking sites seem to invite you to tell everyone else your business, where you are going and who with. Someone somewhere is rubbing their hands with glee knowing that an innocent message to a friend tells the thief that you are in Tenerife for two weeks. What an opportunity to earn a living without work. Police are constantly warning us of such dangers. Personally I am not terribly interested who had what for breakfast, the colour of the nail varnish being used or other trivia.

On a lighter note there are positives. A neighbour found a tortoise wandering in her garden. She put it on Facebook and tortoise and owner were reunited within hours after escaping its pen months before.

The Venerable Bede depicted at his desk in a twelfth century manuscript

I'm lucky to have any sort of assignment with my record, and maybe if I make a really good job of this one, they'll send me to Ripon or perhaps even York. We live in hope!

As far as my duties are concerned, I'm here to oversee the interregnum. The last priest, a lady I believe, who hailed from an extraordinarily interesting-sounding place called Australia, where there are man-eating spiders and all the people walk upside down, has moved to another parish, and the poor souls have to muddle along on their own for a bit. Now this does worry me a little, since as we both know, I haven't a particle of administrative experience. If it were a question of teaching them Latin, or helping with the choir, I'd be fine, but no one seems to use Latin and there's already a choir director (who does need help, though, so I can be a bit useful there). Otherwise I'm rather at a loss, and this is where I would really appreciate your input. After all, Trumwine, you were a *bishop*. You know what it is to run a community, and I would be truly grateful if you could give me the benefit of your advice from time to time.

Will write more soon. Must dash – the archdeacon's expected.

Ever your own, Bede

Christmas Tree Festival

It has always been difficult to have conversations around death, dying and funerals, even more so when it gets personal. However, in the past few years signs have been appearing that this taboo is under challenge.

This challenge is partly being driven by demographics: the generation known as 'baby-boomers' (1946-1955) are reaching the stage of life when death is getting closer. Throughout the years this generation has been characterised by questioning and challenging institutions and authority, and perhaps wanting to be original and creative. As someone put it: *"The generation that created Woodstock are not going to 'go gentle into that good night'."*

Signs that the taboo is being questioned include the making of documentaries such as ***My last summer*** (Channel 4), the emergence of Death Festivals (Southbank), and the success of the grass-roots movement known as Death Café. A Death Café is a space where people can eat cake and talk about death, sometimes in a real café or sometimes in a home or other meeting place. Young adults as well as older people find that once they start talking, there is a lot to be said about this sensitive but important reality.

The Church of England is well placed to be part of this momentum. For centuries we have held, both literally and metaphorically, people's experience and thoughts around dying, death, funerals and bereavement. Pastorally, we are there for people as they face death and there for them as they plan funerals and grieve. We also have plenty of space and are good at tea and cake.

GraveTalk is a café space to talk about death, dying and funerals. It is organised by the local church and can be held in a hall, a home or a real café. At each event a pack of GraveTalk questions are distributed – there are fifty-two specially written open questions which get people talking about death, dying, funerals and loss. There are no answers, just conversation. And it's open to people of all faiths and doubts.

Perhaps All Saints could invest in a pack of Grave Talk Cards and organise a session in the village.

Grave Talk

a new Church of England initiative described by Mick Lumsden

I recently attended a Grave Talk session in Cambridge. About a dozen people met in a café-type setting. We sat in groups of four, munched cake, drank tea and chatted together as we were led by cards with such questions as:

Do you know where your will is?
What was your first experience of death?
Do you think you ever get over a bereavement?

It was fascinating to share with others on this subject that we never usually discuss. It struck me that it is so much easier to be thinking about these issues before a crisis strikes. I was also struck by the paradox of death – that for the Christian it is both the gate of Glory and therefore a friend who 'takes us home' but also the last enemy that separates us cruelly from those we love. The discussion was far from morbid – indeed we laughed a lot and if the discussion did get heavy there was always more cake.

This new resource has been produced by the Church of England after testing with parishes in partnership with the University of Staffordshire, and is explained on their website at https://churchsupporthub.org/article/gravetalk/, quoted opposite.

Photographs by Ben Coppin and Jane Webster

On 10 December visitors to All Saints' enjoyed Christmas trees decorated by village organisations and live music from keyboard, handbells and brass band.

Christmas shoeboxes a report by Sue Hooks

Did you get involved in Operation Christmas Child this year? Many people did. If you were not one of them, would you like to help in 2017?

Operation Christmas Child is a charity which sends gift filled shoebox to needy children in numerous countries throughout the world. All Saints' has been involved for more than a decade and is supported by lots of people from the whole village.

This year we decided to repeat last year's experiment and set up and pack on Friday and pack all day on Saturday, or until we run out of things to go into the boxes. As usual it was a hive of activity, right from the time when the cars arrived to empty my garage to the least popular job, clearing up at the end.

There is a wonderful atmosphere with a real buzz as everyone finds something to do and there is plenty to do. Some wrap the boxes with Christmas paper, others sort out the toys, stationery, toiletries, gloves and hats, and bags which go in. Still more help to fill the boxes or write Christmas cards. Then there is box checking, counting and storing them, not forgetting the catering team, those who run the raffle and those who tidy up as we go along to keep everyone safe.

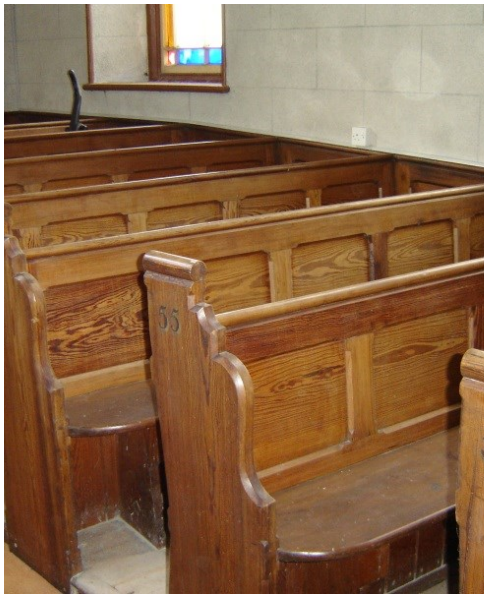
A number of regular helpers like to do the same job, others like a change, but since there is so much going on, there is plenty of variety. Children are always welcome and soon get the hang of what to put in and even small children can usually manage with minimal help. Our youngest helper was five and our oldest ninety-four, so there is no age barrier. I am always so grateful for the help, without which this wonderful event would not be possible. Help comes from church members, from all around the village, as well as further afield.

This year we sent 602 boxes to the processing unit in Godmanchester where they joined more than 13,000 other boxes and were sent to needy children in Kyrgrzstan and Ukraine.

butterflies, and the views over the foothills of the Pyrenees, shimmering in the sunlight, are breathtaking.

The hill is called, in the local dialect, *le pog de Montségur*. *Pog* derives from the Latin *podia* (elevated place, or balcony in a Roman theatre), and its northern French form *puie* or *puy* eventually developed into the English ***pew***.

At the bottom of the hill stands a stone Cathar cross, a monument to the two hundred or so members of the Cathar church who had taken refuge in the castle, and were burned to death after its capture by French royal forces in 1244. Is there perhaps some message for us in those flames that crackled around the pog nearly eight hundred years ago?



What's in a name? a series by Frances Horgan

Pew

The word *pew* might be defined as *'the answer to the question: what single item of ecclesiastical furniture has caused more upset than the Reformation, the French Revolution and World War 1 all put together?'* This being so, I was expecting to find something fairly inflammatory in its ancestry. Could it perhaps be related to *pain*? Or *panic*? Or *pandemonium*? Not at all! In fact, it comes from the same root as one of my favourite holiday destinations.

The Château de Montségur lies in southern France, in the spectacular and unspoilt department of the Ariège. In order to reach the castle, you have to climb a very steep hill, usually in temperatures of around 35 degrees. The result is worth the effort: the medieval ruins share the summit with fragrant wild flowers and

Operation Christmas Child is just one project undertaken through Samaritans Purse which is a Christian organisation. The boxes are given to needy children throughout the world regardless of nationality, ethnicity or faith and nothing is asked in return, in fact nothing of a religious nature is permitted in the boxes. Most of us are glad to know that children who have little or nothing of their own can receive a box filled with lots of small gifts which will bring a little happiness to them.

Throughout the year hundreds of small items were collected for packing in boxes. In fact now is a good time to start, with lots of reduced-price Christmas stock around. Some people pack their own boxes at home, which is great, as it is fun looking out for little things to see how much will actually fit.

Please do consider if you can be part of this great event next November. I am always happy to discuss how you might be involved.

My sincere thanks to everyone for their help with what was our best year yet.

An African message for Christmas

On Christmas morning our service was led by our old friend Revd Roger Bowen, who has supported All Saints' through several interregnums and many clergy holidays. Earlier in his career, Roger and his wife Wendy spent time in East Africa, where they learned Swahili and translated some traditional African stories, one of which Roger adapted for his Christmas sermon to us.

You have all heard about three men making a long journey a long time ago about this time of the year to visit a new king. You may know them as 'The Wise Men.' So here is another story about three young men who also travelled a long way to visit a king - but they were Africans and this was an African king. You will have to decide if these young men were wise, or not . . .

Once there was a very rich king who would only allow his only daughter to marry if her future husband could perform certain mysterious deeds about which there was total secrecy. Many tried and failed and at last three young men from a distant country thought they would try their luck. One was the prince and he took with him many wise men from his father's court. The second was the son of a merchant and he took a whole string of porters carrying valuable gifts on their heads. The third was the son of a very poor man and all he took was some food for the journey wrapped in date-palm leaves, and some dried millet seed tied up in a cloth bundle.

Oh gracious Lord and Father of us all
Who shares our burdens and who hears our call.
Shed on our world the peace we all so crave.
O God of wholeness, only You can save

Throughout our world lie hatred, grief and greed,
Now for Your healing power we intercede.
Soften the hearts of those who seek to kill.
For Lord we know that this is not Your will.

Victims of war and frightened refugees
Lord Jesus Christ, who all their suffering sees.
You gave Your life to heal our broken land
We ask You now to send Your healing hand.

Lord of compassion, look down on our plight.
Here, all your children, precious in Your sight
Pray for a world where war and hatred cease.
We ask you now to send Your perfect peace.

With the hundreds of thousands of immigrants living in appalling conditions mostly across Europe, could we stretch out our hands and welcome them into our homes as we did with the evacuees?

We know that economic migrants and potential terrorists have infiltrated the mass of displaced refugees. Our consciences are painfully torn, wondering how to respond. With our giving restricted by what we can afford, we are tempted to donate to charities where we are certain to reach the needy, as those supported by All Saints' and others we know well.

The scale of the migrant crisis is beyond our comprehension with governments unable to find humane solutions to the suffering due to the massive numbers involved. There have been several supposed 'cease fires' in Syria but battles continue. We can only hope.

We are told that God is all powerful and merciful. May we not only sing this hymn but use these words in our daily prayers.

Hymn for Peace by Lynda Unwin

I was searching through the hymn book for hymns for Remembrance Sunday and recalled that we used to sing ***O Valiant Hearts*** to the tune ***The Supreme Sacrifice***. I noticed that it is no longer in the hymn book and, indeed, we have not sung it for many years. I always found the tune very moving and so decided it write a new hymn for it which would include prayers for our troubled world (see words opposite). I think it is important that we remember that sacrifice made by those who fought in the world wars but I also wanted to plead for the current situation and the victims of war and greed today.

Tribute to the suffering by Ken Hewitt

As most of us have recently celebrated Christmas with our families and friends in the comfort of our homes, a little child in Aleppo will be gazing helplessly at a mountain of rubble, thinking, "somewhere in there was my home." The chances are, that child is now orphaned, cold and hungry. Is there anything we can do about it? Materially, not much, but we can pray that some Divine intervention can turn the hearts and minds of the many warring factions in Syria and other troubled parts of the world to ways of peace as reflected in the words of Lynda's Hymn Of Peace.

In past conflicts and natural disasters everyone has responded generously to such appeals, but tragically this is different. Recent aid convoys in Syria have been hijacked and plundered by military groups with some simply blown up. Such events have prevented charity aid being donated to help innocent civilians caught up in the conflict.

During the second world war, young evacuees were welcomed into our homes to escape the London blitz, but then we knew who the enemy was, unlike many wars of today. Countless evacuees and their families have remained close friends with host families to this day.

Continued opposite

They set off together for company and it was not long before they reached a great river which flowed out of the country to which they were going. By the river lay a very thin crocodile.

"Oh, travellers," wheezed the crocodile in a very faint voice, "please give me something to eat because I am weak from hunger and cannot walk as far as the river so that I can find my usual food."

"Not likely" said the prince and the merchant's son together. "You are only an animal after all." But the poor young man felt pity and he gave the crocodile all the food wrapped in the palm leaves. As soon as he had eaten, the crocodile revived and managed to lumber back into the river and to swim rapidly away up stream.

The travellers went on their way until lying in the path before them was a bird surrounded by fledglings which were just learning to fly.

"Oh travellers," cheeped the bird in a very small voice, "please give us something to eat because we are too weak from hunger to fly back up into the safety of our tree."

"Not likely" said the prince and the merchant's son. "We did not bring food with us just to give it to the birds." But the poor young man felt pity and he untied the cloth and scattered the millet seeds onto the ground. The birds pecked up every seed and then flew into the top of the tree to sing their sweetest songs.

Continued on page 12

An African message continued from page 11

Meanwhile the travellers continued on their way until they saw that the path was covered in ants.

"Oh travellers" squeaked the ants in their high little voices, "please give us some food. We have eaten every tree and every bush and every blade of grass on this plain and now we are dying of hunger and too weak to crawl away in search of new food."

"Not likely" said the prince and the merchant's son. "You are just horrid little insects - get out of our way." But the son of the poor man had pity and gave them the date-palm leaves in which his own food had been wrapped. The ants ate ravenously and then filed away over the horizon and were lost to sight.

"You are a stupid fellow" the merchant's son said. "You have given everything away and now you will have to be one of my porters if you want me to give you any food for the rest of the journey."
So the poor young man joined the column of porters with heavy loads upon their heads. But before very long a fly came and settled on the prince's forehead.

"Please give me a drink" buzzed the fly, in the tiniest possible voice.

"Get away, don't bother me!" replied the prince with a swipe of his hand. "Give you a drink indeed!" The fly flew away and settled on the poor man's hand.

"I too am thirsty" the poor man said. "I understand how you feel. Please drink from the sweat on my brow." The fly drank its fill and then buzzed away to bother the travellers no more.

just as the fly had warned. But the fly still had not come to rest on the man's hand. So to give himself time, he began to run round and round the tree in ever wider circles and then when the fly touched down on his hand, he ran with his axe straight for the massive trunk. The tree toppled and fell and some of the bystanders only just got out of the way in time.

So the young man married the princess and they did live happily ever after and all because, when her husband was a poor man, he had still been the kindest and most generous man in the land . . .

. . . and that's what Christmas is all about, not so much what you get as what you give, and how you help those in need – which you can do at home, at school and everywhere in the world.

And when you think about it, isn't that what Jesus did? Born in a poor family, he spent his life helping people in need. He had an even longer journey to the stable than the wise men had, that he might make us friends with God and show us how to love one another – just what this world needs today.

An African message continued from page 15

"We must find a way of defeating this man" said the king, who really did not want his daughter to marry anybody at all. After consulting many hours with his council of old men, he called the young man to dine with him at mid-day in the shade of a huge baobab tree which twenty grown men with arms fully stretched could only just manage to encircle.

During the dinner, a fly landed on the poor man's plate and by bending low over his food he could just make out what the fly had to say.

"The king is planning to ask you after dinner to chop down this baobab tree in the full light of day and before all his elders with one single stroke of an axe. But don't you worry. I settled on the king's plate at dinner last night and learnt of his plans and already your friends the ants are eating away at the tree from inside.
When the tree is just about ready to fall I will land on your hand and you can then fell the tree with one single blow."

After dinner, the table was cleared from under the tree and the king gave the young man an axe, ordering him to fell the tree at one stroke

Now drummers had warned the king in advance that the travellers were approaching and he sent out servants to welcome them to his home. The prince and the merchant's son were given rich food and silk sheets on their beds, but the poor young man had to sleep with the rest of the porters on a heap of straw.

In the morning the king invited the prince to dine with him that night. The prince arrived just as it was getting dark and was shown into the palace courtyard. By the light of hundreds of small lamps set about the walls, he saw an astonishing sight. The courtyard was full of steaming bowls of food and mountains of rice.

"If you can eat all this before the first cock crows," said the king, "the princess is yours. If you fail, the princess will refuse to marry you." The poor prince felt so sick when he saw all this rich food, that he could not eat even a single mouthful. So he told his courtiers to pack his bags and he went home as fast as he could.

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The next day, the king invited the merchant's son to dine with him that night. He arrived at the palace just as it was getting dark and was shown into the palace courtyard. There the same scene met his eyes as had appeared to the prince on the previous night - the courtyard was full of cooking pots brimming over with food. The very smell made him also feel too sick to taste even a mouthful and he ran from the palace, woke up his porters and left with the utmost haste.

The next day the poor young man woke to find he was the only visitor left. The king, thinking to play a joke on him, invited him also to dine at the palace. He arrived just as it was getting dark and by the light of the hundreds of flickering courtyard lamps he saw that the whole place was filled, not with cooked food this time, but with cows and goats and sheep and chickens.

"If you can catch these animals, cook them and eat them all up before dawn," he was told, "the princess is yours." The young man was in despair but then he felt slight tickle on his hand and there was a fly.

"Why are you so sad?" buzzed the fly. "I will soon fetch friends to help you." Before long the fly returned with the crocodile which the poor man had befriended. And the crocodile was not alone. He had brought all his friends and relations who crawled out of the river, up the palace steps and into the courtyard where they soon made short work of all the animals which were there.

Long before dawn, they slithered happily back into the river, and when the king's servants came to see the young man, he astonished them by asking for tea and bread because he said he still felt hungry.

The king was very perplexed, and decided to ask the poor young man to dine with him for a second night. When he arrived, he found that instead of animals, the courtyard was full of seeds, millet, wheat and corn, which had all been tipped out any old how on to the sandy ground.

"If you separate out all the grains and put them back into their proper sacks - without a trace of sand - you can marry the princess and inherit this country." The poor young man got down on his knees and began to pick up one seed at a time - t.t.t.t.t.t.t. - until he felt a fly buzzing round his head.

"Do not waste your time" said the fly. "I will bring your friends who will complete the task in no time."

Before long, the courtyard was full of birds - not only the family which the young man had helped but all their friends and relations.

Within minutes, they had sorted the grain and put it into the sacks. The young man lay down upon them and managed a fairly comfortable night's sleep. By morning he servants were astonished to find the task was done and the young man not even the slightest bit tired.

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