

Bridie's Blethers



December 2023

No Side Ever Wins A War

As we prepare for the culmination of Advent and to celebrate the joy of Christmas and the birth of Jesus over 2000 years ago, this year you could be forgiven if that joy and celebration feels a bit subdued. The world still seems to be caught up in war and turmoil.

Last year saw wars, repression, suffering and injustice in Ukraine, Syria, Afghanistan to just name a few. In 2023 we can add Gaza and Israel to this seemingly growing list.

While the world still recovers from the pandemic, its economic fallout and the impact of climate change, the lack of peace, tolerance and charity in the world seems to be ever present. Those mainly affected are inevitably the innocent, young, old and frail. Even infants and hospitals are no longer safe in times of war.



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Amongst all this is **hope**. We remember God is still ever present and active especially in difficult times. We see the growing worldwide calls for ceasefire and humanitarian aid for Gaza growing and hope this will happen soon.

One news item in particular caught the attention. It concerned a young Palestinian boy, Aasef Abu Mahadi's. He was 11 years old and a promising footballer. His ambition was to be like Yassine Bounou, the Moroccan international goalkeeper. However, during an airstrike he lost one of his legs. During the news article on TV, the young boy (still sitting up with a big smile on his face) was still determined to keep on playing and also took a video call from his hero goalkeeper to show support and keep his spirits up.

"I will keep trying to play football and become a player just like Yassine Bounou," he said.

There are a number of examples of hope and the power of faith in places of conflict. Despite Israel's recommendation to evacuate northern Gaza, Sister Nabila of the Sisters of the Holy Rosary (a local project partner of the charity Aid to the Church In Need), told the charity that she is not going anywhere.

"We need medicine. Many hospitals have been destroyed. Our school has also been damaged, but we're not leaving. People have nothing, not even the basic essentials, where would we go? To die in the street? There are old people here, the Missionaries of Charity are with us as well, with a group of disabled and elderly. Where can they go? We will stay with them. Pray for us, for this madness to end", she says.

It reminds us that war and violence will never win. Despite wars and all their destruction during which no side ever wins - there are more people with hope, love and faith than those who wish to take it away. Pope Francis also reminds us of this. During a visit to a military cemetery on All Soul's Day in Rome, Pope Francis said,

"Wars are always a defeat, always. There is never a total victory. One side wins over the other but behind that there is always defeat in the price that has to be paid,"

Despite these terrible conflicts, it is right to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. Celebrate and enjoy this Christmas time in the knowledge that despite the terrible stories being reported from war torn geographies around the world, ultimately peace and the work of God will prevail. As the Our Father prayer promises, *"Thy Will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven"*.

God Comes As A Baby At Christmas

By Fr. Duncan



Merry Christmas to everyone at St Bride's! Well, at the centre of our Christmas celebration is a strange, astonishing fact: God became a little baby. We have to say this again: God became a baby for us. The all-powerful Creator of the universe, the reason why there is something rather than nothing, became a baby too weak even to raise his own head. He made himself vulnerable, and he made himself small so that we could love him and give ourselves completely to him.

This special Child on this Christmas Day is placed in our laps. So you want to hold the baby? Mary might ask us. This is what Christmas is all about. This was the stroke of divine genius. Again and again the Lord, the "Hound of Heaven" sought us out, but again and again we sometimes run away. But who can finally resist the baby who is God. The Christ-Child brings out the best in us. He calls forth love in us. If the baby is in

danger, even more so our sense of love and protection would be awakened. The baby wants to get your attention.

God is speaking to us through this Child. We often find the quest for God in the Bible, people seeking God in their lives, you hear it in the Psalms. This is part of our spiritual experience - our quest for God, which brings security and healing. However, biblical religion is not primarily about our quest for God, it is about God seeking us out - his relentless and passionate quest for us. He gains nothing through his search for us. He created the world out of sheer love - that is the message of the Bible. He runs after us. Pursues us. Look at the beautiful Psalm 139 - "you search for me and you know me, in my resting and my rising". This is the Father's passionate search for us.

He called Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Moses, Daniel, Deborah and Ruth, Mary and Joseph. He sought them all out, each time with the aim to form a people according to his own heart. He chose them and he sent them on a special mission. He gave laws, rituals and commandments. Not oppressive demands. They should shape us in the direction of happiness and joy. God gave his people laws and commandments for human flourishing and well-being. He gave us the prophets. They could be harsh, they could be rigorous and unbending but their task was to call people back to obedience. God is passionate to set all things right. Every parent has raised their voice to their children. This is God coming after us, seeking us out.

Despite all these efforts, we tended not to respond. We tended to run the other way. Break the commandments, and stone the prophets. God tried again and again. And we ran away. In the fullness of time, he sent his only Son. He entered the world as a defenceless Baby. God tried so many things but we ran away each time. There is just something magnetic about a baby. How many people set up a manger scene in their homes. The Baby is always at the centre.

This Baby is in danger - right from the beginning. Being Herod is after this child. The Christ-Child is in mortal danger - a threatened, vulnerable Baby who is also God. Who can resist him? Who can finally say "no" to him? Have we something better to do? Is there something more important? He has been placed in our laps this Christmas. When we look into the face of this baby, we are looking into the very face of God. Christmas contains the invitation to give ourselves completely to him and this means that we will lose some of our freedom. Pope Benedict once wrote: "The person who abandons himself totally in God's hands does not become God's puppet, a boring 'yes man or woman'; he does not lose his freedom. Only the person who entrusts himself totally to God finds true freedom, the great, creative immensity of the freedom of good. The person who turns to God does not become smaller but greater, for through God and with God he becomes great, he becomes divine, he becomes truly himself." Here the Holy Father identified the struggle of our age and a sticking point for the possibility of belief for many—if I believe in the Christian God, I must surrender some of my freedom. If we let

Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation.

Our Blessed Mother can help us to surrender ourselves as she did. Her heart was flooded by the love of God, She stands before us as a sign of comfort, encouragement, and hope. Imagine Mary saying to us on Christmas Day: "Have the courage to dare with God! Try it! Do not be afraid of him! Have the courage to risk with faith! Have the courage to risk with goodness! Have the courage to risk with a pure heart! Commit yourselves to God, then you will see that it is precisely by doing so that your life will become broad and light, not boring but filled with infinite surprises, for God's infinite goodness is never depleted!"

At the end of the day, the Saviour of the world came as a Baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger. The Manger was the feeding trough for the animals. This Child will feed the world and bring about a new Kingdom that will never end. That's why the Church has always had a great sensitivity to those who suffer and who are poor and on the margins. We see the faces of the vulnerable and, at the same time, we see the face of Christ. Christ in his most "distressing disguise". The saints say it repeatedly as they serve the poor and the hungry and the needy - they were actually serving Christ. This is so central Christmas message. We find God in the face of the poor and the vulnerable. A baby brings everyone together and we all want to reach out and care for the Child - this is why we are gathering today because God became a baby and allow ourselves to be drawn by that Child's magnetic power.

This is the Christmas Prayer of Saint Pope John XXIII - may it fill all our hearts and lives with peace and joy this Christmas in a world that is still "running away" from God: "O sweet Child of Bethlehem, grant that we may share with all our hearts in this profound mystery of Christmas. Put into the hearts of men and women this peace for which they sometimes seek so desperately and which you alone can give to them. Help them to know one another better, and to live as brothers and sisters, children of the same Father. Reveal to them also your beauty, holiness and purity. Awaken in their hearts love and gratitude for your infinite goodness. Join them all together in your love. And give us your heavenly peace. Amen.

A happy and blessed Christmas everyone and God's peace and health for the New Year 2024!



<https://www.worldhistory.org/image/12682/the-nativity-by-giotto/>

The Nativity by the Italian artist Giotto
(b. 1267 or 1277 - d. 1337 CE).

Did You Know.....

It has been suggested that Christians in the 4th century chose December 25th as Christ's birthday because pagans already observed this day as a holiday.

In this way the problem of eliminating an already popular holiday would be sidestepped and make the growth and adoption of Christianity by the population easier.

Some researchers also suggest that the Roman Catholic Church chose 25th December because it ties in with the winter solstice and Saturnalia, a festival dedicated to the Roman god, Saturn.

The Nature of Prayer



...By Our Largs Correspondent

At the beginning of Advent, the liturgy presents us with a series of beautiful passages from the prophet Isaiah filled with images of the wolf living with the lamb, the cow and the bear making friends, the lion eating straw like the ox, and so on. The prophet is dreaming of the day when a messengers sent by God will wield authority over the nations. When he comes, nations will no longer lift sword against nation and there will be no more training for war. The peoples of the world will hammer their swords into ploughshares and their spears into sickles, words, so central to the meaning of Advent, that they are read, not only on the first Sunday of Advent, but again on the following day, the first Monday of the first week of Advent.

But what are we to make of words written 2500 years ago? Are we any nearer to them becoming a reality in the world today?

There is little evidence of nations hammering their swords into ploughshares or their spears into sickles in

Gaza, or Israel, or the West Bank, the very places where Isaiah lived and breathed all those centuries ago. Are words little more than wishful thinking, or is his dream still alive? We pray for peace, asking God to do something about the horrific things that are happening in Gaza and elsewhere. But does it do any good? And behind that question lies another question, one that has puzzled human beings for centuries and is one of the main causes of loss of faith in the very idea of God in the world today. We are talking of the problem of evil. If God exists and he is a loving God, why does he let evil happen? If he has the power to stop it but decides not to, what kind of God is he? If he does not have the power, then, again, what kind of God is he? Or, if he can make exceptions, do the odd miracle and cure one random person of cancer, why does he not do it for everyone? St Paul tells us in the Letter to the Romans after all, that God does not have favourites.

At the heart of this ancient problem lies a serious misunderstanding of the nature of prayer. Most people think of prayer as a way of getting God to do what we want. But Jesus himself tells us that there is no need for this because the Father knows what we need before we ask him. He warns us against using many words, as the pagans do, and to keep our prayer simple. Intercessory prayer, as this kind of prayer is called, is important because it is a way of expressing our helplessness and complete dependence on the love and goodness of God. True prayer, however, is not a way of persuading God to do what we want, to do our will, to make the world the way we would like to be as opposed to the way it is. It is the way God opens us up to his will for us revealed in the person of Jesus. Jesus came into the world to show us the way to the Father, to show us what it means to be human, to show us what has to happen if Isaiah's dream is to become a reality. Jesus is God's answer to the problem of evil.

All we have to do to change the world is to become more like him: to love our enemies, do good to those who hate us, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, seek to serve rather than be served and in all circumstances to love God and our neighbour as ourselves.

This is God's dream for the world. It is called the Kingdom, and Jesus assures each of us individually, and the world as a whole, that if we seek it above all other things we will find it. It is the fulfilment of Isaiah's dream and is there in the Christmas story for anyone who has eyes to see.

Needs Change, Compassion doesn't



Focus on the new challenges facing the St Vincent de Paul Society in future.

It's the perfect metaphor for the low key charity work of the Society of St Vincent de Paul - an undistinguished building in the Bridgegate, next to one of Glasgow oldest pubs, and marked only by the words 'Ozanam Centre'.

Named after Frederic Ozanam, who founded the society in Paris a few days after he turned 20, clothing is provided at the centre for those in need - just one of countless programmes run by the society in Glasgow and beyond.

And like everything they do for those living on the margins they follow their unwritten philosophy of doing good without fan-fare.

No showy public appearances or elaborate regalia mark out the members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, and that is precisely the way they want it.

But there's more to them than the blackened donation boxes we see every time we leave church.

Joe McGuire, the Glasgow Archdiocesan President of the society and parishioner at St Ninian's Knightswood, said: "The poor are always with us as they say, but nowadays poverty doesn't just mean having little or no food even although as a society we organise food banks, food parcels and things like that.

"But we recognise that loneliness is a terrible kind of poverty and a lot of what we do and once again very confidentially I must stress is visit people in their own homes because more often than not the best gift you can give people is the gift of time."

Generations back, and to a lesser extent today, the famous black boxes were used to alert the society that a friend or relative needed help. What better way of passing on that message than to quietly slip a discreet note along with a donation?

It's donations via these same boxes often hand-made by members and handed down over several generations plus the occasional legacy, that is the society's only source of income, enabling it to offer the services that they provide.

Many of the people they come into contact with nowadays - usually after a quiet word from a priest or family friend - may have drink, drug or mental health problems. Some are suicidal or hiding from an abusive partner.

While members - around half of whom are women - may be qualified in their own fields, as doctors, teachers, lawyers, trade unionists, local government officials and so on, they work very closely with social work departments and other agencies.

Joe McGuire, whose term as president is due to end in February said: "I think we are facing huge challenges over the next few years. There is a growing gap between those in society who are struggling and those who are succeeding, yet the level of government support to those struggling to make ends meet is faltering."

"Community projects such as food kitchens set up during the pandemic are now closing as their government grant expires".

"This means that charities like ourselves will be asked to pick up the tab in some shape or form and many like ourselves will do the very best to meet this challenge."

"In Glasgow many conferences are turning their hand to new ideas and ways of doing things. Community cafes, community kitchens, foodbanks are now on the landscape. There are close links with schools. Warm hubs are now in the conversation, whether supporting them or conferences might consider setting up their own if there was a perceived need."

"Recruitment is always an ongoing issue. A look across the conferences in Glasgow shows some have healthy membership while others are less so. The changes in society over the last 30 years or so has seen both parents working and consequently there is less time for involvement in charities like ours."

"Grandparents are now tied to looking after grandchildren. These are obstacles but we are continuing to find ways around these."

"One feature is 'Sign Up' nights where the local conference holds an information session for parishioners to find out what the society does. This has had some success, and we can only continue to use such ways and others to attract more members."



"But one thing is certain - we will go forward doing God's work inspired by same faith and compassion for the poor which guided our founders all those years ago."

This article first appeared in Flourish, the monthly newspaper for the Archdiocese of Glasgow and appears with kind permission.

With grateful thanks to Brian Swanson (Flourish) and
Joe McGuire(SSVP President, Glasgow Archdiocese.)

HOW LUCKY ARE WE TO HAVE SUCH A GOD!

Scripture from the 2nd week of Advent

'Come to me all you who are weary and
carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest.'

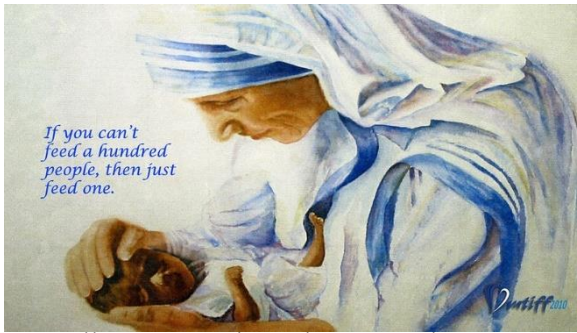
Mt11:28

'For I the Lord your God hold your right hand.
It is I who say to you "Do not fear, I will help
you."

Is 41:13,14

An Unforgettable Acquaintance

.....By Clare McIlhatten



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In 1995 I received a six month Visa from the Indian High Commission in London.

The previous year while I was still living in Italy, I had begun studying to become a Lay missionary. Nevertheless, I needed to learn the practical side of things so I decided from study the best.

I went to Mumbai first as a sort of taster. It is a marvellous city and I would have liked to stay a bit longer.

However, after a week I took a train heading to Calcutta and 36 hours later I arrived in the city that would be my home for the next 6 months. I got a taxi to Mother House of the Sisters of Charity in Bose Road. At reception, Sister Deence took my passport and told me to go upstairs and Mother would see me just as soon as she had finished her breakfast. To tell you the truth I was not quite sure which mother she was referring to but I did as I was bid.... Almost immediately Mother Teresa appeared, smiling. She asked about my family and gave me medals and little prayers for them. At that point, I told her why I had come. She said I would be working for with Sister Damian who was in charge of the street lepers.

Mother Teresa has a leper colony which is state of the art. Nevertheless, not all lepers want to be there because they want to remain free to beg in the street and live with their families. In the colony the lepers weave cloth for the sisters saris and the bed linen for the houses all over the world. They also make their own shoes since their feet are hyper-sensitive. They make the colony self-sufficient.

Mother Teresa, as we know, was a good, holy woman only, but was also extremely practical, sane and sensible. These qualities, or virtues if you prefer, are necessary to carry out the fearful everyday tasks facing the sisters. They practice the "Martha and Mary" syndrome... the prayer and work, the perfect combination.

There are four houses in Calcutta: The House of the Dying, The House of the Abandoned, The House of the sick and The orphanage.

There are two sisters who are doctors holding clinics for everyone needs medical attention. Twice a week there are anti-natal clinics.

Most of the children in the orphanage get adopted but a few do not. They are usually the older ones. However, in the colony, there are small family units where lepers (husbands + wives) live and adopt an orphan. This means that the lepers who are missing some extremities have a child to help them and the child has loving parents. This is altogether a perfect solution.

Mother Teresa's love and compassion are all around. She finds safe accommodation, food and schooling for the children living in doorways. Monday to Friday we went out to tend to the lepers, giving them whatever we had. Sometimes we had towels, clothes and food, but always medicine for them. The food consisted of multi-vitamin biscuits donated by a company from Holland. These biscuits were famous throughout Calcutta - the lepers would sell them for two rupees and the load mafia made themselves rich by selling them on. The problem really was that the lepers needed the nutrition, therefore, we came up with the idea of breaking the biscuits. This caused a riot. They kept shouting "Don't break the biscuits - don't break them."

Even though she was loved, there were those who questioned her work. Many professional people, such as journalists and doctors were against her work and criticised the way she carried it out. She always imitated Christ and was silent before her accusers. She was most certainly an inspiration to us all. She looked after everyone with love, simplicity and particularly humility.

There is much more to be said and it will be said in a little talk that will take place after the festive season.

St. Bride's Christmas Social Evening

The Christmas social evening was held at West Kilbride Gold Club on 8th December and was well attended from parishioners, relatives and friends across our parish. This was our first get together as a Parish since COVID19. Some of the sober pictures are below.





St. Bride's Christmas Carol Service

The Christmas Carol Service at St. Bride's was held on 13th December and was a candle-lit joyful, singing occasion. A special thank you to Aimee Taylor for her amazing flute playing at our Carol Service and to the lovely children who made it magical. Some pictures of the celebration are below:



We call this picture

"WE THREE KIDS"

A **big thank you** to all who helped and contributed to both events.

Aimee Slater And Alexander Considine Wedding

Rachel Slater, eldest daughter of Paul and Avril Slater, married Alexander Considine on Friday 13 October 2023 (which was lucky for Aimee & Alexander). Fr. Joe Boland officiated. Originally from Leicestershire, Alexander was delighted to wear the family tartan - Smith Modern. Paul was wearing Ancient Smith. It started raining before the wedding car showed up but it very quickly cleared up!

Cara Frew, Ayrshire based wedding photographer.



Some points to ponder...

I asked for Strength....

And God gave me challenges to make me strong.

And God gave me problems to solve.

I asked for Wisdom....

I asked for Prosperity....

And God gave me brain and brawn to work.

I asked for Courage....

And God gave me danger to overcome.

I asked for Love....

And God gave me troubled people to help.

I asked for favours....

And God gave me opportunities.

I received nothing I wanted.

I received everything I needed.

"God is not a theory. He's a person!"



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/23963573@N08/3606295240>

Oxford Mathematician Destroys Atheism. (15 mins)

John Lennox gives a speech on his belief that God is a person and provides some great basis for his belief explaining the relationship between science and religion at the same time.

He also addresses a number of other questions we sometimes ask ourselves.

You may have to rewind to catch all of his points. Link below -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VrIvwPConv0>



One To Watch – The Bishop's Wife

BBC iPlayer / Amazon Prime –

First release in 1946, star's David Niven as the bishop, Loretta Young as his wife and Cary Grant as the angel sent to give guidance on a new cathedral. Always a great Christmas film to watch at this time of year.

Henry Brougham is the Bishop, played by David Niven, and is struggling to find the funds for a new cathedral. Cary Grant as Dudley the angel appears to give him guidance – build a new cathedral or help the needy! Dudley appoints himself as the angelic assistant where everyone falls for his charm. Dudley does help everyone he meets although in the way they would have initially preferred.

A charming, funny film full of wit and humour.



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/photolibrarian/12016099003>



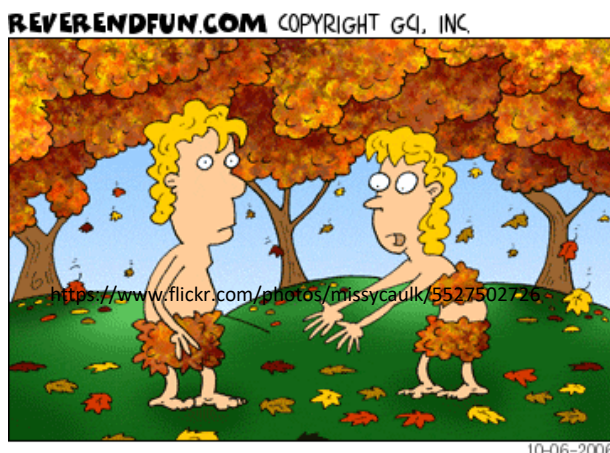
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Bridie's Nuggets



"It's not how much we give but how much love we put into giving."

...Mother Teresa

"Freedom consists not in doing what we like, but in having the right to do what we ought."

.....Pope John Paul II

"May you never be too grown up to search the skies on Christmas Eve."

.....Unknown



"I stopped believing in Santa Claus when I was six. Mother took me to see him in a department store and he asked for my autograph."

.....Shirley Temple

Just for a laugh.....What does God look like



Seven year old Jamie was at school and looking forward to Christmas. His teacher had given the class an activity to draw a Christmas picture. When walking around the classroom to look at the pupils work, she stops at Jamie's desk.

"What are you drawing Jamie ?", asks the teacher.

"I'm drawing God", Jamie replies.

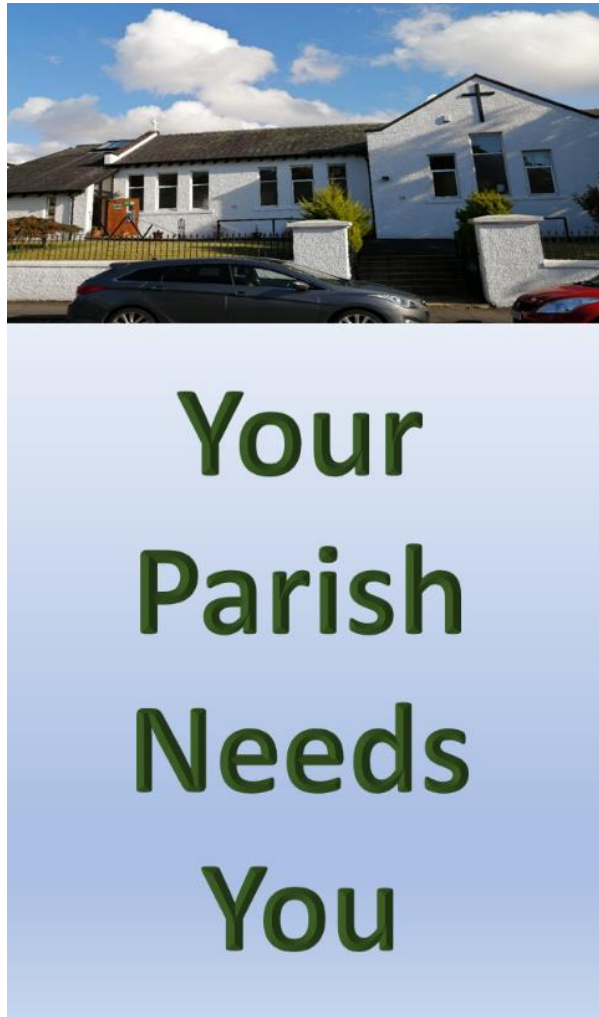
"But no-one has ever seen God and doesn't know what He looks like", the teacher replied.

"Well, if you wait a couple of minutes, I'll show you.", said Jamie.



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/158206039@N04/46307576221>

**A Merry and Blessed
Christmas and
a Peaceful and Prosperous
New Year
to everyone at
St. Bride's**



Please write to us with your thoughts!

We hope you have enjoyed this edition of Bridie's Blethers. For future editions your parish needs **YOU!** Please provide any feedback (good or bad) and most importantly topics and articles to include in the next edition by emailing westkilbride@gallowaydiocese.org. Alternatively, speak to or email one of the editorial team:

Petermccluskie60@icloud.com; joe.mcaleavy1804@yahoo.com; howiephyllis@yahoo.co.uk;

Bride's Blethers is about the parishioners of St. Brides, their lives and their opinions. We rely on your feedback and input otherwise it will be difficult to keep publishing in the future. Please help.

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