

# CNI CHURCH NEWS IRELAND

**Wishing you a blessed Christmas.**

**Warning - This bulletin contains several items of light-hearted nature**

**Daily Bulletins will resume December 30. Please continue to visit.**



## **President chooses Clarke window**

**As the ceremonial head of the Irish State, President Michael D Higgins must choose the Christmas cards he sends the country's many officials carefully.**

This year's card is the resplendent Harry Clarke image, entitled 'Adoration of the Maji', located in Saint Patrick's Church, Newport and photographed by Westport's own Michael McLaughlin as part of a Mayo County Council publication honouring the work of the stained-glass artist.

'Stained Glass Windows of Mayo by

**President chooses Clark window ....** Harry Clarke and The Clarke Studios' is a beautifully illustrated book of his windows which are in churches all over the county. Photographed by Michael McLaughlin, Clarke windows are in churches in Balla, Ballindine, Ballinrobe, Ballyhaunis, Callow, Charlestown, Claremorris, Cong, Kilmaine, Knock, Lahardaun, Newport, Roundfort, Tooreen and Westport.

Speaking to The Mayo News, Michael McLaughlin said he felt 'honoured' that Michael D Higgins had used one of his images, adding that he was aware the President was a great fan of Clarke's work.

"I got a call from the design company, Vermillion, telling me that the President had requested to buy one of my images of a Harry Clarke window. I understand he had a copy of the Mayo County Council book," said Michael McLaughlin.

The President's card has greetings in Irish, French and English and includes two of his poems, 'Of Utopias' and 'Nocturne 4'.

The opening lines in 'Of Utopias' are: "Old Utopias never die/ nor do they fade away./ Born of possibility/ out of ancestor traces,/ memory gives birth/ to imagination."

This poem is in Michael D Higgins's 'New and Selected Poems, 2011'. Harry Clarke was born in 1889 in Dublin and died in Switzerland in 1931. He was a leading member of the Irish Arts and Crafts Movement.

More at - [www.mayostainedglass.ie](http://www.mayostainedglass.ie)

## Parish generosity



**Jackie Greer, People's Church Warden at St Patrick's, Ballyclug, Ballymena, is pictured presenting Mrs Jean Craig, a parishioner at Ballyclug, with a cheque for the Alzheimer's Society. This was part of the money raised by Jackie at a supper he organised for the Charity.**





## Bishop's visit to Swaziland

**Rt Rev Dr Michael Burrows as chair of the Irish US. Board recently visited the Diocese of Swaziland where Us Ireland has a special brief to partner the work established by USPG in the diocese amidst all the challenges of poverty and the huge HIV rate.**



Bishop Michael commented, "I was there to see it for myself and to meet key partners such as bishop Ellinah... I visited in particular schools and the diocesan farm at Luyengo. Travelled from Dec 8 to 17, and preached mightily in the cathedral last Sunday!

"But the poignant thing was I was such an old man there... because of HIV and other factors most men are dead before they are 50. A sobering thought at this time of year."

## GB News



### Christians encouraged to practice generosity

**The President of the Methodist Church in Great Britain has issued a Christmas message in which she calls on Christians to celebrate the love of God by being generous to those around them.**

The Reverend Ruth Gee urged believers to remember the true meaning of Christmas and the significance it has on our lives.

"This is the moment when we remember that: 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory.'

"It doesn't get much more real than this. In Jesus we see, and we encounter, the creator of the universe, the artist who weaves the fabric of our being. This is the reality that God is with us," she said.

The focus of the address was on festivity and merriment as she calls on believers to demonstrate the jubilation that the Christmas story inspires.

"We are filled with the deep and real joy of those who know that they are loved and valued beyond measure.

"In all the busyness of the festival, don't forget to be excited," she reminded believers.

"Celebrate the birth of Jesus, and share the good news of God's generous love as widely as you can. Celebrate and share the generous love of God who sent his only son so that we might know the father through the child."

She also suggested that our response to God's love should be one of generosity and kindness towards other people.

"We can be generous with our time; time spent with God and time spent with others. Only if we spend time with God will we grow to know God better.

"We can also be generous with our resources, with our gifts and skills and with our money. And we can be generous with our love, love of God and love of others which is often shown when we engage with, and respond to, challenges and needs in society," she noted.

"Celebrate and share the generous love of God who mothers us and longs to wipe away our tears, and to nurture us so that we can become the people she has created us to be.

She finished her address with the prayer that all "will find the space and the time to kneel at the manger, to look deep into the eyes of Jesus and to glimpse the glory of God. Then you will know that Christmas is real."



## The original Nativity play

**Nativity plays are now incredibly popular throughout the Christian world. Schools and churches put them on to varying degrees of success every year and many**



**of us will remember holding our breath when finding out which part we'd been given.**

Its origins, however, lie in the 13th century. Pope Francis' namesake, St Francis of Assisi, is believed to be the first to create a physical nativity scene in 1223 in an effort to engage ordinary, poor people with the Christmas story.

Until the nativity play was born, Christmas was primarily celebrated through church services held in Latin. Most ordinary lay people didn't understand the language, however, and so St Francis decided that a more accessible and interactive way of sharing the story of Jesus' birth was needed to share the good news.

According to the only account of the event, recorded by Franciscan monk St Bonaventure, Francis set up a scene in a cave just outside the town of Greccio, Italy. He used live animals, a wax figure to represent Jesus and a real man and woman dressed up as Mary and Joseph to create a visual image for his audience.

Francis brought the story to life through a dramatic retelling of the Bible story, and preached an impassioned sermon in which he reportedly couldn't utter the name Jesus, such was his emotion, and instead referred to him only as "the babe of Bethlehem".

In 'The Life of St Francis of Assisi', St Bonaventure writes: "The brethren were summoned, the people ran together, the forest resounded with their voices, and that venerable night was made glorious by many and brilliant lights and sonorous psalms of praise. The man of God [Francis] stood before the manger, full of devotion and piety, bathed in tears and radiant with joy."

St Bonaventure also reports that the hay used during the scene later cured the animals that ate it of all diseases and ailments, "God thus in all things glorifying his servant, and witnessing to the great efficacy of his holy prayers by manifest prodigies and miracles."

The response to that first nativity was incredible and its popularity soon spread. Other towns and villages across Europe began to hold their own, more characters were included such as the wise men, shepherds and angels and the nativity play as we know it today began to take shape (although probably with fewer tea towels).

Pope Honorius III gave his blessing and it eventually became a staple of Christmas celebrations. To this day, the nativity play continues to invite people in to hear of that amazing first night when God entered the world as a tiny baby and brought peace and justice to all.

## Funny Nativity: Sing Like No One Is Listening!

One little girl with a voice and attitude takes over at this nativity pageant with an LOL result... The person who first posted this said, "This is perhaps a little festive but definitely guaranteed to make you laugh out loud. I am the embarrassed angel in the middle with the gold tinsel halo. You can't really miss my little sister with her humongous wings, she definitely steals the show. The person filming is baby Jesus' mother... baby Jesus amazingly managed to sleep all the way through!"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dpsXNlarAk8&sns=fb>

## An Unexpected Christmas

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TM1XusYVqNY&app=desktop>

The story of Christmas told by the kids of St Paul's Church, Auckland, New Zealand, including footage from their films "The Christmas Story" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kWq60o...>) and "Good News of Great Joy" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttlnl1...>).

Check out their new kids' film: Star News Bethlehem: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBaTUw...>



The script is based on the book "An Unexpected Christmas" by a friend Simone Graham, whose kids are also in the film.

The music is an original score by Nathan King ([humstudios.co.nz](http://humstudios.co.nz)) and has not been published separately. The closing song is a re-arrangement of the title track from St Paul's

album 'God w/ Us' (<https://itunes.apple.com/nz/album/god...>).

## Father Christmas is in the Bible - some believe

**One in 10 people aged 25 to 34 in modern Britain think that Father Christmas is mentioned in the Biblical account of the birth of Jesus**



### *Traditional nativity scene - without Father Christmas!*

Daily Telegraph - For centuries Christians have been taught that wise men from the east brought gifts for the baby Jesus.

But, according to polling, one in 10 young adults in Britain now believe that Father Christmas also makes an appearance in the Biblical account of the nativity.

Significant numbers also think that Mary and Joseph might have brightened up the stable with a Christmas tree.

Over a third of the public think that the Bible records December 25 as the date of the Jesus's birth.

And a quarter appear to have confused the lyrics of "Away in a Manger" with the gospels by believing that the Bible states that Jesus did not cry when he



was born.

More than 2,000 people of all ages were polled on their knowledge of the Christmas story to test whether younger generations are becoming increasingly ignorant of religion.

The ComRes survey, conducted on behalf of the Christian Institute, involved giving people a list of elements and asking whether each was included in the Biblical accounts of Christ's birth.

[Read here](#)

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/10531210/Father-Christmas-granted-a-walk-on-part-in-the-Bible.html>

## In a lighter note -





*Santa and the windfarm*

## News Bulletins will resume December 30th.

### **Prayer for Today**

**Shepherd of Israel,  
may Jesus, Emmanuel and son of Mary,  
be more than just a dream in our hearts.  
With the apostles, prophets, and saints,  
save us, restore us,  
and lead us in the way of grace and peace,  
that we may bear your promise into the world. Amen.**