

Church News Ireland

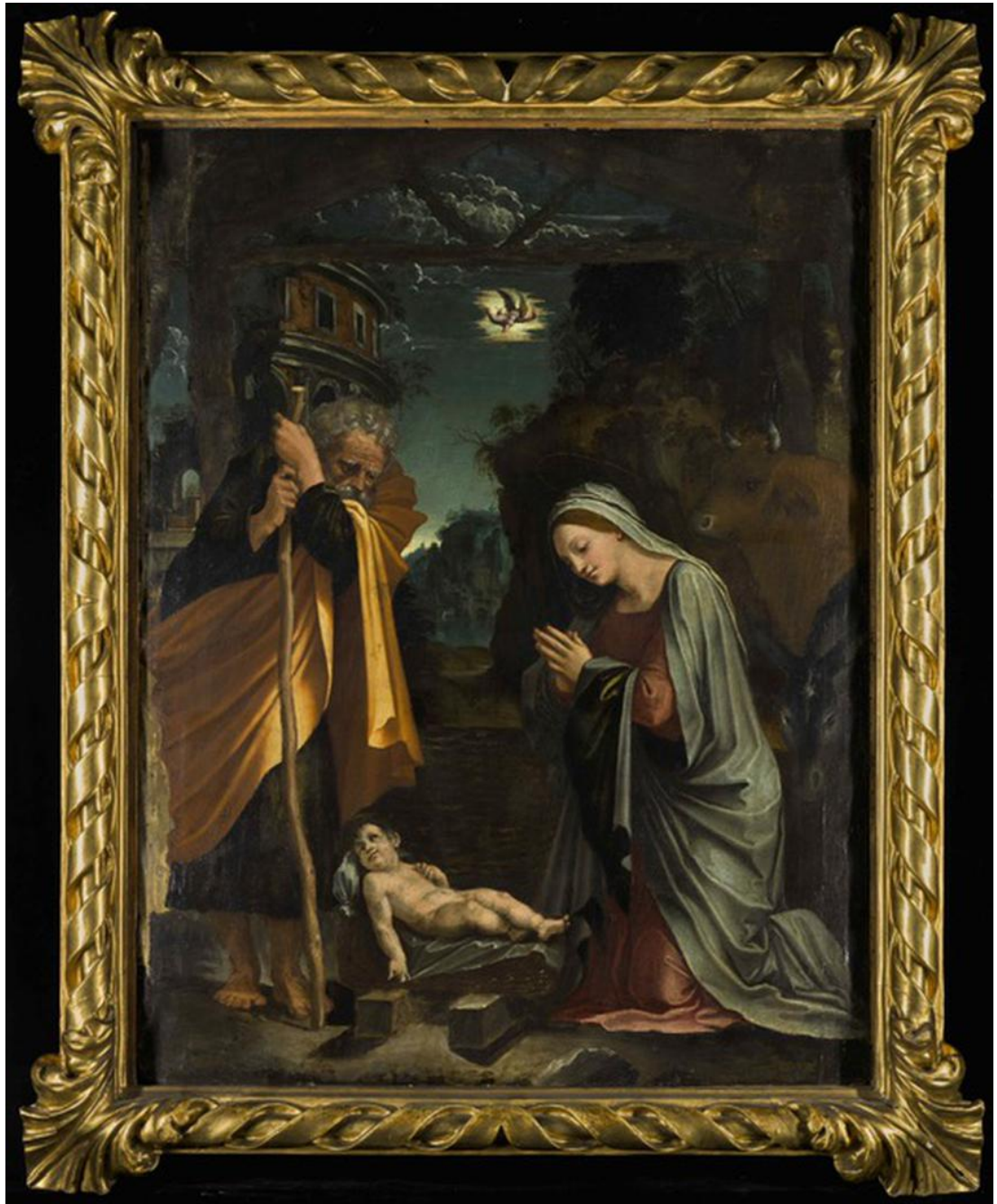


Image of the day – Christmas boost for art in Ulster

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Christmas boost for art in Ulster



The painting is being restored in the National Gallery in London. Photograph: The National Gallery Photographic Department/The National Gallery

Renaissance nativity scene for display at Ulster Museum

A painting of the nativity dating to the early 1500s has been saved from leaving the UK after it was acquired by National Museums NI.

The work, painted around 1515 in Rome by the Italian artist Baldassare Peruzzi, will go on display at the Ulster Museum in Belfast next year following a fundraising campaign.

December 25, 2022

The piece, depicting the nativity scene at night, is one of only a few by Peruzzi to survive outside of Italy and the only one in the UK.

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Valued at £277,990, the painting had an export bar placed on it by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) last year to allow time for a UK institution or gallery to come forward and purchase it.

It was acquired by National Museums NI with support from groups including the National Heritage Memorial Fund, Art Fund and Esme Mitchell Trust.

Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay, the arts and heritage minister, said: "For many, being part of a nativity play is one of the first ways that we learn the story of Christmas.

"That is why I am delighted that, this Christmas Eve, we can announce that this incredible painting of that famous event has been saved for the nation thanks to the export bar system. I am pleased that, following conservation, this work will go on display at the Ulster Museum where it will be enjoyed by generations to come."

Anne Stewart, senior curator of art at National Museums NI, said: "We are delighted that this remarkable painting will be

December 25, 2022

part of our collection, which has been made possible with the help and generosity of our partners and funders.

“Currently, there are no High Renaissance paintings in any public collection in Northern Ireland, so this is truly a Christmas gift to our audiences.

“We look forward to welcoming visitors to the Ulster Museum when it goes on display in 2023.”

Peruzzi, a painter, architect and draughtsman, was born in 1481 in a town near Siena and was a leading figure in Rome during the High Renaissance period.

He worked alongside Raphael and Bramante, before returning home to work for the Republic of Siena, building fortifications and designing a dam on the Bruna river. Many of his artworks were in fresco and have since been lost.

The painting is currently undergoing conservation work at the National Gallery in London before moving to its permanent home in Northern Ireland next year.

Christian Aid visits Belfast Sitout

Dean Stephen Forde was enjoying a well-deserved break on Tuesday when the Chief Executive of Christian Aid, Rosamond Bennett arrived at Belfast Cathedral to lend her support to this year’s Black Santa sit-out.



Minding the 'shop' that day was the former Bishop of Limerick, Rt Rev Trevor Williams who served as Chair of Christian Aid Ireland for many years.

Rosa MU d said, “We are indebted to the many Church of Ireland clergy and cathedral staff members who brave the elements to support Dean Forde with his annual fundraiser.”

This year’s sit-out began on Monday (19 December) and continued until Christmas Eve with a fundraising target of £150,000.

Black Santa's last column for now

Dean Stephen has been writing a daily column in the Belfast Telegraph throughout the Sitout. His final one for this year -



Christmas can be an uncomfortable time but our appeal is here to help.

It is Christmas Eve. For many children across the land, tonight will be the last sleep before red Santa delivers much hoped for presents.

Some of those children will follow the progress of his mystical sleigh on tablets and computers — the science of the internet combining with the wonder of dreams. For Belfast's Black Santa, it is also the last day of this year's sit-out.

From 9.30am until 4pm, Black Santa will be on the steps of St Anne's Cathedral in Donegall Street, collecting from last-minute shoppers and those who have come into the city centre to soak up the vibe.

Later, there will be familiar Christmas traditions to be followed, after interruption from two years of covid.

For myself as Black Santa and Dean, there will be the wonder of the cathedral's Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols with the St Anne's Cathedral Choir at 8pm, and then the First Communion of Christmas.

Each service held in anticipation of a packed cathedral. And each in preparation for the Festival Service of Christmas morning

But in today's world, and in our community, there are many people for whom Christmas will not feel familiar or comfortable.

Some will be alone, with only the silence for company. Some will know family, not as a place of warmth and welcome, but of rejection or pain.

Some will feel more comfortable to be apart from those whose violence they have known too well.

Some will be cold, unable to feed the meter for extra heat on Christmas Day.

Some will be far, far away from home and family and the familiar, as those who are refugees in our country, perhaps present but unseen.

Across our province, at Christmas and on every other day, there are individuals and charities who are passionate about bringing hope and change, care and love, wherever these are lacking.

These are the people and the organisations which each year the Black Santa Appeal champions through the generosity and support of every individual and organisation who has made a donation.

Out of darkness, light. Out of despair, hope. Out of loneliness, companionship. Out of the gloom, the joy and peace and presence of Christmas.

Dean Stephen Forde

‘Always grateful for feedback’: Justin Welby hits back at Tory MP criticising bishops for speaking out against Rwanda policy

The Archbishop of Canterbury has responded to the MP for Stoke on Trent North who on Monday criticised bishops for sharing their thoughts on the government Rwanda policy.

Jonathan Gillis said during an interview at BBC's World at One programme that the bishops in the House of Lords shouldn't "be preaching about politics" but instead should be "looking in-house at the wide abuse claims".

Several bishops in the House of Lords had called the Rwanda policy "immoral". Only last week, Most Rev Justin Welby had asked the government for an immigration policy based on compassion and recognition of human dignity.

But unhappy with his comments, Gillis also called on the Archbishop of Canterbury to spend his time "focusing on the Church's reputation".

On Wednesday Archbishop Justin responded to the criticism.

Writing on Twitter he said: "Always grateful for feedback - look forward to advice on what we should be doing in the pulpit.

"(Just to confirm: we'll be continuing to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ.)"

Gillis made the comments following Monday's High Court ruling confirming the government can go ahead with the plans to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda.

Campaigners had argued the plans were illegal, but the ruling said the policy had complete legal validity.

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Holy Land: Children's Christmas wish list

While Lego, Barbie and Playdoh are all tipped to top many children's Christmas lists in the UK this year*, children in the West Bank have shared their hopes for an end to checkpoints, work for their parents and access to water and healthcare.

In a survey of the hopes and fears of 200 pupils at Christian schools in the West Bank, more than half (52%) said that travel restrictions were their biggest day-to-day challenge and over a quarter (27%) said they worried that their parents couldn't find enough work to pay for their basic survival. In the survey, conducted by UK-based charity, Friends of The Holy Land (FHL), almost a quarter of the children (23%) also said that not having running water all of the time was their biggest problem and 16% were aware that they couldn't afford to see the doctor.

Now FHL is appealing to supporters to give a one-off Christmas gift to families such as theirs to help make wishes come true into 2023.

With images of the Holy Land often limited to 2,000 years ago, FHL has drawn together a 12 Days of Christmas countdown this December to offer an insight into the lives of those who live across the region today - and show how gifts are offering hope to Christians living in difficult circumstances in the West Bank, Jordan and Gaza.

FHL Executive Director Brendan Metcalfe said the results of the school survey had been sobering but not surprising. He

said: "The freedom to move around easily and the ability to access water and healthcare are things that we often take for granted in the UK, but are pressing issues even for young children in the West Bank and the wider region.

"One child from Bethlehem told us: 'My Christmas wish is that the funny spirit and the spirit of childhood remain inside us and don't go away because of the difficulties of life.'

"We are appealing to Christians to help grant the wishes of children and their families so that spirit of childhood can be less burdened. Throughout 2022 we have been able to alleviate hardship in ways such as providing new water tanks and paying medical bills and with the help of our supporters we look forward to being able to bring joy and relief to families in 2023."

A donation of £25 could help grant a child's wish to stay at their Christian primary school, £50 could help a parent see the doctor or dentist and £100 could help a family ensure more reliable running water.

To support the appeal visit:

www.friendsoftheholylord.org.uk/Appeal/christmas

Hungarian & Ukrainian churches say 'thank you' to Presbyterian Church

As the war in Ukraine approaches its tenth month anniversary on Christmas Eve, the Reformed Church in Hungary (RCH) has written to the Presbyterian Church

in Ireland (PCI) and its other partner churches, thanking the Church for its solidarity and support as it continues to help thousands of refugees in Hungary and Internally Displaced People in Ukraine.

In a letter from Bishop Zoltán Balog, President of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in Hungary, one of PCI's partner churches, he wrote, 'There are no words sufficient to express our gratitude on behalf of the Hungarian Reformed Church Aid (HRCA) and the Reformed churches in Hungary and Ukraine, as well as the thousands of refugees to whom you have offered hope in a time of hopelessness.'

Since the war began Irish Presbyterians responded to the humanitarian emergency by giving £1.3 million (€1.5million) to the relief effort through a Moderator's Special Appeal, which was launched two weeks after the Russian invasion. The amount raised from congregations from across Ireland has been distributed equally between PCI's relief and development partners, Christian Aid and Tearfund, and the RCH through its relief and development wing, Hungarian Reformed Church Aid. In October Presbyterian Moderator, Dr John Kirkpatrick visited Hungary and Transcarpathia in western Ukraine to see the ongoing humanitarian relief effort.

Since the war began the RCH and its charity organisation RCHA have been offering support to Ukrainian refugees in Hungary and delivering humanitarian aid directly to Ukraine helping the Reformed Church in Transcarpathia to provide for Internally Displaced People and others left behind. With The Moderator recently visited homeless people in Belfast



The Moderator (right) recently visited homeless people in Belfast

Supply vans crossing the border daily, Bishop Zoltán said in his letter that over 500 tons of aid had been delivered directly to those fleeing the war. At PCI's General Assembly in June, Members heard from the President of the HRCA and the support that they had been able to provide.

In his letter, Bishop Zoltán wrote, ‘I have personally been deeply impressed and grateful for the tremendous wave of solidarity from our partner churches and church-related organizations. Your hearts went out to Ukraine, for the victims of the conflict, for the millions forced to leave their homes. Your prayers and support encouraged and enabled us to fulfil our Christian duty to welcome and host thousands of refugees in Hungary and internally displaced persons in western Ukraine...’

He concluded by saying, ‘We are grateful for those who have chosen to stand with us, for your prayers and your donations...In this season of Advent, I wish you and your community God’s rich blessings as we celebrate the birth of our only hope, Jesus Christ whose words remind us of the Gospel-based motivation of our steadfast commitment even amidst war and destruction, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me.”’

Speaking in response to the letter, Dr Kirkpatrick said, “Once again, I would like to thank our Church family across Ireland for how they responded to this humanitarian crisis, which was in fact the largest response in living memory ever to be received for a special appeal.

“Having seen first-hand the work that the HRCA is doing in Hungary and Ukraine when my wife Joan and I visited both countries in October, you get a sense of the need and how PCI and other churches have been a real blessing in this awful situation. Can I encourage our congregations to continue to pray for all those affected by the ongoing conflict, for an immediate ceasefire and lasting peace, justice and stability for Ukraine, and pray that those who

have lost loved ones would be comforted. Pray also for the Christian Churches in Ukraine, for their endurance, protection and faithful witness in face of this time of trial,” Dr Kirkpatrick said.

Poem for today

The Kerry Christmas Carol by Sigerson Clifford

Brush the floor and clean the hearth,
And set the fire to keep,
For they might visit us tonight
When all the world's asleep.

Don't blow the tall white candle out
But leave it burning bright,
So that they'll know they're welcome here
This holy Christmas night.

Leave out the bread and meat for them,
And sweet milk for the Child,
And they will bless the fire, that baked
And, too, the hands that toiled.

For Joseph will be travel-tired,
And Mary pale and wan,
And they can sleep a little while
Before they journey on.

December 25, 2022

They will be weary of the roads,
And rest will comfort them,
For it must be many a lonely mile
From here to Bethlehem.

O long the road they have to go,
The bad mile with the good,
Till the journey ends on Calvary
Beneath a cross of wood.

Leave the door upon the latch,
And set the fire to keep,
And pray they'll rest with us tonight
When all the world's asleep.

The poem is an evocation of an old Irish custom in which each household would leave a lighted candle in their window on Christmas night. There was a pious belief that Joseph and Mary and the Child still wandered the roads of the world, looking for a place to rest from the persecution of Herod. That they should show a preference for the roads of rural Ireland was accepted as a given.

Speaking to the soul – Christmas series

Short reading and a prayer - daily on this site

Church News Ireland

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