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**Image of the day -
Coleraine
nativity**

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Coleraine nativity

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People and places

New Year message of encouragement and confidence from Bishop of Cork

Writing a New Year message in the January 2022 edition of the Cork, Cloyne and Ross Diocesan Magazine, the Bishop, Dr Paul Colton, sent a message of encouragement and confidence to the people of the United Dioceses.

He acknowledged that all our current fears are understandable and a necessary part, often of our need to avoid danger, But, quoting Dr Scott MacDougall, Associate Professor of Theology of the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, he said that, in the wake of our Christmas celebrations, ' Fear is the wrong response to the coming of the Prince of Peace ...The proper response to the coming of the Prince of Peace is joy.'

Bishop Colton also referred to 2022 as the 70th anniversary year of the consecration, in Cork, of Dr George Otto Simms, as Bishop of Cork.

Bishop Colton said that the text of the sermon, preached on that occasion by Eric Symes Abbott is as relevant now as it was then: 'Do not be afraid little flock, for it is your Father's pleasure to give you the kingdom.' (Luke 12.32)

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Wales-Ireland walking route to celebrate Celtic links

The shared religious and cultural history of Wales and Ireland is being celebrated with two pilgrimage routes in each nation, BBC News reports.

The Ancient Connections project will see two routes in St Davids, Pembrokeshire, and Ferns, County Wexford, linked via a ferry service.

It is hoped the routes will boost green tourism after the Covid-19 pandemic.

The aim is to attract about 5,000 people a year, whether they are keen walkers or making a pilgrimage.

The five-year project is being sponsored by Pembrokeshire and Wexford councils, and is also backed by European funding.

The nations are linked by the close bond that grew between St David, the patron saint of Wales, and St Aidan of Ferns during the early medieval period.

John G O'Dwyer, chairman of Pilgrim Paths Ireland and author of Irish Pilgrim Paths, said the potential of the trails was "absolutely huge".

"We have quite a few pilgrim paths in Ireland but this is the first one that will recognise the fact that for the Irish, in the

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early medieval period, pilgrimage overseas was a very important thing," he said.

Link - [\[\[\]\] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-59837381](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-59837381)]



Nenagh Black Santa appeal raises over €3,000

Fr Michael Geraghty (Nenagh) and Dean Very Rev'd Roderick Smyth (Church of Ireland Nenagh) have raised €3,270 for Friends of Nenagh Hospital and the neonatal unit at University Hospital Limerick. The funds were raised for the Black Santa Appeal last week, with each charity receiving €1,635.



Appointment to Gilnahirk

Bishop David McClay of Down & Dromore has appointed Revd Ken McGrath as Bishop's Curate for the Parish of Gilnahirk in Down Diocese.

Mr. McGrath is currently Associate Vicar in Holywood Parish, prior to which he was rector of Kilkeel. He was ordained in 2003 after a career in education which included 5 years in Nairobi, Kenya.

Gilnahirk was Mr. McGrath's home parish until he left Northern Ireland to attend university in England. A date for the service of introduction will be announced in due course.



Christian news: 8 things to look out for in 2022

Marcus Jones of Premier Christian News writes -

Brian Houston trial

As leader of one of the largest global church network's which is home to numerous celebrities, Brian Houston's case will receive much attention in the early part of the year. Houston is charged with withholding information linked to child abuse carried out by his father. Houston claims he told both church and state authorities in the appropriate way. Whatever the verdict, this trial will undoubtedly cross over into the mainstream news

Lambeth Conference

The much delayed Lambeth Conference is due to take place this summer, Covid permitting. It'll see Anglican bishops and archbishops from across the world descend on Canterbury for a once a decade event. Divides over the issue of sexuality remain with some African bishops already indicating they would boycott the event. Same sex partners of gay bishops have already been asked not to attend. Justin Welby will be hoping to use the event to foster greater unity for the global body moving forward.

Return to summer festivals?

After two years of cancellations, Christian festivals will be praying that they can return in 2022. The likes of Spring Harvest, New Wine and Big Church Day Out have made moves to take place as normal. They've all already suffered huge financial losses as a result of previous cancellations.

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Päivi Räsänen trial

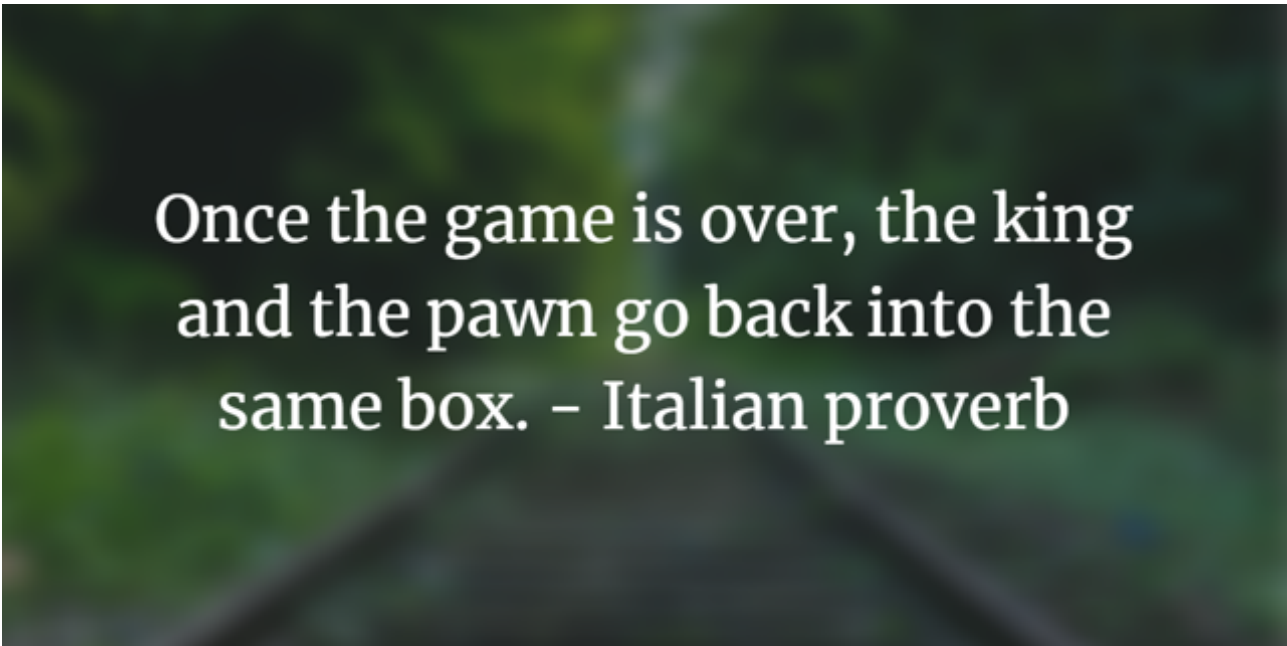
Could an MP be imprisoned in 2022 for simply tweeting a Bible verse? That's the dilemma facing Finland's Päivi Räsänen who shared a scripture in response to the country's divide over the issue of homosexuality. She's been accused of a hate crime. Her trial will be heard in January.

Religious freedom summit

All eyes will be on the persecution of religious minorities as the UK hosts a global gathering of ambassadors for religious freedom. It's a government sponsored event so there are big hopes that good can come of it. Fiona Bruce, as the Prime Minister's special envoy for religious freedom will host.

Franklin Graham Tour

US evangelist Franklin Graham caused much uproar last by launching a UK tour. He was accused of speaking negatively about homosexuality and Islam and as a result, every venue he booked cancelled him following complaints. Legal cases were brought based on the issue of freedom of



Once the game is over, the king
and the pawn go back into the
same box. – Italian proverb

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speech and the tour is now back on. Expect more protests but Graham promises that he'll speak of God's love and nothing else.

Gay Conversion Therapy

The government recently extended its consultation on gay conversion therapy to give more time for people to take part. It's committed to banning therapy which encourages someone to change their sexuality. Many church groups have raised concern that could lead to a ban on prayer and pastoral support. The wording of any government legislation will be combed with a fine brush. With both sides of the argument very vocal, expect to hear lots on this issue.

Churches to stay open?

With concerns over increases of Covid cases, many countries have introduced new restrictions. In Wales and Scotland sporting events have been forced to go ahead without crowds, while nightclubs have been closed. So far no further restrictions have been put on churches but certainly one to watch in the year ahead.

Courtesy Premier Christian News, 24/12/2021

Webinars, music, resources, broadcasts and books

The Feast of Epiphany from St Alban's

Worship at Home with a Service of the Word for the Feast of Epiphany, led by the Very Rev Jo Kelly-More, the Dean of St Albans.

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This service is manually subtitled and includes BSL interpretation.

LINK [[<https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/join-us-church-online/weekly-online-services/feast-epiphany>]

Happy New Year at Washington National Cathedral

The celebration of the Holy Eucharist on the Second Sunday after Christmas Day.. The Rev. Canon Leonard Hamlin preaches.

[[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rhac_9oMLYA]
[]

Sunday Sermon by The Rev. Canon Leonard L. Hamlin, Sr
[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VMSpB1gFuM>]

News Reports

**Justin Welby
celebrates
Archbishop
Desmond
Tutu's life on
special BBC
Sunday
Worship**



May this day, this year unfold as it should;
may you find solace in scripture and spirit;
and may your journey into this new year
be filled with the hope and promise of God
for the sake and the peace of the world.

AMEN

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Most Rev Justin Welby has honoured the life of late Archbishop Desmond Tutu during a special BBC Sunday Worship.

During his sermon, the Archbishop of Canterbury said that “however hard people may try, it is impossible to speak of Archbishop Tutu without speaking of Jesus Christ”.

“His life and witness only make sense when seen in the light of the love of God in Jesus Christ and the faith he had in the purposes and sure coming of the Kingdom,” Archbishop Justin said.

He said he believes there are many similarities between Archbishop Desmond and prophet Jeremiah.

“They are words which are usually ignored, opposed, and protested against. But these words must be spoken by the prophet because they are the words of God. Jeremiah was confronted with the presence of God calling him to things beyond his wildest imagination, to raise up and throw down nations and kingdoms by his words of prophecy.

“What authority did he have? Desmond Tutu was often asked that, labelled a meddlesome priest, accused of interfering in politics ceaselessly. He lived politics - not interfered - because he knew that the authority over all human life was that of God. He knew that a nation that forgets that authority forgets its soul, forgets to value one another, forgets to champion the oppressed.”

Archbishop Justin continued: “Archbishop Desmond Tutu consistently spoke when he saw those on the side he had



supported falling short of the standards of integrity that God seeks. He stood up against corruption in his own and other countries. He stood up for the oppressed in every place and every time because he knew that God's authority covered every aspect of world affairs.

“He also spoke prophetically to the church, calling us to include, to welcome, to struggle so that through justice, we in the church could call for justice.”

He concluded the sermon by urging everyone to respond to Archbishop Desmond's life by being “passionate on the side of the oppressed,” “to speak and act in the authority of the one whose word is given to heal the world,” and to “cast away fear, see the authority of God, and act always on the side of the poorest and the oppressed.”

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The special Sunday service was led by the Dean of St Mary's Cathedral, Johannesburg, Xolani Dlwati and also included worship from South African churches.

Church leader calls South Africa to strive for Desmond Tutu's ideals

South African Council of Churches (SACC) general secretary Bishop Malusi Mpumlwana called on his country to work harder towards the diverse and unified "rainbow nation" the late Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu toiled for in his 90 years.

Bishop Mpumlwana, general secretary of the South African Council of Churches and a bishop of the Ethiopian Episcopal Church, who was in the struggle against apartheid with Tutu, made the comments during an interfaith memorial service. in St Alban's Anglican Cathedral, Pretoria, on 30 December.

He said: "The idea of a rainbow nation was aspirational, something to strive for and to work towards. We pray for it to work for the promise of the post-apartheid South Africa. That has not been achieved, requiring the healing and reconciliation to address the woundedness of our society that makes us a violent society,"

Many services were held in Tutu's honour throughout South Africa, as he was lying in state at the St George's Cathedral in Cape Town before his funeral service yesterday.



Mpumlwana rued the violent crime, corruption, gender-based violence, and senseless femicide against which Tutu railed.

"All this calls for a serious effort in an initiative for nation building towards Tutu's rainbow vision," said the SACC leader.

"Then there is the poverty and inequality that cries out for the transformation of the economic architecture of this country, to seriously address the inclusion of what we refer to as the excluded majority - Coloureds, Africans, people in the rural Bantustan areas and the small country towns for whom not much has changed," he said.

Among them are those who flee rural poverty for urban squalor in pursuit of elusive opportunities.

Mpumlwana made parallels between Tutu and Prophet Jeremiah, who said: "If I say, 'I will not mention his word or

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speak any more in God's name,' his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot."

At the service, World Council of Churches (WCC) deputy general secretary Prof. Dr Isabel Apawo Phiri read a memorial message on behalf of WCS's acting general secretary Rev. Prof Dr Ioan Sauca, lamenting Tutu's passing.

"Desmond Tutu had the uniquely vibrant personality, infectious laugh, and embrace of life that could disarm opposition and rally allies and followers. He was much loved and very loving. He was a churchman of deep faith and a committed ecumenist," said Phiri, a Malawian who studied in South Africa.

"But, as the Nobel Committee noted, he also brought to his work with the South African Council of Churches and the Anglican Church a steely clarity of purpose and an unwavering commitment to social justice for all South Africans."

She said that despite worldwide fame and praise for his successful work, he remained "a humble and earnest servant of God, intent on sharing the love of God for all God's people and the earth."

The Vatican's Nuncio in South Africa, Archbishop Peter Wells, also delivered a message. "His Holiness Pope Francis was saddened to learn of the death of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and he offers heartfelt condolences to his family and loved ones, mindful of his service to the Gospel

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to the promotion of racial equality and reconciliation in his native South Africa," said Wells.

LINKS

Video of the Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu Memorial Service www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=3133966693541561

Desmond Tutu, Apostle of Reconciliation: A Memorial Message from the World Council of Churches
www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/desmond-tutu-apostle-of-reconciliation-a-memorial-message-from-the-world-council-of-churches

Pope: If we don't feel profound amazement at the Incarnation nothing will change

During Vespers on New Years Eve, led by the Dean of the College of Cardinals, Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, Pope Francis gave a homily recalling the Christmas liturgy when the mystery of the Incarnation evokes in us "a sense of amazement, wonder, and contemplation."

He described how the "holy wonder" of Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds of Bethlehem should also inspire our own amazement in grasping the heart of the mystery of Christ's birth. And this sense of amazement needs to be profound, touching our hearts and minds, or nothing will change in our lives or societies, he noted.



The reality that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" reminds us of how in this liturgy which opens the Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God, that Mary is the first witness of this event, the Pope said.

She is also the greatest witness due to her humility, the Pope said, describing how her heart was "filled with amazement," but grounded in reality "without the shadow of romanticism, of sweeteners, of spiritualization." He added that our own Christian amazement is not based on "special effects" or "fantasy worlds," but from the mystery of reality itself, like the beauty of a flower, a life story or encounter, "the wrinkled face of an elderly person or the blooming face of a newborn baby." There "the mystery shines."

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The Pope pointed out how "Mary's amazement, the Church's amazement, is filled with gratitude," realizing that "God has not abandoned his people, that he has come, is near, is God-with-us."

While our life's problems and challenges remain, we are consoled knowing that "we are not alone," that God loves us and redeems us "to restore our dignity as children."

The pandemic has created "a sense of being lost," the Pope observed, when at the start there seemed to be a feeling of solidarity that we are all in the same boat followed by a temptation of "everyone out for themselves."

"Thank God we reacted again with a sense of responsibility," the Pope added, and we must all have this gratitude to God since the choice to be "responsible in solidarity" comes from God, from Jesus "who has once and for all impressed on our history the 'route' of our original calling: to be brothers and sisters all, children of the same Father."

Reflecting on the city of Rome, the Pope noted how this calling to solidarity is "written in its heart," and comes from its history and culture rooted in the Gospel of Christ "that laid down deep roots here, made fruitful by the blood of the martyrs."

But he said a welcome and fraternal city is recognised by how well it assists the vulnerable, families weighed down by the crisis, those with serious disabilities, and so forth. He noted how Rome is a "wonderful city," but also a difficult place while it tries to live up to the calling to provide

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"welcoming care for the dignity of life, for our common home, for the weakest and most vulnerable."

Pope Francis concluded by encouraging everyone to look to the Blessed Mother who "smiles at us" and tells us to trust and follow the Lord, who "brings time to its fullness," gives meaning to our lives and all we do.

"Let us trust in joyful times and in sorrowful times: the hope He gives us is a hope that never disappoints."

LINKS -

Reflection text: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2021/12/31/0890/01876.html>

Watch the Vespers on Vatican Youtube channel:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZWbm9QDMzA

Perspective

Why Northern Ireland isn't going anywhere -

Dan Hannan writing in the Washington Examiner

What would make someone choose between British and Irish nationality? There is a consensus that rows over the Irish border have brought a referendum on unification much closer. But there is almost no

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discussion of what issues might determine how people in Northern Ireland vote in such a referendum.

You might object that “issues” are beside the point. Nationality, you might argue, is not determined by tax rates or education policy but by history and culture, poetry and memory, blood and speech. The reason that support for a united Ireland has grown north of the border over the past century, you might go on, is not that the Irish Republic has been outperforming the United Kingdom, but that the birthrate among Catholics, who generally identify as Irish, has been higher than among Protestants, who generally identify as British. As that bombastic loyalist clergyman, Ian Paisley, once put it: “The secret weapon of the Roman Catholic is the perambulator,” i.e., the baby carriage.

But that is not the whole picture. If people voted purely along confessional lines, there might very well already be a majority for a 32-county Irish republic. In 1921, when Northern Ireland was founded, Protestants outnumbered Catholics 2-1. The last published census data, from 2011, showed the two populations almost the same size. The 2021 census, which will be published next year, may show the first Catholic majority.

Despite that demographic shift, opinion polls continue to back the status quo. The most recent major poll of Northern Irish voters, carried out in October, showed support for U.K. membership at 59%, versus 30% for a united Ireland. A significant minority of Ulster Catholics would vote to stay in the United Kingdom. Some of their reasons are practical: recognition that Britain’s vaccination program was better than Ireland’s, fears about jobs or pensions, doubts about

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whether Dublin would subsidize the province to the same degree that London does. But these things would count for nothing if they did not also feel that they could freely express their Irish identity within the U.K.

And it is here, it seems to me, that unionism (the wish to remain British) has an unremarked edge over nationalism (the desire to join Ireland). Whereas unionism assumes that you can be both British and Irish — indeed, unionism might be said to have begun as the idea that to be Irish was also to be British — there is no version of Irish nationalism that is not based on a rejection of Britishness.

This matters because Northern Ireland cannot be incorporated into either of its neighboring states without disappointing a big chunk of its population. The British government has always recognized that challenge. Hence its support for power-sharing, its readiness to let people in Northern Ireland take Irish passports and proclaim Irish nationality, and its willingness to let Irish nationals within Great Britain vote, claim social security, and exercise other rights as full citizens. Because so many British (including this author) have Irish family links, Ireland will never be seen simply as a foreign state in the way that, say, Finland is.

Oddly, though, the reverse does not apply. Every time Ireland has had to choose, it has emphasized its distance from Britain rather than trying to appeal to Northern Unionists. It was Eamon de Valera's provisional government that insisted on putting up a border, complete with customs posts, precisely a hundred years ago, much to the regret of London, the preference of which, once the break became

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inevitable, was for an all-Ireland state loosely associated with Great Britain.

Had successive Irish governments wanted to woo the million-odd people on the island who identified as British, they might not have cut their remaining symbolic links with Britain in 1937, or remained neutral in the Second World War, or walked out of the Commonwealth in 1949, or promoted Irish as the national language.

Each time, they chose to diverge rather than to accommodate the people they aspired to rule. In doing so, they may well have been accurately reflecting their own voters' wishes. A poll in the Republic last month showed that, while people would vote for a united Ireland by 60% to 25%, it was a very different picture if such unity was conditional on higher taxes (41% in favor, 43% against), altering the flag (27% in favor, 59% against), or rejoining the Commonwealth (23% in favor, 58% against).

All these are legitimate choices. Ireland is under no obligation to seek to accommodate the British identity of the population it aspires to incorporate. But it should not surprise anyone when that population prefers to stay as it is, which is why, a hundred years on, Northern Ireland isn't going anywhere.

Courtesy the Washington Examiner, December 20, 2021

Poem for today

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Christmas Bells

by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old, familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet
The words repeat
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along
The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Till ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime,
A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Then from each black, accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound
The carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
And made forlorn
The households born
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

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And in despair I bowed my head;
"There is no peace on earth," I said;
"For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The Wrong shall fail,
The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men."

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