



December 2025

# THE LINK

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

The First Christmas – *Stepping Into the Story*

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Often the stories from Scripture come across as long ago and far away, but I sometimes wonder what it must have been like for those main characters in the story of the first Christmas ... for Mary and Joseph, for the Innkeeper and the Shepherds.

These were not extraordinary people with some magical qualities raising them above everyone else. These were ordinary people, like you and me ... *when God breaks into their lives.*

God *breaking into our lives* is always surprising and unexpected. It brings to us more problems and difficulties than it solves. It rearranges our plans and our priorities. It calls forth in us more bravery and courage than we imagine we have.

That's the way God always works.

Most of us are realistic ... hard headed ... practical people. We're not the type of person likely to turn our lives upside down over some "pie in the sky" notion of divine intervention and supernatural plans.

However, like **Mary**, we encounter wonder and mystery in our lives, and like Mary, we may ponder all of this in our hearts. Is it possible not everything can be understood and explained by human reason? Shakespeare speaks of the limits of human knowledge, when he places these words on the lips of Hamlet, "There are more things in heaven and Earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

**Joseph** feels inadequate to the task God calls him to step into ... "Why me? Aren't there others ... braver, more capable, better prepared for the challenge?" But God looks not so much at who we are now, but at who we're capable of becoming. God has a dream, for your life and for mine, and God sees us, not in the ways in which we are *inadequate*, but in the great potential of the gifts and abilities with which God has blessed us.

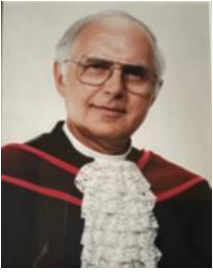
Like **the Innkeeper**, we can become caught up in the practical matters of life, so busy with the "nuts and bolts" of existence, we may overlook a miracle even when it comes to stand right in front of us. The Innkeeper reminds us of the importance of slowing down and recognizing when the presence of God *has come close.*

And **the Shepherds**, they are a reminder, God values us in ways that are different from how the world judges a human life. The shepherds were poor and considered ritually unclean by the rules of first century Judaism. They were outcasts, and made to feel unworthy and unloved by God, and yet it is the shepherds who first receive the Good News of the birth of Jesus.

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**The Rev. Dr. John F. Allan** passed away on November 20, 2025 in Abbotsford, BC. Dr. Allan was a minister and friend to many Presbyterian congregations, including our congregation from 1988 to 2000.

John, and his wife, Marjorie, came from Ontario to minister at St. Andrew's Victoria, along with their two children, Susan and Andrew. Prior to coming to Victoria, Dr. Allan also served in Chateaugay and Beech Ridge, Quebec, and Trinity York Mills in Toronto, Ontario. John and Marjorie were married for 65 years.

John and Marjorie have three grandchildren, Cassandra and Bryce (Susan), and Tavish (Andrew), as well as two great-grandchildren, Logan and Scarlet (Bryce). During his time with us, Dr. Allan was the Moderator of the 116th General Assembly from 1990-1991.

Dr. Allan was on the Centennial Celebration Committee and was one of the authors of the book, *The Kirk That Faith Built*, which celebrated a century of St. Andrew's from 1890 - 1990. Published in 1989, *The Kirk That Faith Built* told of the life and work of St. Andrew's through photos and writings.

One of the things we will always remember about Dr. Allan's sermons – there were always three points to be made.

When John and Marjorie retired, they moved to Nanaimo to be closer to their son, Andrew, who is in the RCMP, and was working in Nanaimo at the time. In July 2020, they moved to Langley to be near Susan and her husband, Brett, where they enjoyed living in their carriage house. John eventually became a resident of a care facility in Abbotsford.

Arthur and I kept in touch with John and Marjorie via phone calls, emails and visits throughout the years. Arthur has never forgotten John passing on four things a person needs in their life to be successful, "Faith, Hope, Love and a Job!" We last saw John in September 2025, and it was indeed a treasured 'in the moment' visit. As usual, after confirming we were well, John asked, "And how are things at St. Andrew's?"

Rest in peace, John. St. Andrew's will always remember you with great respect and love.

**Jean Marcellus**

## In Loving Memory

**Rev. Dr. John Allan - November 20**

**John (Jack) deZeeuw - November 25**



## Pulling Out All the Stops ...

I am delighted to have been invited to start a monthly column for *The Link* exploring different music ministry topics that might be of interest to parishioners.

For the month of December, I was asked to share some information about the anthem the choir will be singing on Christmas Eve, entitled "Before the Paling of the Stars".

When I started my previous position as Director of Music at an Anglican Church, I was surprised that the job came with a designated choir "mother", a title lovingly bestowed on the oldest (and indeed wisest) female singer who had been a chorister longer than I had been alive! But how do you celebrate and honour this cherished chorister, years later, on the occasion of her 95<sup>th</sup> birthday? With an original composition of course!

As choir mother, Frances loved Christina Rossetti's poetry. I found a Christmas-themed poem, written in 1864 by Rossetti, and set it to music for Fran's birthday which fell on December 18. I had to "tweak" the text a bit to keep the metre and syllable count the same for each verse so it could be sung like a strophic hymn. The mood and musical timbre I wanted to create was that of a simple tune with a medieval flavour, set in 4-part harmony with an AABA structure. The rhythm is based on how you read the lyrics out loud, identifying specific sound patterns based on how syllables are stressed or not.

Choir mother Fran, both saint and angel, passed away July 2022 at the ripe old age of 98 years. May she rest in peace.

Please join us at the Christmas Eve service, Wednesday, December 24 at 7pm to hear the choir sing this anthem for the first time at St. Andrew's Presbyterian.

I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year 2026!

Susanne

### *Before the Paling of the Stars*

(original text by Christina Rossetti; revised text below by Susanne Reul-Zastre)

Before the paling of the stars, Before the winter morn. Before the earliest cock did crow Jesus Christ was born. Born within a stable, cradled in a manger. To the world His hands had made in the winter deep.	Priest and king lay fast asleep in Jerusalem, young and old lay fast asleep in crowded Bethlehem. Saint and angel, ox and sheep, kept watch throughout the night. 'Til the dawn of Christmas Day in the winter deep.
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Jesus on his mother's breast  
in the stable cold,  
spotless Lamb of God was He,  
shepherd of the fold.  
Let us kneel with Mary maid,  
Joseph bends in wonder.  
Saint and angel, ox and sheep,  
in the winter deep.

## Session Report

Session met in person on Monday, December 1st. Our treasurer, Jack Reimer, presented the proposed budget for 2026. He indicated that a lot of the budget figures were tentative because exact amounts had not yet been received by the Property and Finance committees. Other numbers are dependent on when a minister is called and the cost to move them to Victoria. In spite of the uncertainty of the proposed budget, session approved it for presentation to the congregation on January 18th, 2026 after the worship service.

The search committee is now active and the congregational profile was posted on the national web site three weeks ago. We pray that the right candidate will answer our call.

Meanwhile, session and the interim moderator, Rev. Irwin Cunningham, have engaged Rev. Wes Denyer as regular interim pulpit supply until the end of April. Wes will also be available for pastoral care. He has already enthusiastically embraced this role, visiting some of our house-bound members. If you would like a pastoral visit with Rev. Denyer, please contact your elder to arrange it.

The session, now with only 9 members, has decided to combine a number of functions to reduce the number of committees. Finance and Property are now combined, Worship and Christian education are also combined and Congregational Life and Mission and Outreach have become one committee.

Session is asking the congregation for recommendations for elders in the hope of increasing our numbers to 12. The clerk and the interim moderator will study the process.

We were sorry to hear that Moira Bernard is stepping away from reader coordination and we are therefore seeking someone to take that role.

Session has scheduled the Annual General Meeting for March 8th after worship. The deadline for group reports is January 31st to be sent to Jean Marcellus who will assemble the full report.

Presbytery has designated St. Andrew's for its June meeting at 10:30 am on the 16th of the month. St. Andrew's is also scheduled to provide a representative elder as Elder Commissioner to the General Assembly in June.

Our Presbytery mission to the Indigenous nations in Cowichan, known as Grace Cowichan Church, led by Rev. Joey Cho, is seeking donations for their food bank. They are requesting gift cards from Superstore in \$10 or \$20 denominations. Please contact the clerk for further information.

Our interim Moderator, Rev. Irwin Cunningham, is available on Thursdays between 10:30 and 12:30 in the minister's study.

**Jerry Verwey**  
Session Clerk

*(Continued from page 1)*

Could this mean, in the eyes of God, every human life is valuable and treasured? The shepherds invite us to see the face of Christ in the homeless, those suffering from mental illness or addiction – all those who are judged by the world to live failed and worthless lives.

Each year, Christmas comes as an invitation to step into the mystery of stars and angels, of a newborn baby with parents who are astonished and overwhelmed by the sudden and surprising presence of the divine in their midst, of distracted innkeepers who eventually find a space to welcome God into their lives, and of impoverished shepherds whom God honours with the promise of hope.

Every Christmas, God comes to us once again, inviting us to worship the newborn king, who brings a light into the world with the power to overcome every darkness ... and a hope that conquers even sin and death ... a hope now living in you and me ... *“for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour ... tis Christ the Lord ...”*

**Rev. Wes Denyer**

## Guitar Recital November 23



An afternoon of music by guitar students in the classes of Simon Farintosh at the UVic School of Music was held Sunday, November 23, in the Sanctuary at St. Andrew's. Jesse Marshall, in his second year of his Master's program, played pieces for his 2026 spring final performance. A reception was held after the concert for the audience to meet and interact with these emerging young musicians.



## International Peace Charter

Further to my presentation to the congregation on November 23rd, I am requesting that you consider signing the petition for world peace. While the mission of world peace is ambitious, it is possible (miraculous but possible!).

There is a credible plan in place, but the organization needs 500 signatures. The goal for St. Andrew's is 100 signatures. When we reach this number, the Charter will be presented in the House of Commons by Elizabeth May.

The ratification of the Charter by the Government of Canada is possible in 2026 and would set a precedent for other countries of the world..

There is some urgency in gathering signatures as the deadline for signatures is **January 12, 2026**.

Thank you,  
**Miles Craig**



**The International Peace Charter (IPC) is a new non-profit organization with a vision of creating world peace.**

IPC envisions a national peace movement beginning in Canada and eventually extending throughout the world. The peace movement will be initiated through the utilization of the World Wide Web which unites most citizens and countries of the world.

IPC would like Canada to lead the world by becoming the first country in the world to ratify the International Peace Charter.

IPC is encouraging Canadian citizens to sign a House of Commons electronic petition or e-petition. This will allow the IPC to be introduced in the House of Commons for discussion among Members of Parliament. IPC is also encouraging citizens to contact their MPs for support of the Charter. The goal is for the Government of Canada to ratify the IPC in 2026.

Sign the E-Petition for Peace:  
**[InternationalPeaceCharter.org](http://InternationalPeaceCharter.org)**

## Cello Recital November 30, 2025



As part of the ongoing partnership between St. Andrew's and the UVic School of Music, cello students from the studio of Associate Professor Pamela Highbaugh-Aloni performed Sunday afternoon, November 30, in the sanctuary. A reception with refreshments was held in the Gathering Room following this performance by talented cello, violin, viola and piano musicians.



### Upcoming concerts at St. Andrew's in December feature:

- ❖ **Violin Students** from the studio of UVic Associate Professor Ann Elliott-Goldschmid on Saturday, December 6 at 2 pm in the sanctuary.
- ❖ **The Gift of Christmas Music and Carol Sing-Along** on Thursday, December 11 at 12 noon. Refreshments will be served. Everyone is welcome to come and sing carols and hear trumpet, flute, beautiful vocals and organ presentations.

## Share the Joy of Christmas 2025

Every year St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church has a Share the Joy of Christmas campaign with the goal of making the holiday season brighter and more hopeful for persons who are struggling financially in our community.

Christmas is meant to be a joyful and celebratory season. Unfortunately, for more and more families in these perilously expensive times, Christmas can be stressful. When you donate to St. Andrew's Share the Joy, you are making Christmas brighter for families, couples and singles in need.

All donations to "Share the Joy" are passed on to the local charity, Mustard Seed Street Church, which uses its contacts with local food distributors, to put together food hampers that will feed a family of four. Each hamper, full of a variety of food, including a turkey or grocery gift card, fresh produce, milk, eggs, bakery items, treats, and cereal, also contains a few special gifts for each child in the family that receives the basket. Adults are blessed with a few goodies like warm stockings, chocolates and a new toque along with the food. This way we try to touch each person's heart with the joy, peace and hope of the season.

On Sunday, November 16, Janice James, Manager of Sponsorship and Community Relations at Mustard Seed, spoke during our church service, telling us about its Food Bank and Food Security Distribution Centre and how the charity will be delivering 1200 Christmas hampers this December.

The Mission and Outreach Committee wants to encourage all the members and adherents of St. Andrew's to consider donating money to the Share the Joy of Christmas fundraiser. The need has never been greater.

You can make a donation by putting cash or a cheque in your regular church envelopes or by sending an e-transfer donation to [treasurer@standrewsvictoria.ca](mailto:treasurer@standrewsvictoria.ca). Please indicate that your donation is for "Share the Joy".

We are also collecting donations of socks. Please place any that you have to share in the donation box in the Gathering Room.



For more information, please contact the **Mission and Outreach Committee**, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, phone 250-384-5734 or [office@standrewsvictoria.ca](mailto:office@standrewsvictoria.ca).

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## St. Andrew's Activity Group

During the month of November, the Activity Group was pleased to help Dorothy Reimer, St. Andrew's Health and Wellness lead, to review and update First Aid Kits at St. Andrew's.

The kits are available for minor cuts or scrapes should they be needed by staff, congregants or visitors. In the next few months you'll see some new signage showing kit locations and information regarding contacting emergency services should the need arise. The review will be completed in January.

During December we will not hold our weekly meetings as Advent is a busy time at St. Andrew's and folks are helping with a variety of the activities. Starting again on January 8th we will begin a new year of activities.

Following a very successful vegetable garden this past summer we plan on replicating our garden in 2026. If you would like to help with this initiative we would welcome more gardeners. St. Andrew's laneway garden produced carrots, peas, Swiss chard, lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers and potatoes. Our weekly donation to James Bay New Horizons was much appreciated. We learned a lot about container gardening and hopefully this year will see even more vegetables to share. See you in the new year.

**Sheelagh Garson**

## Moving from Ableism to Inclusion

Definition: Ableism characterizes people as they are defined by their disabilities and also classifies disabled people as being inferior to non-disabled people.

It is easy for us to 'see' that someone with a walker has a physical disability, and that a person carrying a white cane is blind or has low vision. But there are many people who have a disability that we cannot see.

To avoid ableism, we need to become more aware of how everyday language helps perpetuate ableist ideas and values. How do we think about people who present differently to us? Are we open minded and accepting or judgemental and critical? How do we speak about people who are not quite the same as us? Modifying our language is an important step towards being respectful and inclusive. How might we refer to someone with a disability? They may have a disability but that does not define them as a person. We can identify the disability:

- They have impaired hearing or are deaf.
- They have epilepsy.
- The individual is on the autism spectrum.
- They have a cognitive disability.
- They are neuroatypical or neurodivergent. Neurodivergence is the term for when someone's brain processes, learns, and/or behaves differently from what is considered 'typical'. It refers to the natural diversity in human brains.

A disability may impact how someone functions in a variety of ways. The person with a disability may need or choose to do something differently to how we would do it; the result may or may not meet our expectations. This does not mean they are wrong - just different. We need to avoid being critical or judgemental.

A disability often creates barriers to accessibility when perhaps someone cannot reach, cannot see or hear, or is unable to comprehend what is required of them. This may cause them to feel excluded from an activity or an event unless we offer understanding and possibly an accommodation.

Disabilities, visible and invisible, whether significant or minor, can affect how people relate to each other and how they feel about themselves. None of us wish to be labelled in a way that makes us feel inferior or excluded. If we seek to be an inclusive community, we all need to be thoughtful about the manner in which we speak to and about an individual with a disability.

Here is a brief summary of a message received through the church office from someone with a significant hearing loss, who is in the habit of requesting accessible seating to any concert where seating is not assigned.

"At a concert at St. Andrew's last year I was challenged by a volunteer because it was not apparent that I required accessible seating. Likely this was because I had no visible disability. You can generally trust that if someone has requested accessible seating, they require it. It is not always an easy thing to request 'special treatment'. I for one have taken years to come to point where I do so." (abridged)

We can strive to avoid the discrimination and exclusion that results from ableism by refraining from ableist discriminatory language, by being respectful and kind. This is about seeking to understand. It is an important step to becoming a more inclusive and welcoming community. Asking for any accommodation, for whatever reason, is really a request for an understanding of who we are and what we need. It is often a hard thing to ask; it makes us feel vulnerable and different. We remember that we are all different. God created us each with our unique abilities. Indeed, we are 'fearfully and wonderfully made'.

This is a brief introduction. For more information about ableism see: Ableism: Types, examples, impact, and anti-ableism (Medical News Today: What is ableism, and what is its impact? <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/ableism>)

**Colina Titus,**  
Personnel and Leading with Care