In this edition:

- Bishop John’s Christmas Card competition
- The Christmas Mystery in Penicuik & West Linton
- Fischy Music and Bring It All To Me
- Peace Pole at St Anne’s Dunbar
- Play and Pray news
- Top tips from around the Diocese

THE CHRISTMAS MYSTERY - A FAMILY JOURNEY

Rev Lynsay Downs of Penicuik and West Linton offered a creative and inspiring all-age Advent experience this year. "The Christmas Mystery" was held on St Nicholas' Day, 6th December, and was partly inspired by the celebrations Lynsay recalls from her time in Hungary, and also by Jostein Gaarder’s novel The Christmas Mystery. The Graham Institute in West Linton and St James the Less in Penicuik were open for people to drop in and embark on a journey from here and now to Bethlehem at the time of Jesus’ birth.

Lynsay promised participants, “We will travel diagonally through time and space, meeting characters familiar from our nativity stories. Each character will have an activity for travellers of all ages to engage with. These activities include craft, storytelling, listening to music and more. One of the people you will meet is St Nicholas (Santa). He will be giving gifts for the wise men to bring to baby Jesus and to all travelling to witness this wonderful birth.”

I met children from West Linton Primary School who were enjoying following a path made of straw, smelling myrrh, meeting St Nicholas, holding frankincense grains and singing round the manger. It was a magical way to engage everyone in the Christmas story; if you would like to find out more, contact Rev Lynsay - stjandstmrector@icloud.com

BISHOP JOHN’S CHRISTMAS CARD COMPETITION - WINNER!

This year’s winner is Laura Buxel (7) of St Columba’s Bathgate. Bishop John particularly liked the vibrant colours and Laura’s emphasis on joy! Highly commended: Caitlin Smith (7) Holy Trinity, Melrose; Patrick Parocha (almost 9) of Christ Church Morningside.
Hands up who likes Fischy Music? Everyone who attended their recent all-age training event was in agreement! Adults learned all about how to use the new songs and CD resource, 'Bring It All To Me', while the kids learned the songs and performed them - complete with actions - at the showcase concert.

The CD features the songs and backing tracks, and the accompanying DVD and CD-ROM contain a wealth of resources. There are videos to teach the signs and actions for each song, many of which are based on British Sign Language. Those who have an aversion to 'action songs' will be reassured to know that not all the actions require leaping about! Many actions are quiet and dignified; they can be performed sitting down and they gently aid meditation on the song’s meaning. If you are not confident about leading your own congregation or children’s group in song, the DVD lets the Fischy Music team do it for you: there are videos of each song being performed, complete with actions, so everyone can simply follow Fischy Music’s lead. There is an image movie to accompany each song, which is designed to encourage reflection. Much of the artwork in these movies is strikingly beautiful and will appeal to all ages.

The Fischy Music team members really have brought everything they’ve got to this brilliant resource. I recommend the ‘Bring It All To Me’ CD resource pack to anyone involved in Sunday school, Messy Church or All-Age worship.

**BRING IT ALL TO ME**

**3-DISC DVD RESOURCE PACK**

**THIS RESOURCE FEATURES:**
- Ten songs for all ages based on the emotions expressed in the Psalms
- Backing tracks for each song
- Teaching movies and videos for each song
- Image Movies
- Powerpoint slides
- Downloadable sheet music (arrangements for piano and guitar)
- Lyric sheets
- Practical, imaginative teaching ideas based on each song
- £40 per pack from www.fischy.com

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**FISCHY MUSIC ALL-AGE TRAINING EVENT & CONCERT**

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The songs are as singable and memorable as you would expect with Fischy Music, and as they are based on the emotions expressed in the Psalms, they explore a range of different feelings. There is upbeat praise and joyfulness here: ‘E-N-J-O-Y’ has an infectious salsa rhythm that gets everyone on their feet, and ‘Sing a new song’ has us playing not only air guitar but fiddle and drums too. Like the Psalms themselves, these songs are not afraid to voice difficult feelings, either. ‘BIG, BIG questions’ asks God hard questions such as “Why me?” and finds no easy answers, yet the chorus strongly affirms our faith: “We believe You’re there, we believe You care, we believe You’re not scared of big, big questions.” ‘In a deep, deep place’ is a haunting piece which cries out to God when he seems far away: not many worship songs have the courage to stay in such a dark place, but then the music takes us from darkness and difficulty to the joy of turning back to God, tenderly expressed in ‘We your children’ and ‘How we need you’. The title track does what Fischy Music’s songs do best: it tells us the truth about God in a simple and memorable way. In this song, God says, “Anything you’re proud of, anything you’re not, bring it all, bring it all to me. Everything you’re hiding, everything you’ve got, bring it all, bring it all to me.” This is proper theology, sung to a lilting melody with a distinctively Scottish flavour.
The children of Dunbar Primary School have been working with Revd Andrew Bain, the Rector of St Anne’s Church, and Richard Taylor, a local ecumenical youth worker, on a project about war and peace. Their school study of World War Two culminated in the Dedication of the new Peace Pole at St Anne’s, as part of the worldwide Peace Pole project. Children read their moving poems about war, then joined in prayers for peace led by Bishop John Armes around the Peace Pole. The words on each side of the pole read 'May peace prevail on Earth' in English, Polish, Japanese and German, reflecting the most commonly spoken mother tongues of the children in local schools.

This project tied in very well with this year's special Remembrance activities, marking the hundred year anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War, and the children’s poems about poppies, bombs and trenches showed how this part of our history had captured their imaginations.

The Dunbar Peace Pole project engaged the whole community. East Lothian Council kindly supplied the labour and materials for installing the Pole, which is situated in a very prominent position, right on the High Street, at a place where many people pass it every day. The children I spoke to said that they had enjoyed working on the project and are looking forward to showing the Peace Pole to visiting relatives over Christmas. And everyone who came to the Dedication enjoyed tea and cake in St Anne’s church afterwards!

The Peace Pole Project website contains more information about this worldwide project: “A Peace Pole is a hand-crafted monument that displays the message and prayer “May Peace Prevail on Earth” on each of its four or six sides, usually in different languages.

There are tens of thousands of Peace Poles in 180 countries all over the world dedicated as monuments to peace. They serve as constant reminders for us to visualize and pray for world peace.

When you plant a Peace Pole in your community, you are linking with people all over the world who have planted Peace Poles in the same spirit of peace.”

Peace Pole in Bethlehem
www.peacepoleproject.org
The leaders, Claire Starr and Sharon Laidlaw, are experienced spiritual directors who have a passion for this project. They plan to lead the first six sessions, and then the people of St Andrew’s will continue Play & Pray themselves. The Rector, Rev Jim Benton-Evans, says: “Play & Pray has energised and excited our small congregation. As a church that has not had any children for some years, there has been a real sense of being at the beginning of God doing something extraordinary as we have seen the numbers slowly grow. And it has given our congregation the confidence to invite people they know: it seems to be much easier for them to invite families along to Play and Pray, rather than to our normal Sunday service. We are welcoming people into God’s church, some for the first time, and meeting them on their own terms, rather than expecting them to conform to our ideas of what church is or should be. There is a real missiological edge to what we are doing - and it is very exciting.”

Visit playandpray.net

Claire Benton-Evans

Office: 21a Grosvenor Crescent
Edinburgh
EH12 5EL

Direct line: 0131 346 9081

Email: youthandchildren@dioceseofedinburgh.org

Mobile: 0747 372 8148