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Letter from our Minister

A few years ago, we went to New York for my birthday. We caught the lift with a party of noisy teenagers to the top of the Empire State Building. They were jostling each other, laughing, swearing and being generally young people. We spilled onto the viewing platform and there was a stunned silence. Everyone one of us was blown away by the sea of beauty sparkling at our feet. The city is alive with light.

That light is lots and lots of individual rooms lit up. Millions of people create this most spectacular of sights. Each light dances, unknowingly with its neighbour until we are overwhelmed with the sheer delight of it all.

This is an image of Church. Each Christian lights up God's grace; each Church is a beacon of light and when, in our own individual, lit up way, we come together, we create a beauty that can take the breath away. The more we gather, the greater the light and glory of the Lord is seen by all around.

I write this 15 miles away in Newport and yet perceive the light in Chepstow. I was blessed to share the Christingle which brought this image to mind. One of the real joys of a Christingle Service is that 'strangers' and 'friends' draw close together not knowing if they are either. Everyone mixes creating a light that lifts each other's spirits, bringing greater joy to the Christmas time.

Song, dance, light, sweets, fruit, sharing, peace, love, joy; is this not the message of Jesus Christ?!

Thank you for the privilege of being part of Chepstow Methodist Church. This is a place of many gifts and graces, whose light shines as a beacon into the community. My involvement is greater, now, as the Revd. Rachel Frank's light is a little diminished at the moment. There are others, too, whose light shines not as bright as they would like.

May we, in our prayers, in our living, help provide the light of Christ for those going through these darker times, for we know that God's light can never be extinguished. The Christian proclamation is one that knows that, in Christ, God is with us forever; that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ, or, as Julian of Norwich so beautifully wrote all those years ago; 'with Christ all shall be well; all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well.'

Gordon

p.s. This is written by Revd. Gordon Gresswell, Superintendent Minister of the Newport and Lower Wye and interim Minister for Chepstow. The Revd. Rachel Frank has had the heartfelt difficulty of caring for her mother in the last stages of her life. Rachel cared for her mother beautifully, but it has taken its toll emotionally and spiritually. We hope that, once again, Rachel's light will soon glow bright amongst us all. Please pray for Rachel and others whose light flickers at present. May your Christ-light continue to shine.

Thank you for 'looking after us', Gordon, and welcome back to Rachel.



Traidcraft

May I begin by thanking all those who gave extra support to the Fairtrade Stall at Christmas. Everything you buy really does make such difference to those who live on the edge. People like Mathew. Amy Wilson of Traidcraft wrote to me about him, she said:

‘Mathew can see nothing. But Mathew finds a way to work the land, Mathew uses his hands to build a home, Mathew takes care of his young family as best he can, but Mathew knows he cannot give them the future they deserve as, despite his talent and hard work, Mathew is denied opportunity because of his blindness. Before I met Mathew, I only knew one thing about him - that he was blind. I reluctantly admit that as I headed to the tiny mountainous village of Bujela in Tanzania, my subconscious prejudices meant I could only imagine meeting a helpless man, living without hope or purpose.

But as soon as I arrived at his secluded farm, the fit 25-year-old guided by the sound of my voice, walked straight over to welcome me. His bright, friendly smile and firm handshake instantly put me at ease, as did the calm presence of his wife, Debura, carrying their beautiful baby son Gracious. The couple also have a four-year-old son Ghazi.

Mathew is a banana and livestock farmer. When he started to lose his sight at the age of eleven, his family could not afford the operation he needed to remove his cataracts. By sixteen, he was completely blind.

Mathew has never returned to the hospital, as he has never earned enough money to afford medical care. He lives in hope, though, that a simple cataract operation might still restore his sight. Mathew showed me how he goes about his daily chores - weeding his plot, carefully tending to his banana trees and feeding his livestock, with no walking aid or guide dog to assist him. He explained that he had built his current wooden house by hand and told me enthusiastically of his ambition to build a house of brick with better shelter from the wind and rain.

But his hard work and ambition is not reaping the rewards his family deserves - because too often Mathew is excluded from opportunities due to stigma, prejudice, and misinformation surrounding disability.

“I cannot measure the difference between me and farmers who do not have a disability,” he said “I only know the difference is far. Sometimes the children say they are not full, but there is no more food in the house.”

Working on his own, with no support network to rely on, the money he gets for his bananas is just too little. With no means of transport, he is forced to take the low price offered by the middlemen who come to visit his small farm.

But there is good news - Mathew recently joined a Traidcraft Exchange group alongside other disabled farmers in the area, as part of a project to help 7,500 people. By working together as a group, learning new farming techniques tailored to their disabilities and growing new crops, disabled farmers can finally start to improve their incomes. In just a short time, Mathew has made significant progress. "Being part of the project can help me in my life 100% by improving my farming and business skills," he told me. "For instance, I already learned how to grow coffee which, for me, is a new crop."

During our time together, Mathew never once asked for a handout. Mathew has a plan. His plan is to apply himself, to work hard and take every opportunity which comes along. "I kindly ask for a little support, and with hard work I can get myself out of this poverty," he told me as we said our goodbyes.

It is true Mathew is blind, but blindness does not define this man so full of hope and purpose. Mathew is talented, resourceful and ambitious, and he is capable of far more than his present situation allows. He needs the chance to keep learning.'

So, with your support for the Traidcraft Stall we can keep helping people like Mathew as part of our walk of faith. May God richly bless you in 2020.

Cynthia Giles

Zambia “Partnership Across the Miles” Hope in Christ

Education January 2020

Over the last three years we have been so amazed & privileged to see ongoing provision to keep young people in secondary education who were initially educated at the junior school of Hope in Christ in Lusaka which is the vision of Pastor Paul & Mary Swala. Please give thanks to God for His amazing answer to prayers for the “Partnership Across the Miles” that has developed with Hope in Christ Orphanage, School & Clinic. By the beginning of the new school year this January, there was sufficient funding to pay the fees for 36 young people; ranging from Grade 8, 9, 10 & 11 in secondary school to include 4 in University & Technical colleges.

Wonderfully, two of these young people, Matthew & Maggie Ngambi are both in the second year of their courses of Electrical Engineering & Clinical Support at Thorn Park College & City University respectively. They are the eldest of 8 children of the orphaned Ngambi family who were first helped in 2017 when their home was badly damaged by the rains not long after both parents had died; their education will make such a difference in providing for that family in the future.

In early January we heard from Pastor Paul that there were 11 other young people who had passed Grade 7 exams to go on to Secondary school but there were insufficient funds. Regarding one girl Paul shared “We have the story of Alice who is so willing to go to secondary school but due to lack of financial help she has been back in the *shanty* compound for a year and half after finishing Grade 7 at Hope in Christ school. When she saw her friends celebrating for the help you gave them, she approached me that she would want to go back to school.”

By the 17th January enough funds had come in to cover the education fees for the additional eleven young people, including Alice; Praise the Lord. In total this means that 47 young people have been funded for secondary education in the academic year January – December 2020 with an amazing £7228 being generously provided by so many people who support “Partners Across the Miles” here in the UK & USA.

Ongoing education will make such a difference to the future of these young people from the Hope in Christ Classes of 2018, 2019 & 2020 sponsored thus far; Paul Swala said a while ago “Education is Life in Zambia, what you are doing in partnering with us is changing the lives of these children”

Looking to the future please pray for wisdom and strength for Pastor Paul & Mary as they manage the school, orphanage & clinic every day in the challenges of their surroundings in the Chipata shanty compound, for the continued support for food & education for the 156 junior children at Hope in Christ and for the sustainability of the secondary education funding in coming years.

For further information or to donate online please take a look at

<https://www.give.net/HopeinChristZambia>

Vera & Brian Lloyd



Action for Children – quarterly report

Once again, a fairly quiet quarter, but the committee had previously decided that we could celebrate the 150th anniversary of Action for Children by easing back on fundraising for twelve months. Nevertheless, we have raised £1,885 as of mid-January 2020.

Our plans for the coming year include the following ideas:

1. A musical evening – to be organised by Karen Barthram – hopefully in conjunction with Wydean School music centre.
2. Action for Children Sunday. Planned for Sunday 12th July with a special service at our church, hopefully with a guest speaker. An envelope collection will be taken . . .
3. Art exhibition to take place in our church – probably in early July and possibly in conjunction with the Chepstow Art Trail. Hopefully, Karen Barthram to organise.
4. Biennial sponsored walk scheduled for Saturday 19th September – dig out your walking boots for this popular event. This will be our 6th holding of this event and will, as usual, feature a walk over the bridge with refreshments provided at the far end. Our last walk, raised £1,200.

Our committee now comprises Michael Bale (Sec / Treasurer), Cynthia Giles, Sue Lewis, Margaret Harvey, Karen Barthram

and Barry Catlin. If anyone else would like to join us, they would be made most welcome. Please speak to me on 620111. or any of our committee members.

Michael Bale (Chepstow Methodist Church Action for Children Support group.



Congratulations to:

Hazel and Des Edwards who celebrated their 70th Wedding Anniversary December 10th, 2019!!

Caroline and Rhodri Buffet on the birth of their first child, Evan, James, Dylan who was born on Nov 29th, 2019.



Passion Fruit Curd

6 Passion fruit
125g (4 1/2 oz) golden caster sugar
50g (2oz) unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
3 eggs, plus 3 extra yolks, lightly beaten together.

Halve the fruit and scoop out the pulp into a food processor. Pulse briefly (this helps to loosen the pulp from the seeds) then transfer to a sieve set over a small bowl. Rub the pulp through to remove the seeds.

Put the passion fruit pulp, sugar, butter and eggs into a large heatproof bowl on top of a pan of simmering water. The bottom of the bowl mustn't touch the water. Stir constantly with a wooden spoon until the mixture is thick and coats the back of the spoon.

Pour the curd into hot sterilised jars, cover & seal. Label when cold and refrigerate for 2/3 weeks. Once opened use within 3 days.

NB you can sterilise your clean jars by half filling with water and bringing to the boil in the microwave. Using oven gloves, swill the boiling water around the inside of

the jar then pour away the water and drain the upside-down jar on a clean tea towel or on kitchen paper.

To make a stunning dessert use the remaining egg whites to make meringue nests.

Spoon the passion fruit curd into the nest and top with fresh whipped cream.

The flower of the passion fruit is beautiful - I've heard different interpretations of formation of petals and stamens, but they all refer to the crucifixion of Christ. The 16th century Roman Catholic Spanish Missionaries to South America named the plant 'flor passionis' and observed the five stamens represent the five wounds of Christ.

So perhaps a different, but appropriate, recipe to use this Easter.

I think it's interesting to ponder on the origins of the naming of the plant. The Spanish missionary who first made the association must have had a contemplative nature. It should encourage us to look into the wonders of our natural history, the amazing creation around us and see the Creator.

Hils

The doorway

I wandered into town today
To see the shops in bright array
And watch the people buzzing round
Parading with the goods they've found

What I didn't think I'd see
Was darkened windows, empty streets
Doorways filled with homeless. people
Huddled, cold, in a land so unequal

All they own in bags you would not touch
And that was never very much
Their pasts unknown, their future grim
They must ache in every limb
While the many people passing by
Avert their steps, their minds, their eyes

I think it shocks us all to see
And to know it could happen to me
Bodies so thin and eyes of despair
What can you do to show you care?
How does this happen, we know not why
There but for the grace of God go I

I have food and shoes galore
More than enough for a year or more
A warm home, a comfy bed
There is nothing more I need
And yet.....

Next time I plan to have a great spend
I will remember those sad people instead
And how they can live each day and night
Their bones aching with cold in their terrible plight
And call a doorway a home.

(Name supplied to Editor)



Marjorie Hall who celebrated her 90th Birthday on
February 6th,

June Skoll who celebrates her 90th Birthday on April
8th.

Hazel and Barie Evans who celebrate their Golden
Wedding on March 28th.

Leaders of Worship and Preachers' Trust (LWPT)

By the time that this edition of Envoy is printed LWPT Sunday (23rd February 2020) will have passed. Even so I felt that Our Church family and others may be interested to know some of the history and purpose of LWPT.

It developed from the LPMAA, Local Preachers' Mutual Aid Association which itself arose from various changes over the years in the Poor Laws and the moves to help those who lived in poverty. These included many local preachers in the church.

Several local initiatives in the years before 1849 (e.g. in Bolton, Bristol and Cambridge) were formed which included 'promoting brotherly love, relieving the distressed, administering to the necessities of the afflicted, and helping at times of death' and these foreshadowed the formation of the LPMAA. In June 1849 **Francis Pearson**, a local preacher in the Cromford Circuit, initiated a correspondence in the Wesleyan Times which led to an Aggregate Meeting of over 600 Wesleyan Methodist local preachers in London on 3-4th October. This formally established the WM LPMAA.

After World War II the LPMAA diversified its provision to include five residential care homes (at Westcliff-on-Sea, Grange-over Sands, Woodhall Spa, Minehead and Rickmansworth). Rickmansworth closed and was sold in 2001, because of the decline in the number of local preachers and their dependents seeking residential care.

The association had shared with MHA in creating a sheltered housing development in Sheffield in 1989 and continues to provide financial and personal help for local preachers and their dependants in their own homes. Its periodical The Local Preacher's Magazine (now entitled Ichthus) has been published without a break since 1851, originally monthly, but since 1970 as a quarterly.

In response to a Conference resolution in 1963, the LPMAA and the Connexion gradually moved together. A Standing Joint Committee was formed between the Association and the Local Preachers Department in 1964, and by 1967 a joint Local Preachers Sunday was agreed. During the year of its 150th anniversary (1999), the Association appointed a working party to seek ways of revitalizing its work in the Circuit Branches. led to the dissolution of the Association in 2005. Its function of supporting local preachers and their dependents in time of need being taken over by a new, independent body, the **'Leaders of Worship and Preachers Trust'**, comprising trustees nominated by the Methodist Conference, the Wesleyan Reform Union and the former LPMAA. Provision is made for additional trustees as ecumenical developments make this appropriate. The new body has a wider remit under charity law and is governed by Charity Commission regulations.

LPMA was a well-loved 'friendly society' run by its membership with representatives from Methodist Church circuits and Wesleyan Reform Churches. There was a need for it to change at a time when the church and its

leadership of worship was changing, but also as society and the welfare needs of LPMA members were changing (often reducing). In addition, the decision-making system of LPMA was cumbersome and expensive to run, which made that part of its expenditure difficult to justify to the Charity Commission.

Increasingly, churches were making use of worship leaders as well as local preachers and LPMA appreciated that its client group needed to be widened. New dynamics in leading worship and preaching also meant people were requesting support in their developing ministries, so this would become a new dimension in the work of LWPT.

The move from LPMA to LWPT enabled the continuation of LPMA's philanthropy, broadened its membership base (and opportunities to assist), embraced a new support for development in leading worship and preaching, and streamlined the charity's organisation, administration and decision-making.

The streamlining was not easy for some LPMA members to accept. Any change can be uncomfortable. But it is to their credit that despite sadness at losing some of the sense of community that LPMA had, the membership agreed to respond to changes in the church and in society to create LWPT.

Financial Support for Local Preachers

Vocational grants are available to those who need financial assistance in order to enable them to pursue

their vocation in ministry, including to those in the early stages of exploring their calling to preach.

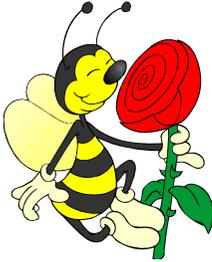
Grants can be used towards course fees and materials for any recognised course that enables the applicant to explore or develop their preaching skills. This may include 'gap year' style courses as well as continuing professional development courses. Before making an application, it is necessary to check if the church or Circuit may offer financial support. There is also a fund to assist Local Preachers of the Methodist Church who are in 'needy circumstances'. Those who is can make an application are:

- Local Preachers
- Those training as Local Preachers
- Widows/widowers or dependents of Local Preachers.

In addition to the provision of general support, 'needy circumstances' includes assistance for training and development as a Preacher where financial need arises. This may include training materials, training courses, travel to a training centre, and any other associated training costs where the training is for the initial training or continuing Local Preacher development.

My thanks for much of this information go to Michael Gray, Circuit LWPT Secretary, for the loan of his copy of "Confidence in Mutual Aid" which outlines the first 150 years of LPMAA and Mr Peter Relf, Honorary Secretary of LPMA at the time of its dissolution.

Terry Quinlan



Gardening with Lesley

From Laundry bags to Treasure bags

Spring is here, and gardeners are getting excited by new growing opportunities, but what do gardeners do in the short, cold and wet days of winter? As a keen gardener I do believe that gardening in the winter pays dividends later in the year. There are the usual winter chores of clearing back the dead growth of the previous season. Weeding is also a very useful task, as it is easy to see seedlings that will be hidden by the new growth in spring. There are also a few opportunities to plant some bulbs such as tulips.

However, this very wet autumn and winter has made getting out in the garden very difficult. Traditionally gardening magazines recommend sitting by the fireside with a selection of seed catalogues making plans for the coming season. But I like to take the opportunity of the wet days and long dark evenings to undertake various craft projects.

For the last few years this has included making laundry bags for the care home where my mother lived. Each resident would have a large drawstring bag, reminiscent of the P.E. bags of my childhood memory. They would use these to collect their washing ready to go to the

laundry. I made many of these recycling old curtains, duvet covers and fabric remnants. I became known at the home as “Lesley the laundry bag lady”. The carers particularly like the “groovy chick” bags I provided. Perhaps it made them remember that these elderly ladies may well have been “groovy chicks” in their days.

In January this year I got an email from my granddaughter requesting help with a craft project. She works as a nurse in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at the Heath Hospital. The Unit had recently launched the “Beads of Courage” scheme to support the parents of the sick and vulnerable babies in the Unit. This scheme originated in the U.S.A. to help seriously ill children record milestones achieved during their treatment. It is a tactile, visual record of their journey. Not only does it serve as a personal reminder, but it can be used as a talking point to share their experiences with friends and relatives.

When a baby arrives in the Unit, parents are given a turtle-shaped bead, and beads to spell out the child’s name and a length of string. There are coloured beads, which have different meanings; yellow for an overnight stay; red for a blood transfusion; and pink for respiratory support. The parents can also choose a “Beads of Courage” bag, or Treasure Bag to store their beads. These bags are often hung from the cots.

This winter, I have used the wet days and long dark evenings to make “Treasure bags” to go to the Unit. Each bag has a special “Beads of Courage” badge and a slip to place inside giving the name of the maker who has

“lovingly” made the bag. There is a special pleasure in being able to choose and match fabrics that give the parents an interesting choice of bags. I have also been able to produce kits to make the bags and several members of the Church and community have been willing to share in this work. It is a privilege to participate in a very small way with the work being undertaken by the nurses at the Unit, and support parents through their very difficult days.

From laundry bags to treasure bags, I can use my time and talents to provide support from the elderly to the very, very young. I thank other people who have shared in the treasure bag project. It shows that there are often very simple, practical ways in which we can help others.

To find out more: www.beadsofcourageuk.org

<http://www.cardiffandvaleuhb.wales.nhs.uk/news/50912>

Lesley

Bringing The Triangle Project to a close, at Chepstow Methodist Church

Twenty-one years ago, in 1999 Cecil and Julie Jones went on holiday to Turtle Bay Hotel, Watamu, Kenya. There, they were taken on a journey into the heart of the forest to meet a group of people who asked if they were able to make a difference to the education and health of the community. This was reported in the newspaper!

After that experience, we made a promise that we kept. Every year except two, when Kenya was threatened by terrorists, we have made the long journey to Kenya to support the project. Rev Andrew Webster joined us in 2012 with his young family. Ever since that journey by Andrew in 2012, he has raised vital funds with some friends, by doing aquathons, zip-wire events and more recently, the Swansea Half –Marathon.

After that very first trip, we returned and shared our amazing experiences, first with the schools I visited in Newport, family and friends and later in 2000 with the church family. Donated books, pens, pencils and monies from schools and family started the project with a big flurry. Chepstow Methodist church soon came on board with a vengeance including a circuit project where Caldicot and the smaller churches donated a large sum of money.

Eighteen years of fund-raising by the church family and hard work by the Kenyan communities saw a school and a community clinic being built. What a thrilling time to see the buildings grow! Teachers were sent and trained in university, teacher's salaries supplemented, and courses

run to train parents to help with cooking a basic meal of rice and beans. Once built, the clinic staff was trained in colleges, given opportunity to improve in every aspect they needed, to run a service which treated the very sick and needy people in Timboni. A purpose-built maternity delivery room was built and named after Julie. Christine, a Christian mid-wife delivered babies and prayed over those who were weak and had very little chance of living. Miracles were perceived at that clinic. FREE outreach clinics to the extremely poor were arranged by the dedicated clinic staff where they treated the very, very sick people. We travelled on some of these outreach clinics and were humbled by what we saw.

Ten classrooms were built at Mzizima School, as it was named, it flourished and grew. Pupils came from the forest regions to gain the education they had dreamed of having. Currently there are 756 pupils including an early-years section of 80 children. The government recognised its excellence and built an Early Years section together with providing nine more teachers, including paying their salaries. We just supplement one teacher now as the other two have retired. Many students tell the tale of moving on to university because they have been sponsored by so many members of the church family, through their secondary school and ultimately university. Three have become doctors, including one who often helps in her holidays at the clinic.

Water tanks were donated to the school, clinic and to the Agape women's aid centre. Water is vital to the health of the people there and they often travel miles, barefooted to collect dirty polluted water from the wells in the area. We

really don't know the hardship these people have unless we experience it first-hand. They thank God for every little blessing that happens during their day. We are the ones blessed by knowing them and realising how far removed from God we sometimes become.

Through the generosity of one church member, we took the school into the 21st century by adding eight raspberry pi computers to a purpose-built classroom, donated by the church family. These last few months, since returning in February 2019, we have been able to link the school to the internet and hopefully secured enough funds to continue this for the future. August saw more computers being donated through the same generous person. The Government has given the school a housed projector and IPADS to all teachers, just because we built, improved and secured the computer room on our last visit in 2019. Last week we had work done to replace the whole of the school roof as it was leaking and would not survive the next rainy season in 2020. All this was possible through the donations currently in the Chepstow Church Triangle account.

Timboni clinic has recently been supported by BOMU hospital, which runs AIDS outreach clinics. They treat the whole family even if there is just one member suffering from AIDS. They bring expertise, knowledge, equipment and vital resources to the clinic. BOMU have recognised that Timboni clinic is a centre of excellence, transparent and dedicated to reach the community. Medical supplies are sponsored by individuals from the church. We are very positive that the clinic will now survive and will continue

to meet the needs of the very poor and needy people in the Watamu area of Kenya.

We thank God that he has been alongside us in these twenty-one years of helping the community. Bibles were carried in our suitcases over the years and also purchased over there, as some wished for Swahili versions. A motorbike was donated by one member of our church so that a pastor could spread God's word. This same pastor had to borrow a Bible as he could not afford to buy his very own. We did not hesitate to purchase a King James Version of which he had always dreamed. We will never forget his thankful words.

In May 2020, the fund in church will be closed down, but if anyone wishes to contribute the cheques can be carried by travellers going to Kenya. Throughout, Sue Chimes has kindly been holding and transferring money when it was needed by the community officers at the Turtle Bay Hotel. Without her diligence and persistence things would not have run so smoothly. We thank her sincerely.

Ces and I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to make their "dream" come true. We hear echoing in our heads what the people in the churches there say:

"God is good all the time. All the time God is good!"

Ces and I will continue to support the Triangle Project, as long as we are able, and possibly make another long journey because, as Rev Andrew Webster said in 2012, "We are the ones who have been blessed!"

Julie and Cecil Jones

Memories of a golden age.

Tony Watkinson has been a much loved member of our congregation for as long as I can remember. What I have just discovered is that he has a treasure trove of memories for us all both of his early years in Yorkshire and of our church. Tony has always had an interest in photography, so I am now the proud holder of a pictorial record of church life from the 1970's onwards. Although our wonderful Envoy can't show you the pictures, it can point you all at Tony's excellent reminiscences of his time working at Brickhouse Farm. It is as they say a 'cracking read', especially as we know the author and his family so well. So, as a tribute to yet another of our Saints I am pleased to include this link to our web site so you can all enjoy it.

https://chepstowmethodist.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/tony_watkinson_brickhousefarm.pdf

I am also more than happy to share the photos if you get in contact with me.

Bob Kouba

Tales from the Silk Road

I count myself fortunate, praise be, that my stall
in the bazaar is well-sited, draws in the passing trade.
The wonders that merchants unload from their camels;
silks, lacquer-ware, porcelain and jade.
I can't fathom their philosophies,
but I delight in hearing their tales.

They come in from the west, over the high pass,
a company of strangers, muffled against the wind,
prominent against the stars. They descend
into the rocky basin, midpoint of Asia,
towards this *caravanserai*, staging post
on the route, meeting point of humanity.

We sit round the fire on patterned carpets,
eyeing each other, pale-skinned Caucasians in furs,
proud Mongols, swarthy types from far-off
Mediterranean lands, round-faced Chinese.
All glad to meet, debate and learn from each other
in this oasis of civilisation.

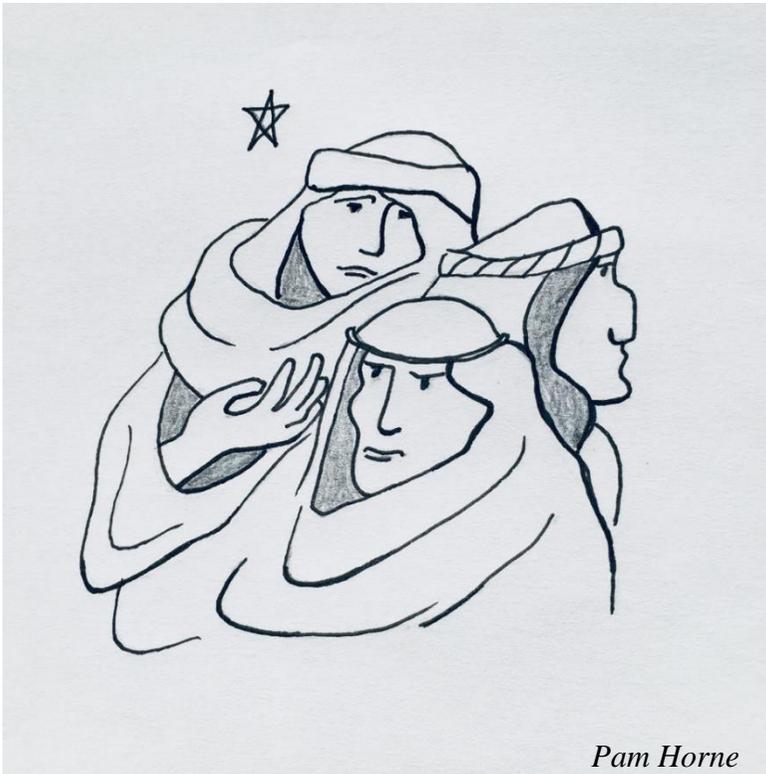
One tale I've heard before, much embellished
in the telling, of astrologers, well-versed in maps
and constellations, who packed and set off
on a hunch or a sign, headed west to old Judea,
not to the port of Caesarea but veered to Jerusalem
seeking an audience with the puppet king.

Bizarre to suggest to a paranoid ruler, unsure
of his standing in an occupied land, that a new
King of the Jews had been born. Someone who might

lead an uprising, keep all his promises, someone the people could love. The king was upset, ordered a massacre but the family escaped to Egypt.

I hope not too much has been lost in translation, but, like Chinese whispers, tales have a habit, like carpets, of being embroidered.

This tale has survived where many have not, although that new king wasn't a typical ruler, his was a different revolution.



Pam Horne