

ALTERNativity

Just God, Simply Christmas



Issue no 20. September 2007

Talking about Christmas already? We have been watching the media and the first advert for Christmas was in May! -to book your Christmas dinner- followed closely by Asda's Christmas saving's scheme. The Press and Journal noted the first catalogue through the door in July and even the New Internationalist July magazine included its gift catalogue. The pressure is on and despite our best intentions we get sucked into a celebration that we didn't plan.

There are lots of fun ideas in our latest resource for women and watch out too for the new star boxes arriving soon from Bangkok. This year, there's a new colour and new reflections.

As well as the events outlined in the diary, we are working on developing some new ideas—our logo in olive wood, new liturgies for advent and epiphany meals as well as a gift for the person who has everything (that won't be ready until next year). We have already led a week of workshops in Iona and I hope you saw our stall at Nexus.

★ **A first this year**—we plan to hold an AGM and combine it with trialling our new epiphany meal—so get the date in the diary now
16th January 2008 at 7.00pm

Finally a thanks to all those who continue to support us not only with subscriptions and donations but also with offers of help. There's always lots to do so give us a phone if you have time—even once a month.

DIARY

- 25 September** Aberdeen
Events for ministers am. and open event 7.00pm
- 9 October** Inverness Guild Rally
- 24 October** A special event for Aberdeen Guilds with the advent meal and then an evening of workshops
- 7 November** Local Guilds at Cumbernauld
- 8 November** Local Guilds at Possilpark Glasgow
- 14 November** Kintore—Aberdeenshire
Morning: ministers
Evening open event
- 26 November** Local Guilds -Bellshill
- 9 December** Workshop day at the Bield
info@bieldatblackruthven.org.uk
- 16 January** **AGM at the office 7.00pm and trial of our new epiphany meal**

New Website Launched

July saw the launch of our new website. We thought it was time for an update and the design of the new site has been an exciting project for us. It is packed full of great resources and articles and there is even an exclusive members area with previews and members only resources. If you would like to find out about getting access to these great resources then contact us on 0141 221 4242 or email info@alternativity.org.uk. You can see the new site for yourself by visiting **www.alternativity.org.uk**



Christmas and the Environment

With the increasing dominance on the news of climate change and a sense that we need to do something about it, some of us are just left wringing our hands, some think that it is up to the government (and that is true) and some are trying to make changes to their lifestyle. There are many now who walk or cycle rather than take the car, others who buy vegetable boxes from local farmers but many of us find it hard to give up on what we have come to think of as 'essentials'.

One couple, concerned at the air miles (i.e. the environmental costs of flying much of our food across the globe) decided that they would remove oranges from their weekly shop but would treat themselves to an orange on Christmas day. The following poem was written in response to the celebration!

Christmas - by Alison Swinfen

This year we celebrated in simpler style.
An orange in the foot of a hiking sock was like
seeing earth for the first time from space,
a glowing ball of sticky loveliness bringing us,
something close to wonder.

The nearest we had come to an orange all year
was my marmalade, on homemade bread.

It shone at us from its place at our table,
all dimpled and seasonal and soon to be
segmented.

It ran down our chin, covered our fingers, clung to
our skin.

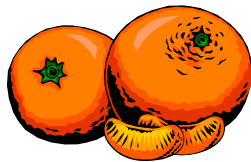
We had forgotten how good it would be to praise
the orange in its own
season.

We defy 24/7.

This is the feast we keep,

This feast, this sweet taste
of the proper time, and the proper place

So take, eat, ring the bright peel, out with the old,
in with the juice and joy of the new.



Your Community's 'Storyline' at Christmas

This idea is based on a tradition from the Congo where people make small replicas of their village life (for example a spade, a plough or a threshing bowl) and then when strangers come to the village they tell their story by moving along the 'community line' and talking through each item as explanation of their life and their history. We thought we could adapt the idea for Christmas.



An idea for any meeting:

Invite members to bring along their favourite Christmas decoration (it may be one that their children or grandchildren have made or a reminder of a special time or place).
Assure them that they will be taking it home again.

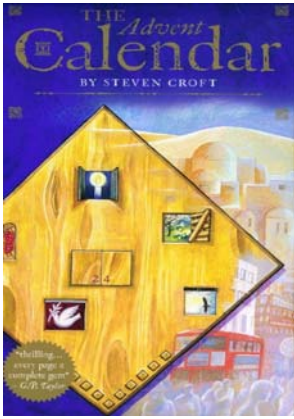
String up a piece of cord and have ready some small pegs for hanging the decorations.

Invite members to hang their decoration on the rope and tell the group why it is special for them. You will bring to your meeting a treasure trove of stories and the gift of listening to each other, especially to the quieter members of your group who may sometimes be overlooked.
This could be part of a carol singing evening or a reading of the story together.

Our stories included memories of friends from all over the world and tales of the work they were involved in. There were those made by children and treasured over the years and those which were reminders of very special Christmases.



Saturday the 24th November



We thought you might be interested in this book by Steven Croft. He works as the Archbishops' Missioner for the Church of England and Team Leader of Fresh Expressions, the initiative to encourage new forms of church across the UK. The book is an alternative story

for Christmas and an attempt to re-invent the Advent Calendar for a world which no longer knows the meaning of the nativity story. The book tells a story which can be read and enjoyed by children and adults who know very little about the Christian faith.

For details: see www.dltbooks.com.

The publishers are putting together a special interactive website to go with the book for the days in December with codes, messages and puzzles.

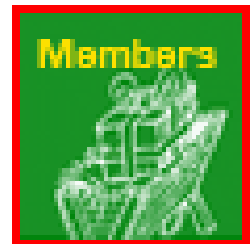
Check his web-site to see if he links to us. If not contact him and suggest that he does!!

Labyrinth

Last year we trialled a labyrinth with stopping places for reflection and symbolic action – it is one which is simply built (a three path) and for subscribers the reflections will be available from late September on the web-site .

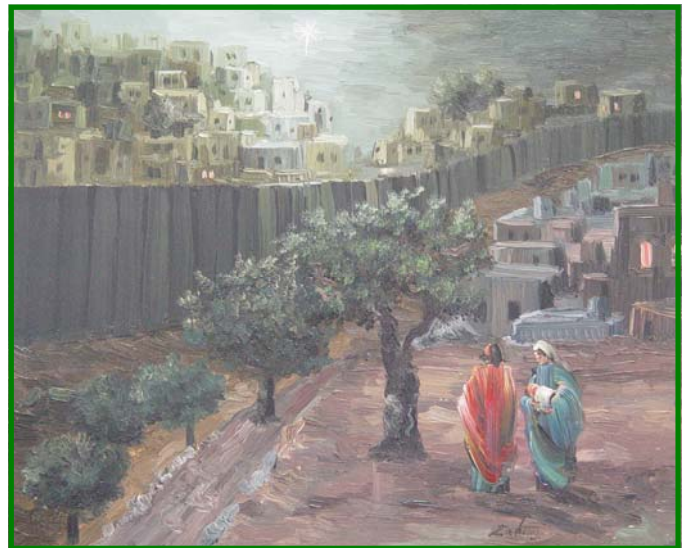
The labyrinth is a traditional form of meditation and contemplation which were often found on church floors for those who wished to make a pilgrimage but could not make it to Jerusalem.

We also have a template for a star shape designed by Robin Anker Peterson– it too will be on our subscriber's page.



Christmas
Came simply;
A pregnant woman
A worried father,
a night birth,
A healthy child.

Just God
Unwrapped
Vulnerable
Lying in a manger,
Living in our world
© Ruth Burgess



Painted by Fadi Dabdoub, aged 16 Bethlehem Christmas 2006
























This painting brings home the reality of Bethlehem today and the harshness of a wall which divides our 'Holy Land'. We can often forget the fears and the violence which are tearing this land apart as we sing songs which paint a picture of gentleness and stillness. James Gordon, a Canadian musician, sums it up well in his song:

*'Maybe where you deck your halls, everything's alright
all is calm and bright
But in the dark where the flocks are no longer watched
and we're kept out of sight
We don't sleep in heavenly peace and there is no silent night.'*



ALTERNADOKU (with thanks to Marjory Williamson)

Fill all the blank squares in the grid with the correct symbol. Every column must include one of each symbol and every 3x3 subsection must include one of each symbol.

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A Christmas Tree with a difference!

Well done to the World Mission Council team for coming up with this wonderful Christmas tree for their office. It not only lets the world know what they think would be the Good News at Christmas but it is also ecologically sound—it is made completely from recycled paper.

Could you share your Good News from your office? Send us photos of your alternative trees.

NEW RESOURCE

Looking for an idea for a woman's group evening or even a bit of fun with some friends? Our new pack has lots of ideas for talking about Christmas and maybe even agreeing to make some changes. This new resources has ideas for meetings from October to March and uses old favourite films like the Wizard of Oz and Pleasantville to explore some important issues. Our web-site will even have materials for downloading so that you have less preparation.

