

**St Mary Magdalene's Anglican Church**  
Moore Street, Adelaide



**An open, welcoming and inclusive community  
in the heart of the City of Adelaide**

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**Keeping Community  
Spiritual Resources & Reflections**

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**Thursday 22 December 2022**

**Dear friends,**

The relaxation of Covid-19 restrictions will make it possible to again open the church for private prayer and public worship.

Sunday Mass is offered weekly at 10 am, and the church will also be open on Thursday between 11.30 am and 1 pm, with the Angelus at noon and Mass at 12.10 pm. During Advent, there is also a reflection each Wednesday at 8 am.

The decision to return to worship in community, whether for private prayer, or the public celebration of the Word and Sacraments, is not a straightforward matter.

These newsletters are intended to keep our entire community informed on events in the life of the Parish, so we will continue to produce these news bulletins for now.



**1. From Fr Steven - Good News**

Today strongmen, from Trump to Putin, are behaving like emperors. Nonetheless, the problem of empire is not new. What's more, the ministry of Jesus cannot be comprehended without considering the meaning of *empire*. So, I want to explore the problem of empire in relation to the Crucifixion, the infancy narrative in Luke, and our situation.

We need to remember that Judea was a small part of the Roman empire. In fact, Judea survived because factions collaborated with Rome. Undoubtedly, this was a conflicted situation. Enter Jesus, who proclaimed an alternative kingdom (i.e., the reign of God), promising to turn the world upside down. This is (non-violent) resistance. So, let's be clear:

- Rome was in charge
- His execution could only be carried out at the behest of Rome
- Hence, the importance of the trial scene with Pilate
- The inscription of the charge against Jesus read "The king of the Jews" (Mk 15:26)
- Crucifixion was a Roman form of execution reserved for deserters, traitors or rebels

The writer of the Gospel of Luke is concerned about the problem of empire. For example, the Gospel, and its partner text the Acts of the Apostles, have important trial scenes, where Jesus and Paul respectively are pitted against Rome. Specifically, the writer of Luke is at pains to emphasise the political context of the birth of Jesus. On that note, the birth of Jesus follows a census, which was orchestrated by the Roman Emperor Augustus (Luke 2:1-2). It is on the basis of a census, that Rome organised taxes and deployed their soldiers.

The birth of the infant Jesus is a challenge to the way of violence. Mary, the mother of Jesus, understands this, “He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly”. And this is how Jesus understood his own ministry, “The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor” (Lk 4: 16-21).

The empire is an all-consuming force, seeking control, practicing violence, and eliminating those who are different. Since the Emperor Constantine corporatized the Church, the Church has wrestled with the problem of empire. For example, the 11th century tussle between Pope Gregory VII and Henry IV of Germany was a classic power struggle (cf. google *Investiture Contest*). Today, there is a plethora of media, mining, military, and financial empires, which often transcend sovereign borders.

Sociologically, empire is the default position of large hierarchical institutions, whether it is a school, a hospital, or a church. As such, the meaning and practice of authority is a litmus test of the health of an institution. Significantly, in Anglicanism, authority is shared (dispersed).

In this light, Christmas is a source of both personal joy and prophetic critique. In other words, Christmas grounds us in the things that really matter. It is about God’s love and the creation of loving faith communities, and the promise of justice. Through Jesus, God embraces the world and offers the gift of unconditional love. In so doing, the birth of Jesus ushers in a new way of living, which is passionately concerned about human dignity and freedom (Gal 5:1, 13). It is good news.

Fr Steven

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## 2. COVID-19 Update

With the significant increase in COVID-19 infections being reported, the Parish Council has again considered the precautions we have put in place within our worshipping community. Parish Council, noting that we (like many church communities) have a number of older folk and others who might be regarded as vulnerable among our number, has agreed that we will continue to take a conservative approach for the time being, and to encourage precautions including Distancing, Ventilation and Facemasks: **DVM** for short. Distancing means maintaining a sensible distance of 1.5 metres between individuals or family groups; Ventilation means leaving some doors and/or windows open to allow a flow of air—and we have air conditioning, so we will neither freeze nor boil!—and Facemasks are obvious.

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## 3. Daily Prayer

Most Christian denominations have forms for prayer in the morning and the evening, and at other times of the day. Morning and Evening Prayer in *A Prayer Book for Australia*, are available in either a fixed form (pp 3-33) or a form for each day of the week (pp 383-424).

### Online Resources

There is an online version of Daily Prayer from *A Prayer Book for Australia* for each day available at Australian Daily Prayer <https://dailyprayer.ampers.x10.mx/>. There is also a free app for mobile devices from the App Store or Google Play.

The Church of England provides an online version of its orders for Daily Prayer at <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/join-us-service-daily-prayer>. This is also available as a free app. The Divine Office of the Catholic Church is available online at [www.ibreviary.com](http://www.ibreviary.com) and is also available as a free app (App Store or Google Play).

### Times of Prayer

Many people find it helpful to make a particular time daily for prayer and reflection. One option might be to join your prayer with those of the wider world at some special times during the day, especially in praying the Angelus at 9 am, 12 noon and 6 pm.

#### 4. Reflections and Meditations

In addition to Fr Steven's regular reflection in this newsletter, which is uploaded to the web page for wider accessibility, Fr Philip Carter's meditations and spiritual reflections are presented on our blog, <https://stmarymagdalenesadelaiide.org/>.

To access these meditations, simply go to the blog and select the "Spirit matters" tab on the top. If you would like to receive an email update when there is a new posting on the blog, whether for a Sunday or weekday service, or for meditations and other supports for prayer, please subscribe to the blog using the box on the right-hand side of the page.

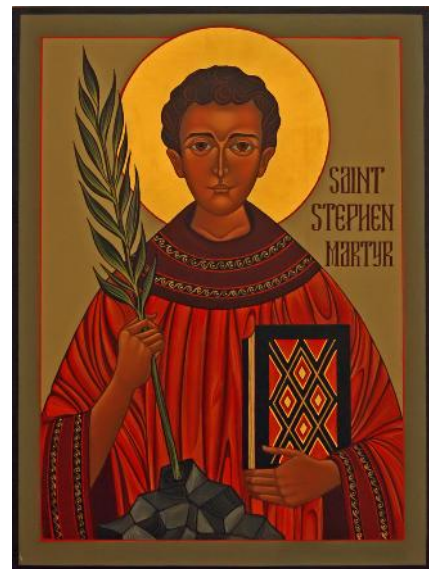
Service booklets as PDF files are still available for Sunday and weekday services on the web site and on the Parish's Facebook page.

#### 5. This Week in the Calendar

In the days after Christmas, the three traditional festivals are St Stephen, the first Martyr (26 December), St John (27 December) and the Holy Innocents (28 December).

##### St Stephen, the First Martyr

"...when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Therefore, brothers and sisters, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word." What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, ..." (Acts 6:1-5).



Acts of the Apostles says that Stephen was a man filled with grace and power, who worked great wonders among the people. Certain Jews, members of the Synagogue of Roman Freedmen, debated with Stephen, but proved no match for the wisdom and spirit with which he spoke. They persuaded others to make the charge of blasphemy against him. He was seized and carried before the Sanhedrin.

In his speech, Stephen recalled God's guidance through Israel's history, as well as Israel's idolatry and disobedience. He then claimed that his persecutors were showing this same spirit. "...you always oppose the holy Spirit; you are just like your ancestors" (Acts 7:51b).

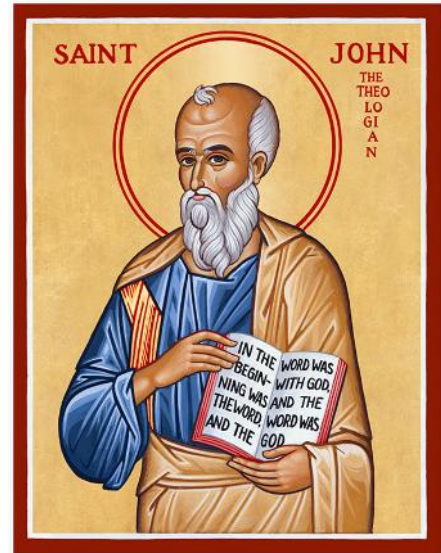
Stephen's speech brought anger from the crowd. "But he, filled with the holy Spirit, looked up intently to heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' ...They threw him out of the city, and began to stone him. ...As they were stoning Stephen, he called out, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' ...'Lord, do not hold this sin against them'" (Acts 7:55-56, 58a, 59, 60b).

Stephen died as Jesus did: falsely accused, brought to unjust condemnation because he spoke the truth fearlessly. He died with his eyes trustfully fixed on God, and with a prayer of forgiveness on his lips. A “happy” death is one that finds us in the same spirit, whether our dying is as quiet as Joseph’s or as violent as Stephen’s: dying with courage, total trust and forgiving love.

### St John, Apostle and Evangelist

It is God who calls; human beings answer. The vocation of John and his brother James is stated very simply in the Gospels, along with that of Peter and his brother Andrew: Jesus called them; they followed. The absoluteness of their response is indicated by the account. James and John “were in a boat, with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. He called them, and immediately they left their boat and their father and followed him” (Matthew 4:21b-22).

For the three former fishermen—Peter, James and John—that faith was to be rewarded by a special friendship with Jesus. They alone were privileged to be present at the Transfiguration, the raising of the daughter of Jairus and the agony in Gethsemane.



But John’s friendship was even more special. Tradition assigns to him the Fourth Gospel, although most modern Scripture scholars think it unlikely that the apostle and the evangelist are the same person.

John’s own Gospel refers to him as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (see John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2), the one who reclined next to Jesus at the Last Supper, and the one to whom Jesus gave the exquisite honor of caring for his mother, as John stood beneath the cross. “Woman, behold your son.... Behold, your mother” (John 19:26b, 27b).

Because of the depth of his Gospel, John is usually thought of as the eagle of theology, soaring in high regions that other writers did not enter. But the ever-frank Gospels reveal some very human traits. Jesus gave James and John the nickname, “sons of thunder.” While it is difficult to know exactly what this meant, a clue is given in two incidents.

In the first, as *Matthew* tells it, their mother asked that they might sit in the places of honour in Jesus’ kingdom—one on his right hand, one on his left. When Jesus asked them if they could drink the cup he would drink and be baptized with his baptism of pain, they blithely answered, “We can!” Jesus said that they would indeed share his cup, but that sitting at his right hand was not his to give. It was for those to whom it had been reserved by the Father. The other apostles were indignant at the mistaken ambition of the brothers, and Jesus took the occasion to teach them the true nature of authority: “... whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:27-28).

On another occasion, the “sons of thunder” asked Jesus if they should not call down fire from heaven upon the inhospitable Samaritans, who would not welcome Jesus because he was on his way to Jerusalem. But Jesus “turned and rebuked them” (see Luke 9:51-55).

On the first Easter, Mary Magdalene “ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and told them, ‘They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know where they put him’” (John 20:2). John recalls, perhaps with a smile, that he and Peter ran side by side, but then “the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb

first” (John 20:4b). He did not enter, but waited for Peter and let him go in first. “Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed” (John 20:8).

John was with Peter when the first great miracle after the Resurrection took place—the cure of a man who had been crippled from birth—which led to their spending the night in jail together. The mysterious experience of the Resurrection is perhaps best contained in the words of Acts: “Observing the boldness of Peter and John and perceiving them to be uneducated, ordinary men, they [the questioners] were amazed, and they recognized them as the companions of Jesus” (Acts 4:13).

The Apostle John is traditionally considered the author also of three New Testament letters and the Book of Revelation. His Gospel is a very personal account. He sees the glorious and divine Jesus already in the incidents of his mortal life. At the Last Supper, John’s Jesus speaks as if he were already in heaven. John’s is the Gospel of Jesus’ glory.

It is a long way from being eager to sit on a throne of power or to call down fire from heaven to becoming the one who could write: “The way we came to know love was that he laid down his life for us; so we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters” (1 John 3:16).

### The Holy Innocents

Herod “the Great,” king of Judea, was unpopular with his people because of his connections with the Romans and his religious indifference. Hence he was insecure and fearful of any threat to his throne. He was a master politician and a tyrant capable of extreme brutality. He killed his wife, his brother, and his sister’s two husbands, to name only a few.



Matthew 2:1-18 tells this story: Herod was “greatly troubled” when astrologers from the east came asking the whereabouts of “the newborn king of the Jews,” whose star they had seen. They were told that the Jewish Scriptures named Bethlehem as the place where the Messiah would be born. Herod cunningly told them to report back to him so that he could also “do him homage.” They found Jesus, offered him their gifts, and warned by an angel, avoided Herod on their way home. Jesus escaped to Egypt.

Herod became furious and “ordered the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under.” The horror of the massacre and the devastation of the mothers and fathers led Matthew to quote Jeremiah: “A voice was heard in Ramah, sobbing and loud lamentation; Rachel weeping for her children ...” (Matthew 2:18). Rachel was the wife of Jacob (Israel). She is pictured as weeping at the place where the Israelites were herded together by the conquering Assyrians for their march into captivity.

The Holy Innocents are few in comparison to the genocide of our day. But even if there had been only one, we recognize the greatest treasure God put on the earth—a human person, destined for eternity, and graced by Jesus’ death and resurrection.

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## 6. On the Feast of St Stephen: from a sermon by St. Fulgentius of Ruspe, bishop

### *The armament of love*

Yesterday we celebrated the birth in time of our eternal King. Today we celebrate the triumphant suffering of his soldier.

Yesterday our king, clothed in his robe of flesh, left his place in the virgin's womb and graciously visited the world. Today his soldier leaves the tabernacle of his body and goes triumphantly to heaven.

Our king, despite his exalted majesty, came in humility for our sake; yet he did not come empty-handed. He brought his soldiers a great gift that not only enriched them but also made them unconquerable in battle, for it was the gift of love, which was to bring men to share in his divinity. He gave of his bounty, yet without any loss to himself. In a marvellous way he changed into wealth the poverty of his faithful followers while remaining in full possession of his own inexhaustible riches.

And so the love that brought Christ from heaven to earth raised Stephen from earth to heaven; shown first in the king, it later shone forth in his soldier. Love was Stephen's weapon by which he gained every battle, and so won the crown signified by his name. His love of God kept him from yielding to the ferocious mob; his love for his neighbour made him pray for those who were stoning him. Love inspired him to reprove those who erred, to make them amend; love led him to pray for those who stoned him, to save them from punishment. Strengthened by the power of his love, he overcame the raging cruelty of Saul and won his persecutor on earth as his companion in heaven. In his holy and tireless love he longed to gain by prayer those whom he could not convert by admonition.

Now at last, Paul rejoices with Stephen, with Stephen he delights in the glory of Christ, with Stephen he exalts, with Stephen he reigns. Stephen went first, slain by the stones thrown by Paul, but Paul followed after, helped by the prayer of Stephen. This, surely, is the true life, my friends, a life in which Paul feels no shame because of Stephen's death, and Stephen delights in Paul's companionship, for love fills them both with joy. It was Stephen's love that prevailed over the cruelty of the mob, and it was Paul's love that covered the multitude of his sins; it was love that won for both of them the kingdom of heaven.

Love, indeed, is the source of all good things; it is an impregnable defence,- and the way that leads to heaven. He who walks in love can neither go astray nor be afraid: love guides him, protects him, and brings him to his journey's end.

My friends, Christ made love the stairway that would enable all Christians to climb to heaven. Hold fast to it, therefore, in all sincerity, give one another practical proof of it, and by your progress in it, make your ascent together.

## 7. On the Feast of St John: From tractates on the first letter of John by St Augustine of Hippo

### *Life itself was revealed in the flesh*

*Our message is the Word of life. We announce what existed from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our own eyes, what we have touched with our own hands. Who could touch the Word with his hands unless the Word was made flesh and lived among us?*

Now this Word, whose flesh was so real that he could be touched by human hands, began to be flesh in the Virgin Mary's womb; but he did not begin to exist at that moment. We know this from what John says: *What existed from the beginning.* Notice how John's letter bears

witness to his Gospel, which you just heard a moment ago: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God.*

Someone might interpret the phrase the Word of life to mean a word about Christ, rather than Christ's body itself which was touched by human hands. But consider what comes next: *and life itself was revealed.* Christ therefore is himself the Word of life.

And how was this life revealed? It existed from the beginning, but was not revealed to men, only to angels, who looked upon it and feasted upon it as their own spiritual bread. But what does Scripture say? *Mankind ate the bread of angels.*

Life itself was therefore revealed in the flesh. In this way what was visible to the heart alone could become visible also to the eye, and so heal men's hearts. For the Word is visible to the heart alone, while flesh is visible to bodily eyes as well. We already possessed the means to see the flesh, but we had no means of seeing the Word. The Word was made flesh so that we could see it, to heal the part of us by which we could see the Word.

John continues: *And we are witnesses and we proclaim to you that eternal life which was with the Father and has been revealed among us* – one might say more simply “revealed to us.”

*We proclaim to you what we have heard and seen.* Make sure that you grasp the meaning of these words. The disciples saw our Lord in the flesh, face to face; they heard the words he spoke, and in turn they proclaimed the message to us. So we also have heard, although we have not seen.

Are we then less favoured than those who both saw and heard? If that were so, why should John add: *so that you too may have fellowship with us?* They saw, and we have not seen; yet we have fellowship with them, because we and they share the same faith.

*And our fellowship is with God the Father and Jesus Christ his Son. And we write this to you to make your joy complete* – complete in that fellowship, in that love and in that unity.

## 8. On the Feast of the Holy Innocents: from a sermon by St. Quodvultdeus, bishop

*They cannot speak, yet they bear witness to Christ*

*A tiny child is born, who is a great king. Wise men are led to him from afar. They come to adore one who lies in a manger and yet reigns in heaven and on earth. When they tell of one who is born a king, Herod is disturbed. To save his kingdom he resolves to kill him, though if he would have faith in the child, he himself would reign in peace in this life and for ever in the life to come.*

Why are you afraid, Herod, when you hear of the birth of a king? He does not come to drive you out, but to conquer the devil. But because you do not understand this you are disturbed and in a rage, and to destroy one child whom you seek, you show your cruelty in the death of so many children.

You are not restrained by the love of weeping mothers or fathers mourning the deaths of their sons, nor by the cries and sobs of the children. You destroy those who are tiny in body because fear is destroying your heart. You imagine that if you accomplish your desire you can prolong your own life, though you are seeking to kill Life himself.

Yet your throne is threatened by the source of grace, so small, yet so great, who is lying in the manger. He is using you, all unaware of it, to work out his own purposes freeing souls from captivity to the devil. He has taken up the sons of the enemy into the ranks of God's adopted children.

The children die for Christ, though they do not know it. The parents mourn for the death of martyrs. The child makes of those as yet unable to speak fit witnesses to himself. See the kind of kingdom that is his, coming as he did in order to be this kind of king. See how the deliverer is already working deliverance, the saviour already working salvation.

But you, Herod, do not know this and are disturbed and furious. While you vent your fury against the child, you are already paying him homage, and do not know it.

How great a gift of grace is here! To what merits of their own do the children owe this kind of victory? They cannot speak, yet they bear witness to Christ. They cannot use their limbs to engage in battle, yet already they bear off the palm of victory.

## 9. Intentions for Your Daily Prayers

*We pray throughout the week for the world and the church. These intentions may be helpful in your private or family prayers.*

*For the world.* The leaders of the world as they seek to respond to the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic. For refugees and asylum seekers, that they may find places of safety and welcome.

*For the church.* In the Anglican Cycle of Prayer, pray for the Diocese of Okigwe North (Nigeria). In our national church, pray for the Diocese of Sydney; and within the Diocese of Adelaide, for our Assistant Bishops Denise Ferguson, Tim Harris and Chris McLeod.

*For our local community.* For the Collective and its ministry in the local community. For the Magdalene Centre, as it deals with the need to change the way it delivers services in order to safeguard the health of customers, staff and volunteers.

*For those in need.* Pray for all those who are troubled in body, mind or spirit, especially Paull, Sim, Jasmin, Henry, John Edwards (priest), Peter Garland (priest), Robert Whalley (priest), John Parkes (bishop), Stephan Clark (priest), Mark, Olivia, Nance, Neil, Elaine and Edward.

*For those who have died.* Those who have worked and worshipped in this place before us; those who have died as a result of COVID-19 and in other tragic circumstances; those who have died recently, especially Jean Pyman, and those whose anniversaries of death occur at this time. ✠ *Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let light perpetual shine upon them.*

*For the saints.* For the Blessed Virgin Mary, St Joseph, St Mary Magdalene, St Stephen, St John, the Holy Innocents, and holy women and men of every time and place.

This newsletter will normally be distributed weekly on Thursday. Any appropriate items should be emailed to the Parish Office, [StMMAdeelaide.Parish@outlook.com](mailto:StMMAdeelaide.Parish@outlook.com), by Tuesday evening at 5 pm.