



Mairangi Bay Presbyterian Church

Minister: Rev Dr Tokerau Joseph

December 2025 NEWSLETTER



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UPDATE FROM TOKERAU

We are in the season of Advent. It's a time for remembering the coming of Christ into the world as a human being, born as a baby. Both Matthew and Luke give us different narratives of this.

The birth of Jesus Christ is more than a charming story of a baby in a manger; it is the cornerstone of Christian faith, a necessary fulfilment of ancient prophecies, and the unique demonstration of God's redemptive love. Far from being a mere story, the Nativity is a profound theological event that demands careful consideration of its implications for humanity.

Central to the birth of Jesus is the doctrine of the **Incarnation**: the belief that the eternal, the of Son of God, took on human flesh. This wasn't just a divine visitation; it was God breaking into human history in a real, physical way.

It's understandable how challenging the incarnation can be to fully grasp. It seems easier to dismiss or reduce the birth of Jesus to myth or invention. The discrepancies of accounts by Matthew and Luke can also compound one's confusion or scepticism. Whatever the objections to the birth narratives, at their heart, apart from scant historical evidence, is the objection to divine events or the miraculous. A woman becoming impregnated by unnatural means (Holy Spirit), other than by a man, is deemed biologically impossible. The intervention of angels cannot be verified. A star that moves out of its orbit is astronomically incredulous (I admit this is a hard one). In today's culture where science is accepted as the authority of reality, there is apparently no solid evidence for such "supernatural" events. But how do you use scientific methods to measure the divine or supernatural?

Yet, our Christian faith is fundamentally grounded in the belief that Jesus was fully human and fully divine at the same time. The Apostle Paul did not talk about the birth of Jesus, but his clear conviction was that the fulness of God was emptied out into the person of Jesus (Phil 2:1-11). The Gospel of John doesn't give a birth narrative but begins with the affirmation of God, as the Word, who "became flesh and lived among us" (1:14). As Christians, if we believe God created the world and we ourselves are created in the image of God, then why is it difficult to believe God could become human or do anything else? Without the divine, our Christian faith is based solely in a human Jesus despite his charisma and teachings. This would make our worship of him a nonsense.

But the Christmas story, the incarnation, is about God's activity in people and the world. It highlights the core of Christian ethics: love and humility. God did not arrive as a conquering king in a palace but as a vulnerable infant in a simple, perhaps crowded, home. This humility teaches that true love is found in service and sacrifice, especially for the marginalised and the poor.

The birth of Jesus, therefore, is not merely an optional belief but a vital truth. It confirms God's faithfulness, validates the salvation God brings, and defines the very nature of divine love made tangible and accessible to all people.

From the manse family, including Tangi and Paul, I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a most blessed New Year 2026.



Carols in the Park

Each year the Mairangi Bay Business Association invites our church to take the lead in providing Carols in the Park.

In the Children's playground at **6pm Friday 12th Dec**

Tokerau will be taking the main lead and we need singers.

Please let Bronwyn or Peter Stone know that you are coming to this event.

The Community Church will also be contributing.

Words From KAREL - Jesus' Birth Stories

Soon we will be celebrating Christmas. We will once again hear the story of Jesus birth. Most probably we will hear an amalgam of the stories from Matthew and Luke even though they are quite different stories.

In Matthew, Mary and Joseph reside in Bethlehem and are visited by the wise men -the scientists of their day. They travel to Egypt to escape king Herod's jealousy. Herod slaughters all the boys under the age of 2 in Bethlehem.

Luke's story begins with a journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem because of the Roman census. There is no room at the inn. Jesus is born in the stable. He is visited by the shepherds. Mary and Joseph then travel to Jerusalem where Jesus is presented at the temple and circumcised and the rituals after birth performed. After this they travel back to Nazareth.

These stories are not historical fact. They are parables to draw attention to the importance of Jesus. The stories are contradictory. People cannot be at two different places at the same time. We need to remember that these stories were not written for us but for the communities addressed by Matthew and Luke in their time. As the scholar John Dominic Crossan writes, "My point, once again, is not that those ancient people told literal stories and we are now smart enough to take them symbolically, but that they told them symbolically and we are now dumb enough to take them literally."

In the ancient world for which these stories were written they were signs like bright neon lights drawing attention to the importance of Jesus. The virgin birth of Jesus is part of these stories, and I have been often asked over the years, "is this factual?" I don't think so, following most mainline scholars, and I will outline briefly why.

The virgin birth stories of Jesus are limited to Matthew and Luke. Mark, the first gospel, and John, the last, do not mention it. Paul who wrote before the gospels writes that Jesus was "the son of a human mother." Galatians 4:4 Matthew cites Isaiah 7:14 where the Hebrew word "almah" means young woman of marriageable age. The Greek translation used by the early followers of Jesus uses the word "parthenos" which can both mean a young woman of marriageable age or virgin.

In the ancient world and at the time of Jesus virgin births we're almost two a penny among the Roman nobility. For example, the emperor of Augustus. Celsus, an early critic of the followers of Jesus, said of Jesus being born to a virgin as a sneering snob, "They gave that peasant who came from a poor village in Galilee that honour."

The stories may have been told by Matthew and Luke because the followers of Jesus were in conflict with the Jewish synagogues. The synagogue Jews claimed that Jesus was illegitimate to undermine him. We can see this started

during his life in Mark 6: 4 where Jesus is referred to as “son of Mary” – an insult to a man with an unknown father.

Matthew and Luke have different genealogies. Matthews is particularly interesting. He names four women. Tamar, who poses as a prostitute to entice her late husband’s father, Judah, to have sex with her because he would not allow his younger son to marry and have children with her as custom demanded. The father-in-law Judah is found out when Tamar has twins and can identify Judah as the father because she has some of his property. (Genesis 38) The next woman is Rahab. She is the Canaanite prostitute who welcomed the Israelite spies to the promised land. (Joshua 2;6:22-25) Ruth the Moabite who seduces Boaz on the threshing floor while he is drunk. (The book of Ruth) Finally, Bathsheba, (who is named as the husband of Uriah) with whom David commits adultery and make sure her husband Uriah is killed in the front line of battle. Bathsheba is the mother of King Solomon. Matthew shows that these messy sexual situations can bring about God's purposes.

Virgin births in mammals are impossible.

Theologically, it is assumed Jesus was a human being, tempted like we are. Hebrews 2:18, and 4:15. If Jesus was born of a virgin, then he really is not one of us. An early view considered heretical was Docetism, that Jesus just appeared to be a human being and to suffer. Docetists claimed his physical body and suffering were only an illusion. If Jesus message is to follow him, we cannot fail do that if he is not one of us.

Not until the 4th-5th century was it believed that Jesus’ virginal conception was considered doctrinally necessary for him to be sinless. One of the fathers of the church, Augustine of Hippo, (354-430) believed that sinfulness was transmitted from generation to generation from the male seed that was planted in the woman's womb. When it was discovered that the woman also contributes one half the genetical material (Yes! Arrogant male belief can blind one to the obvious.) the Roman Catholic church had to formalize the Doctrine of the Immaculate conception of Mary in 1854 to declare that Mary herself was without original sin.

Jesus was most likely born in Nazareth. He is known in the gospels as Jesus of Nazareth, if he was born in Bethlehem he would have been known as Jesus of Bethlehem. Both Matthew and Luke have him born in Bethlehem because It was believed at the time that the Messiah (God’s anointed) would be born in Bethlehem. They wrapped the Hebrew Bible texts around Jesus, because they believed that in Jesus they had found the Messiah.

Does this mean that we should stop telling the stories of Jesus birth as told in Matthew and Luke? Heaven forbid! They are wonderful stories. But we should not take them factually. When taken as factual they become a barrier to intelligent and informed people who we want to introduce to the unconditional love of God and to follow Jesus.



Update from Parish Council – November Meeting

Constituted by Raewyn, with reflections from the prayer course led by Rev Dr Tokerau Joseph.

Highlights from the Meeting:

- In Tokerau's Report he included the effect of shortening the length of his 'Devotions' items on Facebook. The recorded views have jumped from 60 to over 600 which confirms the advice we have been receiving in the rebuilding of the website that short, focused messages are what is required.
- An update from Stephen in his property report with respect to the Driveway from Penzance Road which is now owned by the church. This included an explanation of the next steps to be taken including: a Planner's Report on the adequacy of the Driveway into the future; a Valuer's Advice on a reasonable amount to charge users for use and non-church-related parking; Legal advice on the approach to take in our negotiations and documentation required.
- My report on a continuing financial deficit against our budget which for the first quarter of the year is \$14k. The main reasons for this include a \$4k deficit in offerings and a prepayment of the full amount (\$17k) of our insurance premium.
- An appreciation of the great work that Sandy Burn has done in building a new website for the church. It will be formally launched in December but in the meantime have a look – you only need to Google www.bayspc.nz on your computer and you can explore it yourself. We will be acknowledging Sandy, daughter Rachel Burn (who produced our new logo) and Andrew Burn (our IT expert) at the Packing Service on 7 December.
- A decision to proceed with a **'Ripple Effect' Workshop** for the whole Congregation which is being planned for **Saturday 21 March**. Please make a note of this important event on your 2026 calendar.
- The invitation from the Mairangi Village Business Association for our church to take the lead in **the Carols in the Park**
- A welcoming of **Encore Lin** who is joining our church as an Associate Member, with her son **Shane**.
- A report on the many activities within our **Revitalising Project** which is summarized in a separate article in this newsletter.

Stewart Milne (Clerk)

The Revitalising/Church Growth Project

Back in 2024 we recognized that growth in the membership here in our church is essential with our current aging and reducing membership. We entered into an arrangement through Northern Presbytery whereby the experience of City-to-City Australia (CTCA) in growing churches became available through the provision of an experienced consultant (in our case Rev Tim Loftis) to help us revitalise and achieve growth.

Tim visited, held workshops and made recommendations which we have been implementing.

We now have a new plan with 90 Day Goals. We are on our 3rd set of goals. These were included in the November Newsletter.

Some Parish Council Members have participated in Incubator Training Sessions which have introduced us to the concept of Church Systems. These systems include Outreach, Inclusion and Growth.

Outreach is a process that includes inviting people into the church community.

Inclusion is a process that involves assisting people to eventually become members

Growth identifies activities in the church which facilitate the spiritual development and service of members.

The final Incubator Training Session, held on 15 November, focused on Personal Devotions and on Leadership. The different levels of leadership were presented and discussed as was the approach of growing people for the different leadership roles rather than just plugging gaps when they occur.

There will be a great opportunity for the whole congregation to learn more about how we all can contribute to the revitalization and growth of our church on 21 March 2026. This is the date for a Workshop which will be held in the church from 9:30am to 1pm

Julie-ann Laird from CTCA will be running this workshop If you want to learn what you can do to help this church to grow please mark this as a 'must' on your 2026 Calendar and participate.

Stewart Milne

Growing the Church here in Mairangi Bay

Over the last 12 months Parish Councillors have been participating in sessions led by a CTCA Consultant during which we have been introduced to the concept of Church Systems.

We have looked at the Outreach System, the system for inclusion and involvement and the system for Growth.

Within each system there are sub-systems. For instance, within Outreach there is our website as well as other media, community presence and gracious witness.

Bit by bit we are introducing changes. One of these is a new website. Sandy Burn has created a wonderful new website which is still to be officially launched but which you can visit by Googling www.bayspc.nz

We will be expressing our gratitude to Sandy for the work she has done and to husband Andrew our IT adviser and fixer as well as to their talented daughter Rachel (who designed our new logo) at the Christmas Gifts Packing Service on 7 December.

How can we play our Part? Opportunity for Involvement

During our revitalizing project we have held workshops and some of us have attended special training sessions. We have also tried to keep our members informed on what is happening.

The best opportunity for us all to get the important information on how we can each play our part in the growth of this church will present itself on Saturday 21 March when there will be a workshop for all the Congregation to attend. This will be led by Julie-Anne Laird from City-to-City Australia. Please make a note of the date. If we are to succeed, we do need to all understand our role.

CHRISTIAN WORLD SERVICE CHRISTMAS APPEAL



In this Newsletter you will find the CWS Appeal envelope. We all get plenty of opportunities to support various appeals each year. This is the only one that our church regularly distributes information and envelopes for individual decisions. If you wish to and are able to support this appeal the envelope can either be returned through the church or posted off direct. *Thanks, Stewart*

HOW TO STAY YOUNG. 🍰 Celebrating Life at Ninety

Shared on the day one of our beloved parishioners joined the circle of nonagenarians.

Collected by **Bronwyn Stone**, this timeless message resonated deeply with all present — a gentle reminder of how to live fully, at any age. 🌞 **Ten Joyful Reminders for Living Well**

1. **Forget the numbers** — age, weight, height. Let your doctor worry about them.
That's why you pay them!
2. **Keep cheerful company.** Grouches drag you down. Surround yourself with joy.
3. **Keep learning.** Explore computers, crafts, gardening — anything! A busy brain keeps the devil away.
4. **Enjoy the simple things.** A cup of tea, a sunny day, a kind word.
5. **Laugh often, long, and loud.** Laugh until you gasp for breath.
6. **Let the tears come.** Grieve, endure, and move forward. Be alive while you're alive.
7. **Fill your space with love.** Family, pets, music, keepsakes — whatever brings you joy. Your home is your refuge.
8. **Cherish your health.** Preserve it if it's good. Improve it if it's shaky. Seek help if it's beyond your reach.
9. **Skip the guilt trips.** Take a trip to the mall, the next town, or a foreign country — but never to guilt.
10. **Say "I love you" often.** Every chance you get.

💖 **And Always Remember:**

Life isn't measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away.



Some snippets of events for the year!



**Easter Egg Hunt at our Friday night
Family Games, Meal and Social time.**



Special Communion and Lunch



Elevate Youth Nights



Indian Congregation Service and Meal



Mainly Music



Community Emergency Hub Trial



Tearfund Quiz Night




Guess who's coming to lunch




English Conversations


Mairangi Bay Presbyterian Church Weekly & Monthly Activities

 **Sunday Service** 10am Sundays – Rev Dr Tokerau Joseph

 027 371 4733 |  tokerau.j@gmail.com


 **Seniors Social Group** 1st & 3rd Tues, 10am–12pm


Carole 021 0235 7398 | Raewyn 027 733 7612

 **Advanced English Conversations** Mon 1–2.30pm – Meeting Room 2
John 021 108 7700 | Grace 021 048 7978

 **English Conversations** Wed, 1–2.30pm – Meeting Room 2

Stewart 478 5786 | John 021 108 7700 | Grace 021 048 7978

 **Home Group** 1st & 3rd Mon, 10.30am – Karel 021 903 762

 **House Group** Wed, 3pm at Shadbolt's – Dorille 479 3953

 **Dee's Social Group** Thurs, 10am–2pm – Church Hall


Tangi 022 657 3223

 **Mainly Music** Fri (school term), 10–11am – Church Hall

Karen 021 0226 3846


 **Family Fun Night** 2nd Fri, 6.15pm – Church Hall


Tangi 022 657 3223 | Stewart 027 293 8499

 **Men's Group Lunch** 2nd Tues, 12pm – The Bays Club



Ian 027 332 7235


 **Leader for the Young** Angelika 027 310 3284


 **Born Again Bodies** Wed, 1pm – Church Hall, Brad 021 230 3421

 **Parish Council** 3rd Tues, 7.30pm – Meeting Room 2

Stewart 027 293 8499 | 09 478 5786

 **Office Hours** Wed & Fri 9–1pm | Tues–Fri 9–1pm 

office@bayspc.nz |  09 478 6180 / 021 055 1640

 Please send any Parish photos to **office@bayspc.nz**