

Leaping like calves at Christmas!

I was going to apologise for mentioning Christmases, when it is barely autumn, until I realised that in doing so, I am pandering to the collective anxiety surrounding the festival. I have to admit that my Christmas often degenerate into an exhausting attempt to maintain calm whilst indulging in frenzied over-consumption on various fronts, whilst still clinging to an illusory ideal: a perfect tinseltown of happiness for myself and the people around me. I don't think I'm the only one, which is a sad statement on how we tend to celebrate the priceless gift of God's love in Jesus. Ruth Grayson's thoughtful article, "As Good as a Feast" contains much wisdom about how we might reclaim Christmas as a time of thankful celebration and sharing. The profound meaning of the incarnation is explored further by Orthodox Christian scholar, Elizabeth Theokritoff, explaining how "it is the great mystery for the sake of which everything was created", "the movement in which God assumes and thus saves material Creation" and her article stresses our place *within* Creation, not separate from it.

The gift of God's grace breaking into the world was likened by the Old Testament prophet Malachi to "the sun of righteousness rising with healing in its wings", bringing joy like that of calves leaping as they are released from the stall. It is a lovely image that inspired our front cover. Orthodox theology encompasses this narrative of all Creation carrying within it the hope of redemption, the signs of God's grace. Yet Malachi warned sternly that this gift of joy was "for those who revere My name" and reverence surely implies a



From left:
Commissioning Editor
Clare Redfern,
Convening Editor
Simon Court
and Production Editor
Suzannah Brecknell

deep respect and love, and a desire to take care of all we have been entrusted with.

What might this reverence really look like and feel like? I think we have some great examples in this issue. From the creating of a beautiful community garden (see page 13) and the daring project that brought farm animals to a city car park (Mayhem in Battersea page 10)! Both these are hugely successful in terms of enjoyment, fun and a sense of community, not only with local residents, but with the wider "community of Creation" as farm animals were heard, smelt, patted and fed in central London and bees foraged amongst the roses.

But equally important is the thinking through of the nitty-gritty decisions we make every day about how we live and its effects on others; whether as individuals, Church communities and even at national government level. So we report on the recent Anglican Synod debates around divestment, and John Ranken invites us to also consider our personal lifestyle, taking stock of our use of resources, particularly considering our carbon emissions. All of this he stresses as part of a "work of reconciliation" between ourselves and the rest of Creation as we seek to tread gently. Louise Cook in "Talking Climate" urges us to share our personal stories of

challenge and change with those around us, being honest about our inspiration and our motivation, making accounts personal and hopeful, part of living out our faith with integrity.

Wendell Berry, the farmer, poet and visionary sees all of our life as part of sacramental living as the following, quoted at the GC retreat in July, explains:

"To live we must daily break the body and shed the blood of Creation. When we do this knowingly, lovingly, skilfully and reverently, it is a sacrament. When we do it ignorantly, greedily, clumsily and destructively, it is a desecration. In such desecration we condemn ourselves to spiritual and moral loneliness and others to want."

Wendell Berry, *The Gift of Good Land*

Feeling challenged? I certainly am, but thanks be to God for the gift of peace in Jesus, the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the encouragement and help we give each other as members of the family of God.

Wishing you the joyful freedom of the leaping calf and the healing sun of righteousness as you celebrate all of life, all of Creation, both at Christmas and every day.

Clare Redfern