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December  
2017

The Church of  
Saint John  
the Evangelist  
Montreal

## EDITORIAL

By TONY WHITEHEAD

The Centennial of the Installation of Father Davison at St John's as the Third Rector was one of the most moving and informative Dedication Services I have ever attended.

The presence of so many descendants of Father Davison was thrilling, and the Readings and Hymns created a true sense of History and Tradition of which we are the Inheritors.

Canon Peter Davison's Sermon was insightful as he filled in the history of his father's time at St John's.

It inspired us to try to plan financially to keep this Church open for another hundred years!

*Tony*



Canon Peter Davison





## REFLECTIONS

BY FR. KEITH SCHMIDT

Advent and Christmas are seasons of hope. The birth of a child in any family brings with it the expectation of the continuation of life. With the birth of the Christ Child, the hope of the world is centred on the reconciliation between God and Man. Angels, shepherds and Wise Men from the East, representing the diversity of the created order, all come to pay homage to the Prince of Peace. Hope is not something always in great supply in our world, but one place with a surprising amount of hope is St Michael's Mission. The stories of people's lives are not always easy, but with the strength of encouragement of the Mission volunteers and staff, many are given the extra support to carry on and turn things around. Tomorrow can be a better and new day.

This autumn, the Parish of St John the Evangelist has begun a process of strategic planning and reflection on our future. We have a solid base from our past to build into the future, as the wonderful historic series by Peter Harper indicates. This past Dedication Sunday, we had a visit from the Davison family, and Canon Peter Davison, son of our third Rector, gave an inspiring sermon.

There have been few times in the history of the Parish that things have looked so bright just beyond our doorstep. We are surrounded by modern temples of art and culture, the new Symphony Hall, Place des Arts, the Musée d'art contemporain, the Espace Danse, and soon the new National Film Board headquarters. As well, new condos arise monthly in the neighbourhood. How can we as a parish interact with this new reality? There is certainly a far greater opportunity here than when we sat on the edge of a parking lot for 40 years. But these things will not happen by themselves. If we are to take advantage of our situation, we must be open to God's calling to us, and have willing hearts and minds to work in our part of the Lord's vineyard.

*Keith +*



## MAKING ROOM AN ADVENT REFLECTION

BY MTR. WENDY TELFER

*And she brought forth her first-born son...  
and laid him in a manger; because there  
was no room for them in the inn.*

(Luke 2:7)

I began my preparations for Advent by writing a sermon for the first Sunday of the season. It speaks of the need to make room for Jesus to be born anew in our hearts, and to quiet our distracted minds so we can await our risen Lord's coming again. As I rehearsed my homily, I wondered how I could speak these words with integrity. With this concern whirring away in background processing, I sat down to work.

It was not long before the Holy Spirit, who is attentive to the prayers of preachers, sent me a clear message. My black kitten Sébastien, curled up contentedly in my lap, wriggled into a different position. He was now stretched out perpendicularly across my legs, *quatre pattes en l'air*, eyes closed. His head lolled slowly back towards the floor. At the other end, his tail began to droop. He had attained a state of total relaxation, openness and trust. Sébastien had made room for my affection, and as I stroked

his furry little belly my racing mind slowed down. I breathed deeply and gave thanks to God.

Each of us, in our own way, can find a method to calm ourselves and allow the season of Advent to do its work. At St. John's, the Procession with Lessons and Carols provides an excellent alternative to year-end frenzy. We hear the words of the prophets, and how God's wisdom guides us, and the resounding and courageous "yes" which young Mary said to God. We sing and listen to music of sublime gentleness and beauty. And then, of course, we feast, extending hospitality to all worshippers. I wish you and your loved ones every blessing as we make room for the event that changes everything; the birth of baby Jesus, King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

*Wendy +*



# MEMORIES OF CHRISTMAS AROUND 1950

BY PETER HARPER



Christmas is a time for nostalgia. I recall here the Christmases of my youth. I was brought up in a small Québécois industrial (paper mill, hydro plant) village along the Ottawa River at the confluence of the Lièvre. An only child, I belonged to one of the few local Anglo families – my father from PEI did not speak French and my French-Canadian mother spoke English at home. The village was dominated by the Catholic Church and the Société Saint Jean Baptiste. The parish of then some 1500 souls had a rector and a curate; the

church burned down in 1930 so services were held in a mean temporary chapel till 1958. I went to the French school from age 5 in 1947 to be with my friends. The boys' school offered grades 1-9 and was manned by five Brothers of Christian Instruction of Ploërmel (La Mennais Brothers).

## Advent and Preparation for Christmas

In those days, Christ the King was celebrated in October, so the Church Year ended with the Doomsday Gospel of Matthew and started with that of Luke. The month of December was consecrated to Our Lady's Expectation, but the Immaculate Conception had taken over. December 8 was a holiday and feast of obligation, but the concept was too remote for schoolboys to care. The First Sunday brought the first hint of coming Christmas. That evening at Benediction we sang our favorite hymn *Venez Divin Messie, sauvez nos jours infortunés...* announcing our deliverance from school and the coming holidays. The next two Sundays introduced the preaching of John the Baptist. Later came the Ember Days of fasting and abstinence, with multiple lessons from Isaiah (2 on Wednesday and 4 on Saturday) and Gospels of the

Annunciation and the Visitation. On Christmas Eve, we learned of the anxiety of Joseph.

December brought the mail order Christmas catalogues of Eaton's, Simpson's and Dupuis Frères which we devoured page by page, dreaming of our coming season's gifts. We also wondered about the last pages selling apples, butter and cheese to be shipped to English relatives – the post-war rationing was still going on. Posting our wish list to Santa Claus was heavily frowned upon and ridiculed, as the Brothers reminded us that it was the Child Jesus who brought the presents.

It was a busy time for mothers making fruitcakes and puddings (the Brothers pushed the traditional French *bûche de Noël*), doughnuts, jam and cut cookies, *ragoût de pattes* (pig's feet stew) and innumerable *tourtières* (and 'pets de soeur' - 'nun's farts', a sweet bread filled with brown sugar, from the extra dough), thus taking the best of the English and French traditions. Turkeys were popular and were often received from the father's boss or won at a charity lottery – some of the latter were still alive; a plucked turkey of 20 lbs or less was deemed 'unedinde' and one heavier 'un dindon'. All this food was stored in the summer kitchen or

the shed and kept frozen till Christmas. By then, the Christmas Tree (cut in the forest or bought from a farmer) was part of every home's decoration with a small crib at its foot; it was traditionally put up, decorated and lit on Christmas Eve. There were tinsels, angel hair, lights on a series circuit (one burnt bulb would shut down the whole set), bubble lights, baubles (remember the 'Shiny Brite' ornaments)... Outside decorations and lights were then rare except for a wreath on the door. My mother exchanged letters with my father's family on Prince Edward Island, and we received and sent a few Christmas cards to far away friends and relatives.

Immediate preparation for the Feast included a haircut for the men and boys and a perm (a 'toni') for the girls and women. As most people waited till the last minute, there was a rush on the barber shop and the hairdresser's home. We had two barbers, father and son; the men sat in the front of the barbershop smoking and talking around the spittoons (the men picked up the habit of chewing tobacco while working on the machines at the paper mill) waiting for the old man. The boys sat on the floor at the back of the shop lining up for the young barber who was gentler (the old man pulled the hair and we were terrified of his straight razor) – we sat on a board set over the





barber's chair while being clipped (no scissor cut in those days) and given a dash of smelly hair lotion – which we soon supplemented with Brylcreem or Vitalis for a swell look.

There was the obligatory long visit of our fathers to the liquor store, *La Commission des Liqueurs*; these were few and far between (in the next town of Buckingham) and the employees were there through the political patronage system rampant at the time. There was a large choice of spirits and a meagre one of wine. There was a list of products on the wall for you to choose, but the bottles were hidden on shelves behind the counter; your choice made, you had to go up to an employee who would go (very slowly) and see whether the product was available; the rare industrious employee would suggest a substitute, but generally one had to go back to the list and get back in line. The lines could extend far onto the street, and the local police kept order and tried to control the drunks.

There was also the preparation of the soul. During the last week of term, we were all trooped from school by the Brothers for the Christmas confession, the older boys to the rector and the smaller ones to the curate. Once when the curate was away, the little ones were lined up before the rector's confessional –

after the first few, he came out of his box saying “these little ones have no sins; all kneel down and I will give you absolution”. During the last days leading to Christmas well into Christmas Eve, the priests heard endless confessions from the adults – as it was put amusingly, the sins consisted mostly of unimaginative 'sacrage, buvage et fourrage' (swearing, drink and sex); extra confession places were set up along the communion rail and manned by priests from the neighboring religious houses. These visiting priests were more accommodating in regard to birth control (the women, but not the men, were routinely refused absolution by the parish clergy, so they often preferred outside priests, such as the Monfort Fathers). The men back from the shanties apparently got special treatment, their sins somewhat excused by their long absence from home.

Advent was a time for morality tales. We were read in school, *Les trois messes basses of Alphonse Daudet* - the story of Dom Balaguère, the chaplain of a local lord, who while vesting for the three Christmas masses got a detailed description of the following réveillon meal from the server; this distracted him no end as he celebrated the masses, and more and more during the last two. After mass, he gorged himself so much

at table that he died of apoplexy. St. Peter condemned him to celebrate 300 further masses as his penance; this means that he will be doing the masses every Christmas till 2175 in the ruined chapel of the château de Trinquelague (Ventoux). At home I was read Dickens' *Christmas Carol*. It seems amusing somehow that the French tale was against gluttony and the English one against avarice. On the eve of Christmas, we read together *T'was the Night before Christmas*.

### Christmas Eve and Midnight Mass

Christmas Eve was a day of fasting and abstinence; however, since the rules of the Eucharistic fast prescribed the fast since midnight, one could eat till Mass time. In 1957, Pope Pius put an end to that by imposing 3 hours for food and alcohol and 1 hour for liquids. After putting up our stockings and setting out milk and cookies for Santa, we walked to church, while some of the farmers drove by in sleights and bells.

This was the greatest church event of the year. Seats had to be reserved and bought for lack of space for everyone and the uniformed *conétable* (constable) who had a special elevated pew next to the back door checked the tickets and imposed discipline. The women marched up the central aisle in their best attire

and showed off their fur coats – then apparently the dream of every woman. We servers were dressed in fancy red or white festival cassocks with a lot of lace. The festivities were dominated by the Pagé family – cousins of mine through my great grandmother Julie Pagé. Mass was celebrated by Father Lucien Pagé, a viatorian (clerc de St. Viateur), son of the parish and a one-time superior general of his order, the organist and the choir director were both Pagé girls. But the greatest honour was that of singing the *Minuit, chrétiens (O Holy Night)* at the strike of twelve. This greatly anticipated solo was sung by one of the Pagé boys. One year, the bishop stupidly proscribed this hymn because the French text was composed by an anticlerical and reflected supposedly socialist themes. It caused a near revolt in the parish, but we had to do without for a few years.

The service began with a procession to the crib and the mysterious appearance of the Child Jesus from somewhere. There were three Masses, the first solemn with full choir with deacon and sub-deacon (later in my seminary years, I was a 'wooden sub-deacon' at Christmas – no maniple and no touching the sacred vessels in those days). The rector who was an honorary canon of Gap, his home diocese in France, wore his red and black fur trimmed shoulder cape, and passed



the collection plate himself – it was part of his stipend (other sources were some of the tithe and the 'casual' that is money received for masses, funerals, baptism, weddings, but never for extreme unction). The other two were low said Masses. The second was attended by many who did not get in for the first, for lack of money or space; the choir sang all the favorite 'cantiques de Noël' so many stayed on. The third had virtually no attendance.

We then returned home to unwrap the gifts which had somehow appeared under the tree. The stocking contained the proverbial orange, small toys and candies. The presents were the usual boys' gifts of the time. First, there were books, always in English, from my earliest Christmases – I received *The Boy's King Arthur, based on Mallory...* at age 2, and *The Arabian Nights* at age 3 for future reading and to build up year by year my little English Boy's library of classics. Then the 'real' gifts, such as over the years, skates, electric train, Meccano set, model airplane, play altar, BB air rifle, and later a shotgun... The Brothers tried to induce us to open our gifts only on New Year's Day in the Québécois manner, but my father would have none of it and I was the envy of many of my friends for getting my gifts early.

Followed the réveillon, generally of tourtière and mince meat pie with various pickles. We always spent Christmas night alone in the early years, my parents and I, because we were never invited anywhere, since my father had no local family and my mother's family would not have an 'Anglais' at Christmas. In later years, we celebrated with friends from the local Anglo ghetto.

There was little alcohol served at Christmas in our home. Canadian sherry or homemade dandelion wine for the women (and children) and rye for the men. The drinks were served in the pantry and drunk there by the men. Wine eventually appeared on the dinner table, Ontario wines from hybrid grapes such as Bright's Manoir St-David and later Portuguese Mateus Rosé. My father was allowed his bottle of rye only once a year at Christmas and he poured it down his gullet a thimbleful at the time in the old Maritime manner. He was soon drunk, enjoyed a hangover, and made us miserable. But he didn't drink again till the next Christmas. As he worked on shifts in the sulphite mill, some years he was away at crucial times and could not drink. In the evening, we generally went to supper at a family like ours (English-French, Catholic-Anglican) where the mother's French-Canadian

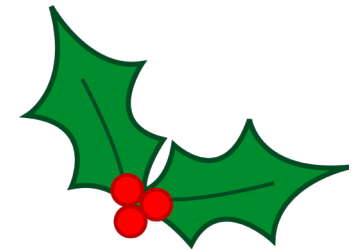
family was more welcoming to Anglos and I enjoyed the gaiety of the celebration 'à la Canadienne'. December 27th, St. John's Day, was my father's birthday, so he would get another necktie or another pipe.

The Sunday after Christmas was that of the Holy Family. In the afternoon there was a visit to the crib for the mothers and their children. The rector was a great admirer of the mothers, particularly of those with large families, and he kept a close record of the reproductive activities in the parish through the confessional and parish visits. The children were gathered round the crib for songs and stories and were given small gifts of candy and/or religious images.

The Christmas Octave and New Year's Day were a time for visiting family (they drove from Buckingham – we did not own a car) and friends (mostly Anglos), and the adults were expected to take a drink in every house. There was a Watch Night service on December 31 for a few years, but the practice was dropped. The brothers had urged us repeatedly to asked for the New Year's paternal blessing in the morning, but my father would have none of that. I went to see the toys that my friends had finally got. We greeted each other with the traditional, "Bonne

et heureuse année et le paradis à la fin de vos jours".

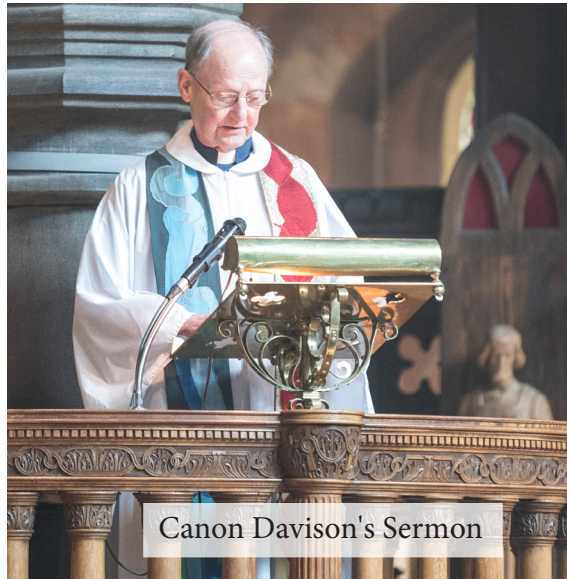
Epiphany, which we called 'Little Christmas', was again a holiday and feast of obligation. We delighted in seeing the Magi appear at last in the crib which remained in the chapel till Candlemas. There was a special collection for the African Mission, la 'quête des petits nègres', as we would say in those politically incorrect days. As long as my grandfather lived, my mother's people came to us for Little Christmas for turkey – the pope's nose and a cup of the fatty gravy being reserved for my grandfather who died not surprisingly of blocked arteries. My grandfather was a great teller of tales, both real and imagined, my uncles sang 'chansons à répondre' and old French classics, and I played with my toys with my cousins. Conversation was lively and one uncle was particularly boisterous; used to my parents' quiet ways, I was quite bedazzled by the experience. There was no 'galette des rois' that I can recall.





# DEDICATION SUNDAY 2017

A VISIT FROM CANON PETER  
DAVISON, SON OF OUR THIRD  
RECTOR



Canon Davison's Sermon



Prayers for Dedication Sunday



The Davison Archives



The Procession



The Davison Family



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