



St Ronan's Presbyterian Church
Eastbourne

Record

June 2024

2 June	Shared service with Anglicans at St. Ronan's.....	9.30am
9 June	John Howell.....	9.30am
16 June	Informal worship service.....	9.30am
23 June	Reg Weeks.....	9.30am
30 June	BYO Fellowship lunch with Doug Rogers.....	9.30am

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Power Hour – Sundays 9.30am
Breakfast Prayer – Tuesdays 8.00am
Mainly Music – Thursdays 9.15-11.15am

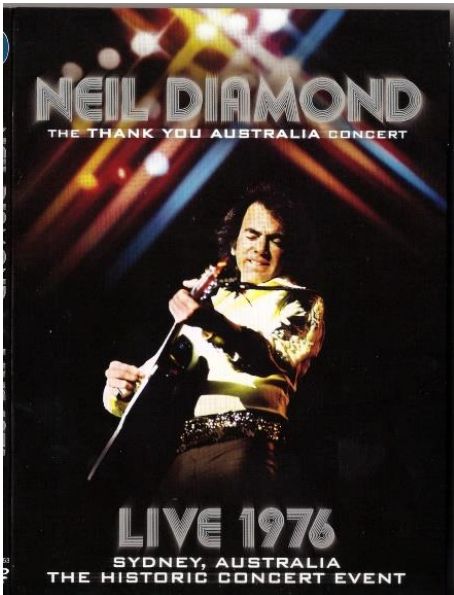
For pastoral care needs, please contact one of the Local Ministry Team
Rev Reg Weeks 027 491 5947, Simon Shaw 562 8772, Colin Dalziel 562 7238 or Sandy Lang
562 8753

Star Signs

Not so long ago I asked a young man what he thought of Neil Diamond. "Who?" he said. That's not surprising when I recalled the song "Signs" that I had hoped to discuss with him was released in the mid '70s – probably thirty years before he was born. I have always liked the imagery in the lyrics and if you are not familiar with them, here they are:



*"Signs that burn like shooting stars
that pass across the nighttime skies,
they reach out in their mystic language
for us to read between the lines.*



*Some are born who would defy them,
others still who would deny them, signs.*

*Signs like moments hung suspended,
echoes just beneath the heart
speak in voices half remembered
and half-forgotten play their part.*

*Signs that come as we lay sleeping
left behind for our keeping, signs.*

*Sail along, sail along the reefs and the coves inside
your soul.*

*Sail along, sail along in search of a star that you can
hold.*

And we journey far to where that star may lead to."

And the stars we celebrate this month are those of Matariki, now officially recognised as an important element in New Zealand's culture. Their appearance, low in the morning sky, heralds the Māori New Year; a time to reflect on the past twelve months and remember any we have lost during that period, to celebrate food and family, and to plan for the coming year. A worthwhile addition to our list of national holidays.

In the northern hemisphere the stars of Matariki go by a different name. They are known as the Pleiades, an ancient star cluster with a Greek name. The name probably derives from the Greek word "to sail" because of the cluster's importance in delimiting the sailing season in the Mediterranean Sea.

There is a poem which speaks of the relationship of the bright star Capella and the constellation of Pleiades:

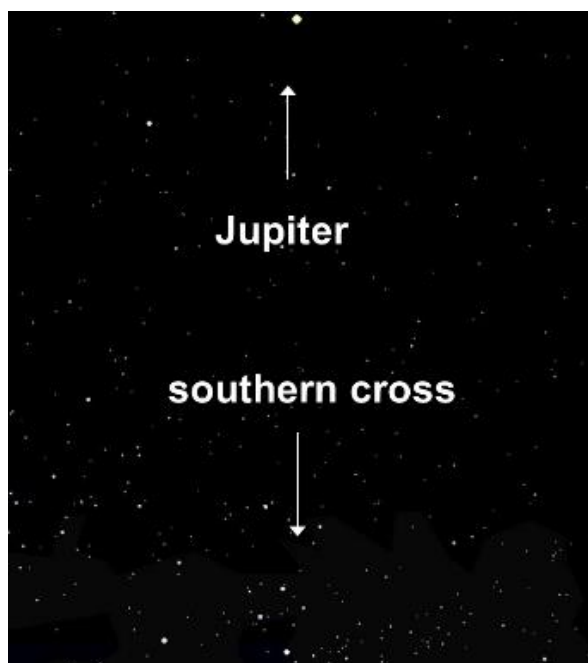
*"Hung from the cold November trees
come from the mists where now you are
clamber up to a noble height
into the clear crisp air above.*

*Lume as before the purple night
rekindled in us forgotten love
tell of a brighter hope that lies
still in the mist below our sight
Be harbinger of Christmas skies
Promise us light. Promise us light!"*

And when Christians think of Christmas Light, it's probably the Star of Bethlehem that first comes to mind. But the star of Bethlehem has been the subject of much discussion and hypothesising down the centuries, most imagining something miraculous moving on before the wise men; a bit like a low-flying drone with a bright LED lamp shining down, to illuminate the path ahead.

Others have sought for some heavenly occurrence that might fit the biblical account, but over the years no contender quite fitted the bill. However, we can rely on what Dr Jeff Tallon, Professor of Physics at Victoria and past Elder of St Ronan's, has found written in the stars, when compared with the Biblical record and other sources of that era.

So, what did the wise men see that made them set out to greet a royal infant?



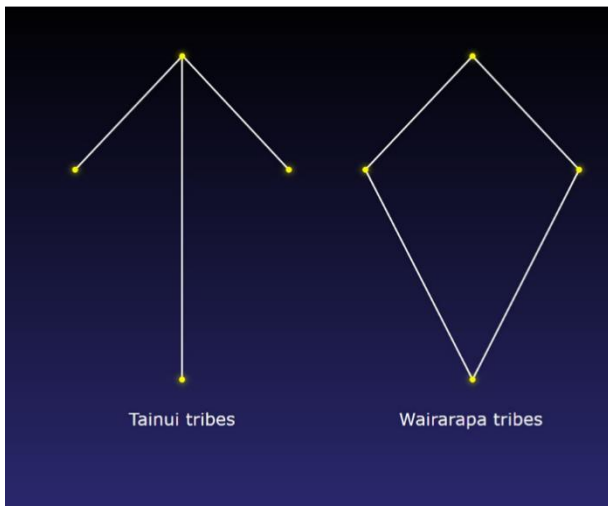
On 11th September 3 BCE, the King planet Jupiter was in conjunction with the King star Regulus within the constellation of Leo. To those astrologers, that was the constellation of Judah, so they headed for Jerusalem expecting to find the baby in King Herod's palace. Herod offers hospitality to what was in effect a diplomatic delegation from a foreign power and wants to know just when the star first appeared so that he can estimate how old the child is.

The date happens to be 25th Dec, 2 BCE, not the day Jesus was born but over a year later - the day the wise men arrived, and the whole of Jerusalem is celebrating Hanukah. The planet Jupiter, whose movement across

the skies the wise men have been marking night by night, they know has now reached the limit of its retrograde motion; has reached its highest point and it stops. And when they look from their accommodation in Jerusalem, they see that it is standing not anywhere in the southern sky, but right over Bethlehem.

But there's more - when looking from Jerusalem that day, those wise men would have seen, below Jupiter, another cluster of stars they thought belonged to the constellation of Centaurus - of no particular interest at the time. Later, Ptolemy would list them in his charts but by 400 CE these stars were no longer visible from most of Europe. Indeed, Europeans did not rediscover them as a

separate constellation until the 15th century, when Portuguese and Italian sailors were mounting expeditions into the southern hemisphere. It was they who called them the Southern Cross.



Of course, Māori knew of them, but knowing nothing of Roman executions saw them as an anchor, or as a hole in the sky through which the storm winds blew. Only in the late 20th century has computer technology developed to such a stage that we, for whom the Southern Cross is so significant, can now see that on that day, 25th Dec 2 BCE, it stood upright over Bethlehem.

And only now, in our time, comes the realization that the King planet and those with the symbol of crucifixion were destined, from the dawn of time, to stand together over the temporary home of the one born to be the very light of the world.

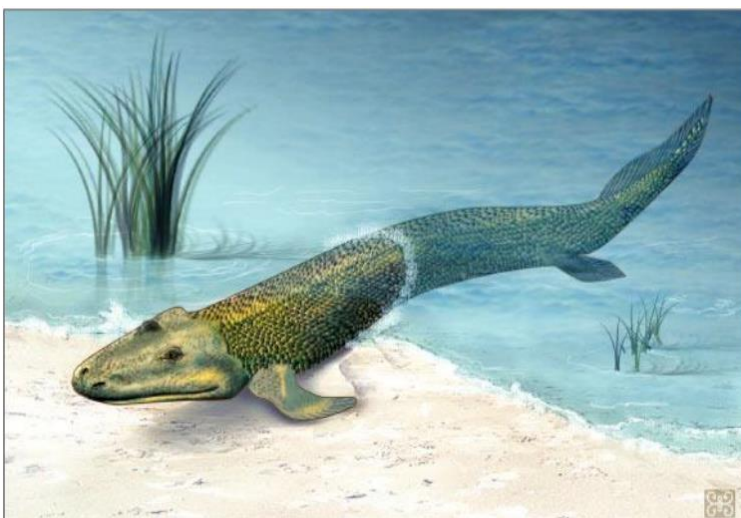
And this latest, silent revelation, joining Advent and Easter, is to me like the very thumbprint of the creator, for those with the eyes to see it.

Reg Weeks

The Coelacanth

When I was a wee lad, I recall being taken to the aquarium in East London in South Africa to see a very dead Coelacanth in a display tank. The great attraction was that it wasn't supposed to exist at all.

One had been caught in fishing nets in 1938, but it was already badly decomposed by the time that it was identified, so the intact fish caught in 1956 was cause for great excitement amongst ichthyologists.



The thing that makes the Coelacanth so special is its fins. It has eight lobe shaped fins that are thought to be what would eventually become the "legs" that sea life used to walk out of the ocean and onto dry land. That makes Coelacanths the ancestors of all tetrapods, both living and extinct. And that makes them a very important part of our history.

Fossil records show that the Coelacanth was living 411 million years ago but, as the youngest fossil ever found was 66 million years old, it was assumed that they had become extinct about then. This photograph (Wikipedia) shows one from the Early Cretaceous period.

So where on earth did the Coelacanth in the East London aquarium come from? No-one seemed to know. Since then, now that fishermen knew what they are looking for, they have identified the odd one in a catch, but very rarely. And of course, all of them were dead.



Then, recently, four friends wearing special diving gear reached a depth of 120m in Sodwana Bay off the coast of South Africa. And there they were able to photograph a living Coelacanth!

It seems that these "living fossils" had found safe haven in the underwater caves there - and they have stayed very much alive for millions of years. And being very much alive, scientists are able to study them and learn all sorts of neat things about them.

For example, their locomotion is unique. To move around they take advantage of up-and down-wellings of current and drift. Their paired fins stabilise their movement through the water but, unexpectedly, while they are on the ocean floor, they do not use their paired fins for any kind of movement.



The coelacanth has high maneuverability due to having so many fins and it can orient its body in almost any direction in the water. They have been seen doing headstands as well as swimming belly up. It is thought that the rostral organ helps give the Coelacanth electroreception, which aids in movement around

obstacles in the semi-dark in which they live. All these things and more could be learned because the Coelacanth is not a fossil. It is a living creature.

I have often heard people pass disparaging remarks about the Bible, calling it a fossil that is irrelevant to today's world. But is it?

There is a beautiful children's hymn that goes:

*God has given us a book full of stories, which was made for His people of old.
It begins with the tale of a garden and ends with the city of gold.
But the best is the story of Jesus, of the babe with the ox in the stall.
Of the song that was sung by the angels, the most beautiful story of all.
There are stories for parents and children, for the old who are ready to rest,
but for all who can read them or listen, the story of Jesus is best.
For it tells how He came from the Father, His far-away children to call.
To bring the lost sheep to their Shepherd - the most beautiful story of all.*

Your Bible contains history, genealogy, words of comfort, words of advice, sensible laws, steamy R18 bits and so much more. Your Bible is not a fossil. It is a Living Word. Enjoy it and learn from it!

John Harris

The Vanity of Mausolea

My musings on vanities led me down an unusual path. One vanity that megalomaniacs seem to have in common is the need to build and/or live in outsized palaces.

Donald Trump has his gold-plated Trump Tower, Assad in Syria has built himself a new palace, as has Erdogan in Turkey. Having full use of the Kremlin's great tsarist palaces was not enough for Vladimir Putin, who built another one for himself.

The Kim family in North Korea has also built itself a palace; and this apparently was the inspiration for Nicolae Ceaușescu who, in Romania, built a huge palace

which, after Khufu's pyramid in Egypt, is the second heaviest building in world.

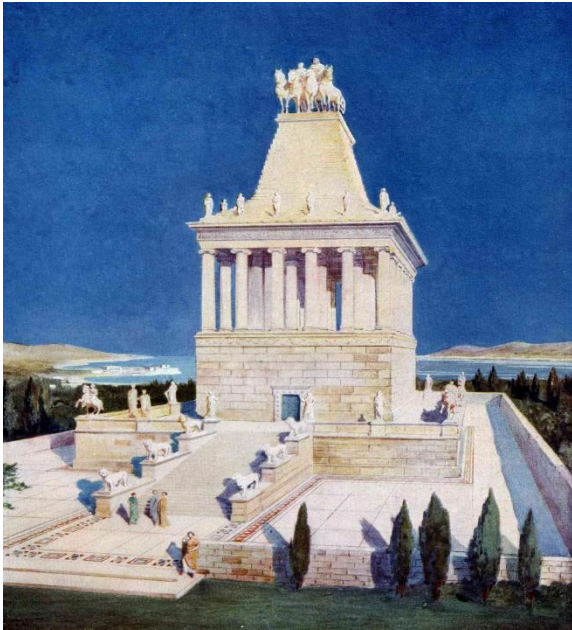
Not only do megalomaniacs build palaces for their living selves but they also need stupendous residences (mausolea) for their precious bodies once they have died.

Of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World only Khufu's pyramid remains. All the rest have been destroyed, usually by earthquakes. So,



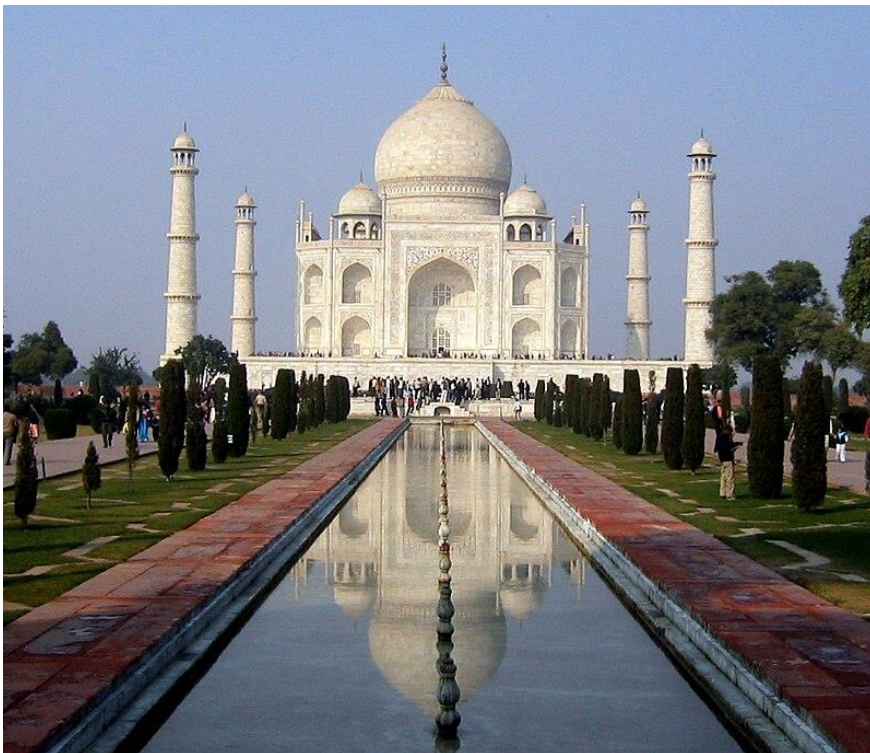
one can only guess what they really looked like. The outstanding example would be the Hanging Gardens of Babylon; no-one (over the last 2000 years) has ever understood where they actually were, let alone what they looked like.

However, this imaging of Mausolo's tomb is probably a realistic guess, in that it



is architecturally similar to the remains of other buildings of the same epoch. The tomb was built in 350 BC by King Mausolo of Caria, in Halicarnassus (modern day Bodrum on the south west corner of modern Turkey) for himself and his wife. This was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World and gave the world the word 'mausoleum'. However, it fell apart in an earthquake a few years later.

There are numerous mausolea around the world, and perhaps the one closest to us is the Shrine of Remembrance in Melbourne.



The most attractive and delicate would have to be the Taj Mahal in Agra. [However, Mughal Emperor Shah Jehan built this mausoleum for his beloved wife, Mumtaz, although it also served as his tomb when he too died. *Ed.*]

Most mausolea are built at great cost and, while some have some aesthetic merit, most are ungainly monoliths. Such examples are those built for Lenin and Stalin in Moscow, and for Mao Zedong in Beijing.



The Kim family's mausoleum, the Kumsusan Palace of the Sun in Pyongyang, enormous in both area and bulk, is evidently intended to exemplify the apotheosis of Kim Il-Sung and his son Kim Jong Il, who have been designated the "Eternal Leaders of North Korea". Not only are they on display in transparent sarcophagi, but they are portrayed in giant illuminated wax statues. Kim Jong Un no doubt looks forward to joining them in the years to come.



Xi Jinping, in Beijing, seems for now satisfied with the Forbidden City which he has inherited, possibly because he knows that it is too late to compete with Qin Shi Huang, the first Qin emperor. Located in Xi'an, his mausoleum was built over a 38-year period from 246 BC to 208 BC, during his own lifetime. Not yet

completely excavated, the Terracotta Army is just one part of that extraordinary complex.



Pyongyang is not only the site of the Kim's mausoleum but it also shows off another Kim vanity, the Ryugyong Hotel.

When construction began in 1987, it was planned to be the tallest hotel in the world. But the hotel has never been completed, let alone

occupied. An eye-stopping 300m tall glass-faced pyramid, it dominates the city's skyline.

Geoff Mann

Power Hour – Keep your eye on the ball

I am always awed when different elements of the day align and echo each other in their message — *We need to stay focused and believe in the important things that matter.*

This happened last Sunday when, first, the Rev Lionel Nunns shared a simple enough story, "The Carrot Seed", about how a boy grew an enormous carrot from seed. The journey had been challenging for the boy because, on the one hand, he daily watered and weeded his carrot seed for some without any visible growth; and, on the other hand, he had to listen continually to his family members making very discouraging remarks.

Relating to the carrot seed story, the Power Hour children were able to identify that a strong belief and patience without being distracted, can lead to good ends. Entwined too was the notion of nurturing for wellbeing to succeed. Call it by another name — love in action.

Then, second, when the children kept their eyes focused on a candle, placed at a distance, they discovered they could walk towards it in a beautifully straight line, as well as hold an imaginary cellphone.

However, in contrast, their repeated walk was quite wobbly when they were distracted, even bumping into chairs, by looking at their “cellphone”.



This lesson of attentive focus can be done, not only easily on the beach, but also in life's daily tasks – important or otherwise. It applies directly to our gospel story (below) about Jesus walking on water.

And, third, our children enjoyed acting out the well-known story of Jesus walking on the water (one of four boat stories - Matt 14:22-36). To mimic the middle of the stormy night, we drew the curtains and turned the lights off, made gathering wind and wave sounds, acted out being Jesus and his fishermen disciples Andrew and Peter, and expressed fear of

ghostly visions versus calm and confidence with a storm all about.

A few props helped to set the scene with green and brown drapery for land and blue for the lake, and wooden planks to form a boat. The children thought the best part of the story was when sinking Peter was rescued by being “given a hand up” by Jesus (a great metaphor, good orientation to relating with others, and an in-house Power Hour reference). Further, they explained that Peter’s misadventure was due to his fear of the distracting gusts of wind and swirling waves. He needed to keep his eyes on beckoning Jesus and believe that he would make it

But Jesus spoke quickly to them: *“Have courage! It is I. Do not be afraid.”* Then later, when Jesus reached out his hand and grabbed Peter by the wrist, He said: *“Your faith is small. Why did you doubt?” (Matt 14: 27, 31).*



Lastly, their artistic expression of the above message was shown in making their thoughtful bookmarks, entitled "Jesus" and "Listening to God".

Power Hour Term 2: 5 May – 30 June;
(School Holidays, 7 – 21 July).

Term 3: 28 July – 22 September.

Worth a visit! The main attraction of St Faith’s Anglican Church, Rotorua – its window

Before Rotorua expanded beyond the shores of Lake Rotorua, the main settled area was at Ohinemutu on the lakeshore. It is still a Māori village with hot springs, handicrafts and the small wooden St Faith’s Anglican Church, built in



1914 to replace its 1885 predecessor. The church’s simple half-timbered, neo-Tudor exterior gives no hint of the gloriously rich interior where there is barely a patch of wall that hasn’t been carved or covered with tukutuku. The main attraction — relevant to our gospel story — is the window at the front of the right-hand aisle. It features the figure of Christ, swathed in a Māori cloak, positioned so that he appears to be walking on the lake. (Currently, the church is only open for two hours daily).
Susan Connell

[Ref: Harper, Maud, Whitfield. *The Rough Guide to New Zealand*, 2006, pp339-340.]



Our God calls us to worship and grow together and to show the love of Christ through serving our community.

Directory

St Ronan's Presbyterian Church,
234 Muritai Road, Eastbourne, Lower Hutt, 5013

Local Ministry Team

Rev Reg Weeks	027 491 5947	third.age@outlook.co.nz
Sandy Lang	562 8753	slang@xtra.co.nz
Simon Shaw	562 8772	simonjshaw@xtra.co.nz
Colin Dalziel	562 7238	colinjdalziel@gmail.com

Parish Clerk	Sandy Lang
Hall Bookings	Sandy Lang

Contributions for the 'Record' are most welcome.
Please email them to lesmolloy7@gmail.com
Phone (04) 568 3377

The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors.
They do not necessarily represent those of St Ronan's Church.

**And the closing date for our next *Record* for July 2024
is Sunday 30 June 2024**