



## MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

*Dear Friends,*

As a new liturgical year begins, we at CBF are launching two new initiatives; the first being a two-part ZOOM Advent series entitled: "Advent: Learning to wait...Together", and a Centre for Biblical Formation Newsletter to share news, reflections and resources. These are just a few of the fruits of COVID where we are experiencing limitations and possibilities. During these months, we have had more time available for reflection, pondering, visioning, and dreaming which has led to exercising creativity in various ways. Technology has provided us with opportunities to come together from all parts of the world to pray, study, celebrate and communicate. Our worlds have been expanded. COVID-19 has given rise to more communication and interaction beyond borders. We are grateful for the challenges of COVID that provided occasions to push us forward into discovering new horizons.



At the same time COVID has caused great loss and suffering for many people: the loss of loved ones who have died alone, loss of jobs and security, insecurity of the future, depression, increases in domestic violence and many other social issues. We pray for all who have experienced loss during this time.

COVID has forced us to pause and to wait; to be patient and to be hopeful that the lockdowns we are experiencing will end soon, that we will be able to be reunited with loved ones. We have grown weary, impatient, and frustrated in this waiting time.

Now the liturgical season of Advent is upon and we are invited into four more weeks of waiting, hopefully a different waiting, characterized by a joy and longing for God to be with us. It is an invitation to renew and refresh our weary spirits with the hope that flows from the beautiful Advent readings.

May this be a time of attending to the deep longing within us, for the God who continually calls us into life.

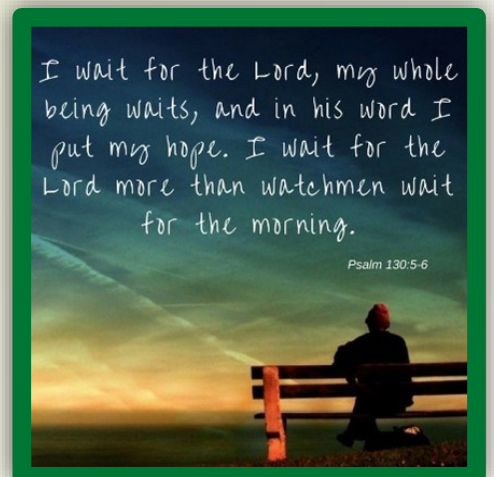
Many blessings on each one during this season of hope and light.

**Sister Margaret Zdunich, NDS**

**Director**

*I wait for the Lord, my whole  
being waits, and in his word I  
put my hope. I wait for the  
Lord more than watchmen wait  
for the morning.*

Psalm 130:5-6



## NEWS FROM CBF

During the pandemic, the Ecce Homo Guest House has been closed. During the closure, there has been a lot of renovations. The Guest house will have a new look when it reopens, and we resume CBF Programs in Jerusalem.

The CBF team of Vicky, Rima, Anne and Sr. Marge have been meeting regularly to follow up on CBF business. Sr. Marge has been working in Toronto where she and Patricia have continued to work on programs and rescheduling programs and professors whose sessions have been disrupted by COVID. Lots of brainstorming and planning is happening as the Centre continues to adjust to the new pandemic reality and prepare for the future.



## JEWISH FESTIVAL SERIES

In September and October CBF presented a five-part online series entitled: Jewish Festivals. This coincided with the Jewish liturgical calendar of the High Holy Days. Dr. Marcie Lenk was the lecturer for the first three sessions exploring the Jewish calendar and the readings of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The text of Gen. 21 and the Book of Jonah were studied. Dr. Lenk provided new insights into both texts.

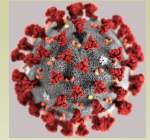
Dr. Murray Watson lectured for two sessions: “When the Shofar Sounds: A Christian Appreciation of the Jewish High Holy Days.” It was an enriching series and many participants expressed appreciation. One participant wrote: “It is 3:00 in Zimbabwe but it was worth getting up for.”





# COVID-19 in Israel

by Anne Ben Chahar



An end to the coronavirus crisis here in Israel is starting to seem within reach. Israel's Ministry of Health signed an agreement with a few companies and their partners to provide Israel with millions of COVID-19 vaccines. This is good news for the elderly population, who are always at a higher risk of severe illness from contracting COVID-19. The vaccine will be voluntary.

Schools, museums, malls and marketplaces are open in the country. The restrictions in gatherings are still in place. Tourism, cultural as well as entertainment services remain mainly closed. Public services are open with certain restrictions. Shops and essential services are open. Restaurants and cafes are open for food delivery and takeout. Educational institutes are operating partly online. Public transport is running. It is mandatory to wear a face mask and keep 2 meters distance in public. Rules and regulations might change in quite short notice.

The Covid-19 pandemic continues to restrict entry permit to Israel. Israel has still closed its borders to foreign nationals. Eilat and certain parts of the Dead Sea are now special local tourist areas. The tourist islands laws allow the hotels and resorts in those areas to be open. Local tourists still need to follow strict coronavirus regulations. Entry to the places will be made possible subject to presenting a negative Covid-19 test result 72 hours prior to entry into the city or resort.

More updated news about COVID-19 in Israel please check the website <https://govextra.gov.il/ministry-of-health/corona/corona-virus-en/>

Please see our new **Instagram** page: <https://www.instagram.com/centreforbiblicalformation/>

And **Facebook** page: <https://www.facebook.com/CBFJerusalem>

## FAREWELL TO JOHN TAYLOR, OUR WEBMASTER

After many years of volunteering then working on staff at CBF then working on staff as the CBF webmaster, John is leaving us. CBF is sorry to lose John's talents and gifts in designing and maintaining the website, expanding the data base, and advising on marketing. John's creative energy will be missed, but he will keep in touch, as John and Lucia continue to volunteer at Ecce Homo.

A big thank you to John for his commitment and work. He will be remembered with gratitude. Godspeed in your new ventures John.

Next year in Jerusalem!



## FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT (YEAR B)



### Mark 13:33-37

[Jesus said to his disciples:] 33 “Beware, keep alert; for you do not

know when the time will come. 34 It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. 35 Therefore, keep awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, 36 or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. 37 And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake!”

### COMMENTARY:

With this Sunday, we begin a new liturgical year (Year B) and, with it, we shift from the Gospel of Matthew to the Gospel of Mark. Mark is the shortest of the four canonical Gospels and, in the view of most Scripture scholars, was the first of them to be put down in written form, probably sometime in the 60s A.D.; according to the most accepted theory, Matthew and Luke then built upon Mark’s basic framework, fleshing it out with their own particular sources and traditions, and shaping the story according to their own understanding of who and what Jesus was. Mark is, after the letters of St. Paul, probably our earliest source for Jesus, and, in many ways, the most “streamlined” and “bare-bones” of the Gospels. It is a Gospel that exhibits a tremendous sense of urgency, an almost “breathless” quality as it moves quickly from scene to scene, sweeping us along toward Jesus’ Passion, death and Resurrection. Indeed, the older ending of Mark’s Gospel concludes very abruptly after the discovery of the empty tomb—a theological and grammatical anomaly that has led many exegetes to believe that we have probably lost the final verses of this Gospel as they were composed by Mark. There is a ruggedness and immediacy to Mark, both linguistically and theologically. It is not the refined literary Greek of Luke, or the theological intricacy of John. As the Gospels go, Mark is largely simple and unadorned; the message is paramount, and Mark does not get concerned with style or sophistication.

Although we have now switched *seasons* (and *liturgical years*!), this Gospel passage, with its focus on vigilance and preparation for the end of time, seems to fit in very naturally with the Gospels of the last several weeks.

“Advent has a twofold character: as a season to prepare for Christmas, when Christ’s first coming to us is remembered; and as a season when that remembrance directs the mind and heart to await Christ’s second coming at the end of time. Advent is thus a period for devout and joyful expectation” (#39). The first weeks of Advent especially are very much in continuity with the message of the last weeks of Ordinary Time—they connect at least as much to the Solemnity of Christ the King as they do to the coming Solemnity of Christmas. Much like the two-faced Roman god Janus, who looked both *forward* and *backward* simultaneously, Advent is a season that looks both to the distant past and to the (distant?) future, and many of its readings reflect this dual focus.

So what is the point in today’s gospel? In Mark 13, Jesus has announced an event that is imminent, along with its accompanying signs. But none of these signs was yet visible to his listeners, and the normal cultural tendency would be to put such an exhortation and event out of mind. ‘Today’s trouble is enough for today.’

People with a strong cultural orientation to the present need to be nudged to think more about the future, even if only tomorrow, just as Americans whose cultural orientation is primarily toward the future need to be reminded to think about the present, today, this very moment.” (John J. Pilch, *The Cultural World of Jesus Sunday by Sunday: Cycle B*).



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*“The threefold call to watch in our text recurs in the Passion narrative, in Jesus’ call to the disciples in Gethsemane, in 14:33, 37, 38. The same gregoreite occurs, calling the disciples to be on alert for the passion crisis, and Jesus’ imminent end in his earthly life” (Willard M. Swartley, Associated Menonite Biblical Seminary; online at: <http://www.ambbs.edu/>). Interestingly, Kittel’s Theological Dictionary of the New Testament says that grêgoreô is linked to the verb egeirô, “to rise up, be raised, awaken and stand up,” which is one of the most common verbs used to refer to the Resurrection.*

The same question, then, is there for us as it was for the writers of the Gospels—what do you do if you believe that Jesus will come back, but probably not so soon as had once been thought? ... Christians are not always very alert. They are far too rarely on tiptoe to see where God is calling them, challenging them, or inviting them. The church can be awfully somnolent. It is beset by every manner of temptation, as is the individual. Where, the preacher can ask, have you been sleepy? Where has our congregation been sleepy? What would it look like to wake up? ... Christians [also] need to be reminded that Jesus is present through the work of the Spirit in the life of the church, in Word and sacrament. They need to be reminded of the way the kingdom is manifested, in meeting the needs of others. They need to have it reaffirmed that God is acting in those personal and social apocalypses that expose our idolatry and false hopes.” (Leonard R. Klein in *The Lectionary Commentary: The Gospels*, p. 281).

(Gerald Darring, online:) “Advent, then, is an expression of our faith in the possibility of a better world. We don’t have to be at each other’s throats. We can ‘do right’ in the areas of race relations, family obligations, and personal responsibilities. We can ‘do good’ to the poor, the elderly, the homeless, and to all our brothers and sisters at home and abroad. We can become blameless, beacons of social justice, examples of faith and love, peace-makers.

The message of Advent is to *be constantly on the watch!* We base this constant watch not on fear but on hope in God’s *promise of eternal life*. The promise of Christmas is a joyful anticipation that *The Lord will shower his gifts, and our land will yield its fruit.*



Dr. Murray Watson is a Faith Development Officer with the Simcoe-Muskoka Roman Catholic District School Board in Barrie, Ontario. He also offers online sessions at the Centre for Biblical Formation.

## IMPORTANT DATES

10. December	International Human Rights Day
11-18 December	Hanukkah – Festival of Light
13. December	Third Sunday of Advent
20. December	Fourth Sunday of Advent
25. December	Christmas Day



## Reflections from Participants of Centre for Biblical Formation online sessions

### A message from Roy Da Silva

*He is the Headmaster of the St. Stephen's School in Chandigarh, India.*

*He has participated in the online sessions of the Centre for Biblical Formation.*

At a time when the whole world is battling the Coronavirus pandemic, The Centre for Biblical Formation (CBF) has been reinventing itself in the true spirit of *Nostra Aetate* #4, under the leadership of Sr. Margaret Zdunich NDS, (Director) by bringing aspects of Biblical Formation into homes and households through international webinars in the online platform.

In her three sessions on The Jewish Liturgical Year, Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, Dr. Marcie Lenk, provided a fascinating insight for Christians and the generally curious, into Jewish Festivals and particularly the Jewish High Holy Days – *Yamim Nora'im*. Dr. Lenk, who considers her role as that of a “translator,” explained the Biblical Liturgical Calendar and traced the Israelite festivals celebrated according to the movements of the moon, as well as the annual cycle of the solar year, paying special attention to the natural changing of seasons as they occur in the Land of Israel, thus encompassing the entire Jewish Liturgical Year from Biblical (Temple times) till modern days, always making subtle connections between the two faith traditions – Judaism and Christianity.

A breath of biblical fresh air during these trying times, Dr. Murray Watson, presented two webinars titled “When the Shofar Sounds: A Christian Appreciation of the Jewish High Holy Days” weaving the thread and reinforcing the bonds that unite the two biblical faith traditions. Highlighting the spiritually and liturgically rich times in the Jewish Liturgical Year Dr. Murray showed how these spiritual themes profoundly shaped the life and spirituality of Jesus who was Jewish, as they continue to resonate deeply with Christians today.

The entire series of webinars enabled the participants to cope with the transition in a post-COVID world. We were indeed enriched to have both Dr. Marcie and Dr. Murray as the resource persons thanks to the creative efforts of Sr. Margaret in making available this online platform.





## A message from Anna Barber

*Anna has participated in sessions in Jerusalem and online. Chaplain & RE Leader St Catherine's School, Thomastown Parish, Australia. Currently Anna is RE Leader at St Clare's School*

During the deep lockdown due to Covid-19 in Melbourne, Australia, I had an opportunity to escape to Jerusalem, albeit online. My time at Ecce Homo has a special place in my life because it was such a life-giving experience. Ecce Homo has and will always be Light in my life. I attended three Zoom sessions hosted by Dr Marcie Lenk on the Ecce Homo platform. It was such a time of growth and wonder, based upon the Jewish feasts in September.

Under Marcie's expertise, we explored the Jewish Liturgical Cycle. This gave a rich context to the feast days that the Jewish Tradition honors, exploring how light and darkness ebbs and flows through the year. I loved hearing how the holy days reflect upon and examine the seasons of our lives. I could see similarities with Catholic Faith traditions, and I noticed differences which lead to a deepening of interfaith dialogue.

The next session addressed Rosh Hashanah. As I write, I am conscious of Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, a season of remembrance and judgment because we Christians are entering our 2021 liturgical new year with Advent, our season of anticipation and preparation for the Christ Child's arrival. The scripture of Abraham and Sarah was discussed. I remember how laughter plays a key role in the story. I was particularly moved when Marcie described the sounding of the Shofar, likening it to weeping and crying. We pray with so many words during this season and yet words don't communicate everything. In the Scripture, the ram's horn is the sound of deepest prayer. I wonder what would be the sound of my deepest prayer?

The last session, was an exploration of Yom Kippur a feast focusing on atonement, confession and repentance. This made me wonder about our Lenten season and the nature of sin. Being able to face our own shortcomings and regrets is something that speaks to our humanity and our need for relationship and transformation through God's love. This is a season of hope for the future as



much as acknowledging the shadows of our past.

The sessions were bright sparks twinkling in the dark days of lockdown. As Marcie shared her expertise, we all listened, learned and engaged with words and questions that involved us all in a spirit of unity and while respecting our respective Faith stories. The dialogue was a reminder of God's unstoppable love and His need to be with us in our own narratives.

Knowing that Jesus was a faithful, practicing Jewish man, stirred wonder within me and helped me understand His humanity at a deeper level – as someone who engaged with His faith tradition and lived a particular kind of life in a particular time in history.

There is always room for hope in our lives, hope to be fully realised as the People of God in our time, which is needed more than ever.

Anna Barber the grateful.

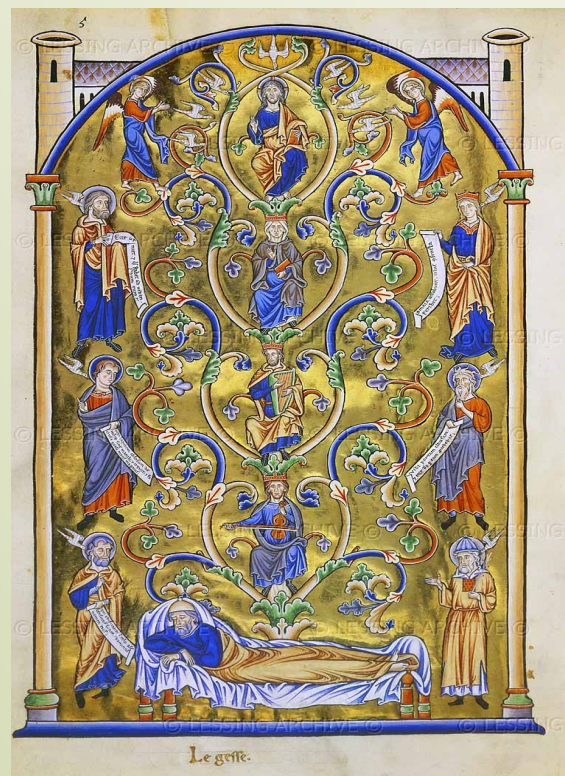


Thursday, 26 November 2020, was Thanksgiving Day in the States where I live in New Mexico. That morning, the Biblical Formation Centre offered a lecture on the Jewish and Christian understandings of awaiting the Messiah by Dr. Murray Watson, a Canadian Biblical scholar. I am most thankful for not only Dr. Watson's insightful reflection Thursday, the first of two for Advent, but for all the offerings the Biblical Formation Centre has presented before and since COVID made travel to Jerusalem impossible.

How can I capture and share the thrill of learning how our own Christian tradition has been shaped by Jewish scriptural and liturgical tradition? It is the thrill not only of greater understanding, but of deepening enrichment of meaning these Jewish roots, when glimpsed from Jewish perspectives, offer my faith and my tradition. All this brings me closer to Jesus, the disciples, Mary of Nazareth, Maria Magdalena, even the Pharisees and Sadducees—all Jews—by offering insights into how they may have understood their own tradition and what God desires for the world. And surely one of God's desires is peace and love among all peoples. These lectures by Dr. Watson and others about the Jewish High Holy Days and Christian liturgical seasons help us recognize and move beyond conscious and unconscious stereotypes and expectations of our Jewish and Christian brothers and sisters to understanding, dialogue and appreciation of each other and each other's beliefs. And that is thrilling!

For me, having studied at Ecce Homo years ago when I was living in Israel as part of a diplomatic family, and in Jerusalem in 2017 on the month-long Matthew studies program, these lectures not only bring me back to the sights and sounds, taste and fragrances of the Land, the Fifth Gospel, but to beloved familiar faces and the thrill of an interfaith community.

Hearing from Israeli Jews and Palestinians about their own fears, pain and *hopes* regarding their situation is heartening, even relieving whenever honest dialogue is possible and encouraged. We are all children of God. When respectful listening and sharing happen, peace and even love begin. The Biblical Formation programs continue to educate us and challenge us comprehensively. Treat yourself and Zoom in to their offerings now and zoom in to Jerusalem when COVID is blessedly behind us. I am saving my money now for then. I am thankful indeed.







WISHING YOU A VERY

*Merry  
Christmas  
and Happy  
New Year  
2021!*



**HAPPY HANUKKAH!**

WISHING YOU LOVE & LIGHT  
THIS HOLIDAY SEASON



## ABOUT OUR NEWSLETTER

CBF plans to publish three newsletters per year to keep in touch with CBF participants past and present and other friends and supporters. The newsletter will share news, reflections, resources, photos and alum experiences. Readers are invited to share a photo, memory, reflection with us. All feedback is welcome. Please send your contributions to: Anne Ben Chahar, the registrar at: [registrar@biblical-program.com](mailto:registrar@biblical-program.com)

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