

Carrickfergus Parish Newsletter

Incorporating the Churches of:
ST NICHOLAS
OUR LADY OF LOURDES

carrickparish.org

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Produced by
Carrickfergus Parish Pastoral Council

Thanks go to community researcher

by Martin Murray

Fr Dillon has sent a letter of thanks and a book token to Mrs June Spindler, who recently completed research into the minority Catholic community in Carrickfergus.

June completed her research in November as part of her MPhil in Reconciliation Studies with the Irish School of Ecumenics.

Fr Dillon was thanking June for the hard work she put into preparing and giving a presentation of her findings at a review evening held in the Parish Community Centre in November.

June's research was entitled 'Desire to Belong: Exploring the Catholic Minority's Sense of Belonging and Integration within the Community of Carrickfergus'.

In the course of her

research June met with over 50 parishioners in six focus groups in the Parish Pastoral Centre to listen to their experience of life in Carrickfergus as members of a minority community.

She also met at other times with three focus groups made of members of the Protestant community in the town, to hear some of their perceptions of the town's Catholic community.

Interviews with three local politicians, two civic employees, three members of the town's clergy and a PSNI officer were also carried out. The result was a 20,000 word dissertation.

This formed the basis of a review evening held in November at which the parishioners who contributed



Mrs June Spindler

to the focus groups were able to hear some feedback from the discussions. Also attending were members of the St Nicholas' Reunited group who had been involved in an earlier piece of research.

The overall picture suggested that what is needed is a more urgent

focus on the whole subject of community development and a better understanding of what it involves and how the parish can benefit from it. Of particular concern is:

- the long term sustainability of the parish;
- the quality of life and sense of belonging of the Catholic community; and
- retaining the younger generation of parishioners.

An evening is being planned for the New Year to give all parishioners the opportunity to hear the findings of the research and to reflect on their implications.

In his letter Fr Dillon congratulated June in her new job as Race Relations Coordinator for the South Belfast Partnership.

Classes 'noted' for Celtic music worship

The sounds of fiddle, accordion, whistle, mandolin and guitars could be heard floating out of the Parish Pastoral Centre on Sunday nights this autumn.

It was all down to a small cross-community group of enthusiasts gathered for an Autumn night class in Celtic music for worship.

Directing the proceedings was Lee Martin, an accomplished multi-instrumentalist, specialising in guitar, bodhran, tin whistle and keyboard.

So far the group has only played together once in public and that was as the interval act in a church 'no-talent' fundraising concert - but hey! the only way is up!

It also hopes to play at the monthly inter-church Worship Watch meeting this coming



Some of the musicians who attended the Celtic music for worship night classes in the Parish Pastoral Centre

January and to meet occasionally after that just for the fun of it.

The night class was supported by Carrickfergus Neighbourhood Development Group to whom the group is grateful.

Lee gives classes in guitar and other instruments in Centres and Schools in Carrick

and Newtownabbey. He is keen to start classes in the parish if there is enough interest and efforts are being made to see if something can be arranged.

While nothing is yet in place, talk to Martin Murray (07815081714) if you are interested in learning a traditional musical instrument.

MISSION 2006

The mission, originally organised to take place in the parish this calendar year, has been postponed to Lent 2006. More details to follow closer to the time.

Who can be against?

From the Keyboard of the Parish Priest...

May the peace of Christ which is beyond all understanding be in our hearts this Christmas and New Year and may the Holy Spirit give us all confidence that God the Father is with us every minute of our lives.

For nothing can come between us and God's love for us. Indeed, let St. Paul's words enter into us:

"Nothing therefore can come between us and the love of Christ, even if we are hassled or worried, or being persecuted, or lacking food or clothes, or being threatened or even attacked. These are the trials through which we triumph, by the power of Him who loved us.

For I am certain of this: neither death nor life, no angel, no prince, nothing that exists, nothing still to come, not any power, or height or depth, nor any created thing, can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Paul to the Romans 8.

The Parish of Carrickfergus suffered a loss in 2005 when Fr Cosgrove was asked by the bishop to be the Parish Priest of Larne. Fr Cosgrove was with you for eight and a half years and during that time he built up two beautiful churches. These are fitting places in which to worship God.

My first experience of the parish was when I arrived one sunny Sunday morning in mid-August. I saw the beautifully maintained grounds and Church at Carrickfergus and the equally beautiful Church at Whitehead. I thought "This is amazing." I still feel the same way. So credit to Fr Michael for leading the work. Thank you to him for building up the parish faith community I come across.

When I first heard of my appointment, I looked up the Parish website. There I saw a whole raft of activities and interest groups. Very impressive! I also noted that the web site was up to date. That doesn't happen in every parish!

I am writing this short piece on a Wednesday afternoon, the 7th December. It's now 4.35 p.m. it's dark outside and – surprise, surprise – it is raining. The sunny days of mid-August have passed and it is now that time of the year when the weather is cold and wet and the hours of daylight are short. Yet I have with me the warmth of the welcome I received here in August.

Thank you to all parishioners. Thank you for your support, your encouragement and your prayers. Thank you also to the members of the Inter-Church group with whom I meet with every month. This is important work and please God it will continue to develop. There is a significant level of inter-Church activity taking place and I would like to ask you all to keep this aspect of the Parish in your prayers.

Let's step into 2006 together. Let's keep Christ as the focus of our daily lives and grow to have more and more trust in Him.

"With God on our side who can be against us? Since God did not spare his only Son, but gave Him up to benefit us all, we may be certain, after such a gift, that He will not refuse anything He can give."

Paul to the Romans

Fr Sean Dillon



Annual bereavement Mass

by Margaret Jervis

The annual Bereavement Mass was held on Friday 16th December.

During this special liturgy candles bearing the name of the people who have died in our Parish over the last 12 months is carried by members, of the family to the altar and placed there for the duration of the Mass.

This candle can be collected after Mass and kept by the family.

Also during the Mass, the Paschal Candle and November Dead List are carried to the altar and placed there to remember all our families who have gone before us.

The Bereavement Mass evolved from the recognition that we, as a Parish, needed to give a real and visible support to those of our Parish who had suffered a bereavement over the past year. As we discussed

and planned how to give this care and support, we realized that all of us have been bereaved at some time and we wish to include everyone in our Mass, giving particular recognition to the recently deceased.

We have now celebrated our third annual Bereavement Mass and we are still in the process of improving our understanding of the needs and wishes of those of our Parish Family who need our support.

So our Bereavement Mass is a service for all of our Parish and all are welcome.

Tea and coffee were available in the Parish Community Centre afterwards, where those attending chatted and remember their loved ones.

Speaker 'inspires' joint cell meeting

by Des Donnelly

An Orthodox Priest of the Antiochian Rite was the guest speaker at the last joint cell meeting, three of which are held annually by St Nicholas' Parish Cells.

Fr Irenaeus helped to provide a very inspiring and informative meeting.

Fr Irenaeus has a church in East Belfast and teaches in the Belfast Bible College.

Accompanying him were a number of young students, European and American, all Protestants. Some of his parishioners also attended.

The Cells Steering Group approached Fr Irenaeus because of an item that appeared in one of the Sunday bulletins. The Redemptorists publish these. The item was the 'Jesus Prayer' which has its origins in the Eastern Church from the early sixth century.

'LORD JESUS CHRIST SON OF GOD, HAVE MERCY ON ME, A SINNER'. This prayer is short and simple and is repeated like a mantra.

Fr Irenaeus in his delightful and energetic way explained

this prayer and portrayed the joy that is to be found in those who love God and are confident in His mercy. The Jesus Prayer can lead to contemplation and inner stillness and more, but to reach that level one needs to be under the tutelage of a spiritual director.

Outer silence calms the senses. Inner silence can usually be achieved only by substituting one thought for another. Hence, the Jesus Prayer overrides our usual mind jumping from one thing to another. With this form of prayer we could be led to deeper inner stillness.

Prayer without words. This can make us more aware of God. We use the Jesus Prayer to do God's will and not our own. Anyone, everyone can say the Jesus Prayer. The only prerequisites are keeping the Commandments and to be a living member of the Church.

As the scribe wrote; "more things are wrought by prayer than his world dreams of..."

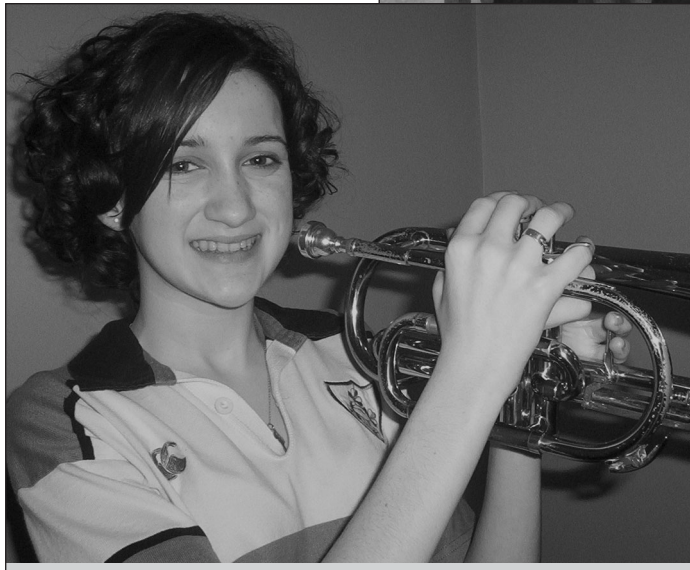
The whole night was exciting but like everything else some got more out of it than others.

'Silver' service for Advent

The 3rd Carrickfergus Silver Band were the special guests at this year's Advent Service held in St Nicholas' on Sunday 11th December.

The parish folk choir also contributed splendidly to this evening of Advent music and Scripture reading.

There was an opportunity to enter into the festive spirit as parishioners and visitors, many in St Nicholas' for the first time, mingled together and enjoyed some of the seasonal mulled wine shortbread and mince tarts that were on offer at the end of the evening.



Clare Kelly played the cornet at the recent Advent Service

Life in the silver band

"Hi, my name is Clare Kelly, I am 14 years old. I have been a member of 3rd Carrick Silver Band for five years. I play the cornet and at present am practising for my Grade 7 exam. We practise every Tuesday and Thursday night in Christchurch Hall from 8 to 10pm, so there is quite a commitment involved. But with the hard work comes the rewards. Earlier this year the band travelled to Holland where we took part in the European Championships. This was a great experience for us all and a trip I'll never forget.

"At this time of the year we are very busy playing at Christmas events in places as far afield as Hillsborough, Broughshane and Ballymena. We have also played in Carrick town centre on two Saturday afternoons.

"The band really enjoyed playing in St Nicholas' and said the acoustics were great. For many of the members and their accompanying guests it was a first visit to our church, and we are all hoping to be invited back to do it all again next year."

Life as youngest folk choir member



"Hi! I am Maeve Connor. I am 12 years old and I am the youngest member of St. Nicholas' folk choir. I joined the choir because I like singing. I like being in the choir because I meet new people, learn new and interesting hymns and get to sing solo every Sunday.

"There are a lot of things you need to have to be a

soloist one thing is confidence, another is a good vocal voice. I enjoy singing very much. A lot of the words in the hymns are stories from and about God and what He has done for us, such as how He sent his only son down to earth to die for our sins.

"We have choir practise every Sunday morning and some Sunday nights. There are around about 20 people in our choir. Linda Mellon leads us. She plays the piano and Roisin and Martin play the guitars, Bridget plays the drums and Anne plays the flute. I am glad we have a range of instruments because it makes it more interesting and makes the songs sound better. I love being in the choir and I hope I will be in it for a long time."

Plenty of 'craic' at SVP Christmas dinner

by Gerard Neeson (President Carrickfergus SVP)

The annual Christmas dinner, which is organised by members of the St Vincent de Paul Society, was held in the Clarion Hotel Carrickfergus on Sunday 4 December 2005.

Ninety people from Carrickfergus, Whitehead and Greenisland attended the dinner and Father Dillon, our Parish Priest, said the grace before the meal. The meal was thoroughly enjoyed and the service was excellent.

Entertainment was

supplied by Louis Small who supplied the music and plenty of craic.

Parishioners generously donated items for the ballot and those who won the many prizes were very pleased.

At the end of the afternoon Father Dillon thanked everyone who attended the function.

This is an annual get together for all parishioners and it would be good to see more people attending this very enjoyable outing.

Head celebrates the four year marker

Principal of St Nicholas' Primary School, Eithne Brady, celebrated her fourth year in the job in December 2005. Here she reflects on her time there.

Before I became Principal of St Nicholas' Primary School I was a vice-principal of a very successful school in West Belfast. We had won the Charter Mark and Investors in People awards, I had accomplished all my goals as a vice-principal and decided it was time to move on.

When I was appointed principal I was asked to take up my position as soon as possible, so on the 3rd December 2001 I arrived as the new female principal. Up to this time I had only taught girls and many colleagues had warned me how different I would find teaching boys. Well there was no need to be apprehensive – the boys and girls in St Nicholas' Primary School were a delight. The pupils were warm and welcoming and they made me feel right at home as did all the staff.

My first meeting with the parents happened at the Christmas Concert. The shows were a huge success and everyone appreciated the hard work of the pupils and staff in making it such a spectacular show. The hall was packed to overflowing with parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles etc. I introduced myself as the new

principal and gave a short outline of my vision for the school under my leadership.

As a principal I believe that the children's needs will always come first and that everyone in the school teaching and non-teaching, must provide the best learning and caring environment possible for the children placed into our care.

This day not only gave me great confidence but convinced me that I had made the correct choice. The parents greeted me with warmth and pledged their support to the school and myself. This partnership between the parents and myself has gone from strength to strength.

In November 2004 the school had a focus inspection by the Department of Education.

St Nicholas' Primary School is one of the extremely few and unique schools in the whole of Northern Ireland who were so successful in this inspection that a follow up inspection was not necessary.

Quoting from the inspection report: "A very caring ethos permeates the school. The behaviour of the children is

exemplary. They are courteous, confident and very welcoming to visitors.

"The strengths of the school include:

- A positive and caring ethos
- The exemplary behaviour and positive attitude of the children
- The attractive and stimulating learning environment
- The hard working and committed teachers
- The quality of the teaching
- The children's experiences in ICT
- The overall standards achieved in mathematics
- The leadership of the principal
- The support of parents and the Board of Governors for the work of the school."

We were all delighted with this report and I regard myself as a very lucky Principal for having such a hard working and committed staff, pupils who are a joy to teach and very supportive parents.

Choir appeal

by Collette Stewart

Although Our Lady of Lourdes Choir is presently all female it would be nice to have a few male voices blending in, anyone interested?

All new members will be made very welcome. I have been a member of Lourdes choir for the past seven years. We practice on Sunday mornings after Mass.

There are ten members altogether including Eilish McKnight, organist and choir mistress. We all get on very well and enjoy our little get together at practices. We have been practicing for Christmas and learning some new pieces for the vigil Mass on Christmas Eve. Coming up to Christmas and Easter would involve extra practice. Easter would be my favourite time as I enjoy all the ceremonies of Holy Week. Why not join us?

Cell-ubrious changes at cell groups

by Hugh Murray

When Margaret Webb stepped down as chairperson of the parish cells steering group, some of us sensed that cells were embarking on a period of change.

I am enormously grateful for all the work done under Margaret's leadership, as stepping into her shoes has been made so much easier thanks to her commitment and enthusiasm.

This period of change

has brought a new parish priest, new steering group members and more new leaders trained up. These tangible things are a reflection of the way in which God is blessing your parish cell groups at this time, with all of us feeling the benefit of a deeper walk with our Lord. For instance, when the cell groups had a joint meeting in November, we were treated to the wisdom of Fr. Irenaeus of the Antiochian Orthodox church. His talk on the

Jesus prayer was quite an experience, showing us a more contemplative way to pray with every breath. It was so inspiring!

Someone recently said to me that these were exciting times to be a part of the cell groups. I think he's right! As we look forward to celebrating ten years of cell groups in the parish and the forming of three new cells in February, surely you too could be part of this exciting period of change when you visit a cell group!

A pre-marriage programme? Help, not for us!

by Nicola McKernon

It'll be irrelevant... we'll be patronised... it'll be embarrassing... what good will it do?

These were our initial thoughts when after the excitement of becoming engaged we realised we would have to go on an inter-faith marriage course.

The months turned to weeks to days and the feeling of impending doom increased.

I happen to be one of the many Catholics in our parish who is getting

married to someone from another faith background. I'm really glad to say that the course we attended last June was everything we DIDN'T EXPECT!

We expected a priest or minister to talk to us about the churches' stance on married life - instead the course was facilitated by a lay married couple with children of their own and they had been through it all themselves! We expected to find ourselves in the spotlight talking about our personal relationship with complete strangers - instead we were given privacy to discuss issues such as

finance, children and other aspects of married life (right down to whose parents to go to for the first Christmas) in a comfortable atmosphere. We expected to come away comparing our relationship to the benchmark they would set - instead we came away affirmed and knowing a lot more about each other. We came away knowing married life wasn't going to be a bed of roses but there were ways to deal with anything that arose. So Christmas dinner next year... heads my parents, tails yours!

Cross community Alpha blessings

by Martin Murray

As the participants in the first ever cross community led Alpha Course in Carrickfergus, sat down to a fine Christmas dinner in the Coast Road Hotel, they knew that this was the last in a series of 10 very enjoyable Thursday evenings together.

Around 30 participants had been meeting since September to explore some of the basic truths of the Christian faith, like who is Jesus?, why did Jesus die? and does God still heal today?

It was a relaxed, non-threatening, low key, friendly and fun time. Participants listened to a 30 minute talk or watched a video together. Then they broke into small groups to discuss the talk and questions arising from it.

During the course there is an overnight or week-end away. On this occasion the group did a Fri-Sat overnight in Drumalis Retreat Centre in Larne in October, which was led by Sr Olcan and Sr Katherine from the Cross and Passion Order, and Pastor Gordon Graham from Larne Elim Church.



Participants on the cross community led Alpha course

We learnt much about the real blessing that comes from being open to God's gift of diversity within the church as we witnessed this wonderful little Larne team of three working together with such mutual respect and friendship, despite their contrasting styles and spirituality.

If you have questions about the Christian faith but no opportunity to discuss them, there is no better way than at an Alpha course.

The course was supported by the community relations department at Carrickfergus Borough Council, to whom we are grateful

• WHAT SOME PEOPLE HAVE SAID ABOUT ALPHA

"Alpha has developed a reputation as an inspirational programme of Christian education and formation, producing excellent results and having a long-lasting and positive effect for those who participate ... may it continue to grow and develop."

(Archbishop Sean Brady, Armagh)

"...It doesn't contain anything that is contrary to Catholic doctrine. What's more, it provides in wonderful form the basis of Christian belief which many Catholics have never cottoned on to..."

(Bishop Ambrose Griffiths, Hexham and Newcastle)

The Pastoral Council – a new member's perspective.

by Pat Quinn

What does a rally navigator, ice skater, bungee jumper and a water sports fanatic all have in common?

Well, these are just some of the pastimes you may find your pastoral council members taking part in.

A year ago Father Michael Cosgrove approached me to become a member of the pastoral council. Not knowing exactly what the council did, I was somewhat apprehensive, but after going to my first meeting I decided to take part in the council's work.

The council is made up of members from Carrickfergus and Whitehead. Currently these include, Father Sean Dillon, Philomena Cunningham, Marie Mone, Connall Lafferty, Selina Lydon, Margaret Webb, Martin Murray, Louise McKernan and myself.

Meetings are held monthly, where current and forthcoming activities are discussed. These include cells, inter-church, youth ministries, the parish newsletter and any other events that happen in the parish.

From our mission statement we recognise that with our parishioners, we are building a community, where all are valued.

In the short time that I have been a member I have found it both challenging and rewarding in working for the good of the parish. I now understand the background work that goes into organising numerous activities such as inter-church events. This is only one example of the work being done by the pastoral council and I hope that I will be able to advance other parish activities in the future.

The council is there for you the parishioners and you can approach us at any time.

PS Have you guessed what my pastime is?

Our Jesse tree

by Connell Lafferty

I first heard of a Jesse tree a few weeks ago, when it was decided we were having one as part of our Advent preparations.

The Jesse tree is based on events and characters in the Bible. The tree starts bare and each day a symbol is fitted to it. When the last symbol, a star, is placed on the tree the story of creation to the birth of the Messiah has been told. Our Jesse tree is made of wood but they can be made as a banner or poster with home-made symbols such as a dove, rainbow, ladder, trumpet, etc.

These symbols are linked to the scripture reading of the day. I think Jesse trees are a good way to give more Christian meaning to Christmas. A Jesse tree made at home by a family is very special.



The pocket guide to St Nicholas' Reunited

by Michael Johnston

The Parish Community Centre was full to capacity last Saturday (17 Dec) as St Nicholas' Reunited held a black and white themed pre-Christmas party.

The event was the latest in a series of social and cultural initiatives planned by the committee, which has mushroomed into a parish-wide development group since first coming together to organise a school reunion in 2003.

The scale and impact of the reunion in the parish created an awareness of the fragmented nature and decline of the local Catholic community, and the lack of opportunity for it to express its identity and to get together socially, especially in large-scale events.

As a reaction to this the committee decided it wanted to address this need. Early activities aimed at past pupils of St Nicholas' Secondary School, but as it soon became apparent that this focus was too narrow, the group widened its 'target audience' to include the whole local Catholic community.

The St Nicholas' Reunited name was chosen because of the school and parish connotations and because it encapsulates the group's aim, which is to help unite, or as some see it, reunite the Catholic community in Carrickfergus.

Since officially forming as a constituted community group the committee has organised two massively successful family football challenges, bringing out around 280 from the Catholic community to the local leisure centre and packing the parish hall to overflowing at evening prize-giving events.

The committee has also organised two Christmas events, and a trip to a Scottish premiership match, Celtic v Inverness. Some 85 participants made up of families, young people and adults grabbed this opportunity in October, many seeing their favourite team for the first time.

St Nicholas' Reunited has also taken part in research into minority communities and been invited to speak at the launch of published research by the Rural Community Network. It has also held facilitation meetings with that body to strengthen its ideas and organisation.

"We are keen to appeal to the *whole* Catholic community, not just the past pupils of St Nicholas'," said St Nicholas' Reunited Secretary Patricia McKeown, whose idea started the whole project off."

The group has applied to a number of funding sources to help with its work.

Members of the committee include Tom Arkins, Stephen and Catherine Brock, Mary Sturgeon, Patricia McKeown, Seamus Cowan, Mark Livingstone, Gerard Arkins and Michael Johnston.

The roots and culture of violence



by Martin Murray

Many people have difficulty with Christianity due to what seems the many violent images of God portrayed in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament.

Images of God for example, who in scripture would seem to authorise ethnic cleansing. There are violent texts of scripture which have been used to authorise and support violence. What do we do with such 'sacred texts' ?

Violence is a major characteristic of our society and world. The forms of violence are multiple. The myth that violence liberates, defends, even achieves peace, is all pervasive. From children's cartoons to national security policies, the culture of violence dominates. Historically, religion has been a factor in violence, often justifying

and legitimising it. The Christian faith has been influential in the Crusades, conquest of the Americas, United States slavery and the Jewish Holocaust. Irish history is violent and remains so.

Reconciliation in our society cannot avoid this all pervasive culture of violence. The process must address the issue of violence within ourselves, society, scriptures and God. There are hard questions to ask; a culture to unmask and an alternative nonviolent vision to be shaped - which might well be described as just peacemaking.

A course entitled, 'Disarming The Powers! Challenging Sacred & Cultural Violence' is the next instalment of our local cross community Journey in Understanding. It is being held in the Coast Road Hotel for six

consecutive Thursday evenings starting on 2nd March 2006 and finishing just before Holy Week on 6th April. There will then be an inter-church Palm Sunday Service in St Colmans' Church of Ireland to round off this section of our Journey.

There is NO FEE for this course and it is open to anyone who is interested in the subject matter and in improving understanding between the churches and within the local community. For those who do take part there will also be an opportunity to meet for a day with other groups from across N. Ireland and the border counties to share experiences and support each other in developing communities of reconciliation. Last year we had a wonderful day in the Glenavon Hotel in Cookstown (with a beautiful dinner thrown in!)

In case you are wondering, the course is delivered by facilitators from the Irish School of Ecumenics and is funded by the Community Foundation for NI as part of the E U Special Programme for Peace & Reconciliation - Phase II (Cross-border Consortium).

CHILDREN'S CORNER

Complete the crossword



Across:

- 3 - The baby himself! (5)
- 6 - Mary's husband (6)
- 8 - What the angels wished for the earth: (5)
- 9 - Jesus' first bed: (6)
- 10 - The angels sang hymns of (6)

Down:

- 1 - Jesus' mother: (4)
- 2 - Where Jesus was born: (9)
- 4 - It led the wise men: (4)
- 5 - They were watching their flocks: (9)
- 7 - One of the heavenly host: (5)