

As you read this we will be in Advent and preparing for the joy of Christmas. As Moravians, our stars will soon be shining brightly. The origin of our star is well known as the idea of a geometry teacher who wanted a practical way of teaching angles, typical of Moravian education to offer hands on experience and pleasure in learning.

For many of us, pleasure over the years has come from reading books and receiving them as presents. The pleasure of reading brings many benefits, including escaping to different places, exploring emotions, becoming inventive and being prepared to stick with something to the end. It is sad that the UK is facing a reading crisis with fewer than 40% of young girls (aged 8-18) now enjoy reading for pleasure: it is much lower for boys.

Research suggests this is due to several factors: Covid, austerity, addiction to social media and the internet. The latter two mean that our attention span is shorter and so reduces our willingness to spend hours with a book. This in turn must have a negative impact upon education. Personally, I learned so much from the wide variety of books I read as a child. How about you?

According to the author Katherine Rundell¹ 'it has never been more necessary that we teach children how to think, to love, to delight, to protect their freedom.' Books can do all this in a way that social media does not.

Moravian schools across the world are based on principles of encouraging young people to be curious and to ask questions. Books are a key element of giving a child access to both questions and answers. Our world is becoming divided – either you agree or you are wrong. Books can help us to learn how to consider different viewpoints, to listen to alternatives and hence to debate. Hatred can be replaced by respect and understanding, learned by exploring and respecting different ideas.

Jesus came into our world at Christmas. As a baby he received many very different gifts. Throughout his life he told so many stories as a way of helping his listeners understand his message. As we are discovering through our devotional papers, those stories still hold real and important messages for us today. Plus, there is the sheer pleasure of hearing stories that we probably heard and read as young children.

As we share the joy of Christmas we can:

- let our Moravian stars shine brightly and remind us of their origin;
- let us find a way of sharing the pleasure of reading with others, young and old.

Books can be a great gift so reflect who may appreciate a book this Christmas, share one you have read and enjoyed or read to a young child. Each will fire the imagination.

I wish you each a joyful Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Sr Mary Holmes

¹ A fantasy children's novelist who undertook the research quoted here.