



FORT MASSEY STAR



Advent/Christmas 2008

www.fortmasseychurch.com

MINISTER'S CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

A little boy once asked his mother where he came from, and also where she had come from as a baby. His mother gave him the tall tale about a beautiful white-feathered bird who left babies on roof tops. So the boy ran into the next room and asked his grandmother where she had come from. Again, a story about that bird.

The boy scampered back to his playmate outside. "You know," he said, "there hasn't been a normal birth in our family for three generations."

The central figures in the Christmas story are the mother and baby. It is somewhat unusual in that sense. Most of our history books are *not* filled with the stories of mothers and babies. They are filled instead with the tales of kings and heroes conquering and taking territory, great battles and generals. Even Biblical history contains many more men than women. We read of David and Solomon, Moses and Abraham, Amos and Hosea.

But the story of Christmas is different. It is not the story of war, nor is it a time to remember a battle, a victory, or even a moment in the history of a nation exactly. It is the story of a birth. A mother and a baby, a symbol of love. There is likely no clearer picture of faithfulness in love because infants are totally dependent, and most mothers totally in love with this tiny morsel of humanity. God, then, is seen not as a mighty warrior, but in a baby.

This love we refer to as God is within us all. It can be experienced among us in the simplest of ways - in the unexpected, the small, the overlooked. As we get caught up during these final few weeks in the gift buying and lists, in the turkey dinners and the trimmings, in the tinsel and glitter, may we remember that it all began with a mother and a baby.

And may we begin to live the life of the Kingdom - a life where the first shall be made last, and a little child shall lead us...

Happy Christmas,

Trent Cleveland-Thompson



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FORT MASSEY CHRISTMAS SCHEDULE OF WORSHIP SERVICES

Dec 14, Advent III, the children & youth will be presenting the annual White Gift Service at 10:30. Wrap up non-perishable foods in white tissue paper.

Dec 21, Advent IV, we will enjoy Christmas music at our 10:30 Service.

Dec 24, Christmas Eve, we will observe the sacrament of Infant Baptism at our 7 pm Family Service.

Dec 28, Christmas I, we will have a service of Lessons & Carols at 10:30. Please sign-up on the easel in the Tobin St. lobby to do a reading. Children (young & old) are invited to show & tell a favourite toy with the congregation.

Jan 4, Christmas II, New Year's Communion will be observed at our 10:30 Service.

“A CHRISTMAS LETTER TO S-”

I am a Sunday school teacher at the George Street United Church. Christmas is coming, and that means a Christmas pageant. If the material in the story of Jesus' birth is not history, then I don't know what to do about our children's Christmas pageant and still be true to this new understanding of the Jesus birth stories as myth. Would you give me some suggestions as to how I might handle this quickly? Christmas will soon be here.

Dear Penny,

Why is it that people think that something has to be historically accurate in order to be portrayed dramatically? No, of course it is not history that a star announced Jesus' birth. Stars were used to announce a number of historic births in the Jewish tradition, Isaac and Moses among them. It is not history that a star can wander across the sky so slowly that wise men can keep up with it or that this star can actually stop over wherever the wise men are supposed to dismount. It is not history that Middle Eastern magi will follow a star to the birthplace of a new king of the Jews, who in fact is said to be the son of a carpenter. Neither do angels sing to hillside shepherds in the middle of the night to tell them about the birth of a baby in Bethlehem. Shepherds do not then go to find this child in a crowded village with no clues other than that the babe is wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

That, however, is not what these narratives are about. The gospel writers knew that they were not writing history, they knew they were creating an interpretive portrait. That is also what you are doing when you present their portrait in a pageant. Why not then open the pageant with the words, "Once upon a time." Would that not signal that this is not history but like all great myths is still profoundly true and significantly important?

“No, of course it is not history that a star announced Jesus' birth.”

Perhaps you might also present a commentary to accompany the pageant. That commentary could then explain the sources on which the gospel writers were drawing for their details and thereby explain the meaning of these symbols. For example scholars know today that Matthew's story of the wise men and the gifts of gold and frankincense come out of Isaiah 60, where kings come to the brightness of God's rising, they come on camels and they bring gold and frankincense. The star in the East is lifted out of the Balaam and Balak story in Numbers 22-24. The manger/crib is a reference to Isaiah 1. The swaddling clothes come out of the Wisdom of Solomon and on and on we could go. A friend of mine who is a priest in the Church of England tried to write a contemporary version of the Christmas story but found it had little appeal to his audience. I do not think people respond to attempts to take the mystery out of an ancient tale. That does not mean, however, that they think the ancient tale is literally true or actually believable.

Perhaps we ought not to worry that for a few days each year people suspend their rational faculties and enter a world of magic where stars do wander and angels do sing and wise men do travel and virgins do conceive. There is enough time each year to deal with reality, maybe Christmas is the time for pretending.

What is important is that we need to know that pretending is exactly what we are doing.

-John Shelby Spong

Margaret Rolfe from Australia, writes:

I would like to add to your ideas about the Christmas story expressed in a recent question and answer feature in your column. Yes, as you say, tell it as a "once upon a time" story, but tell it as a story with meanings: A story about hope

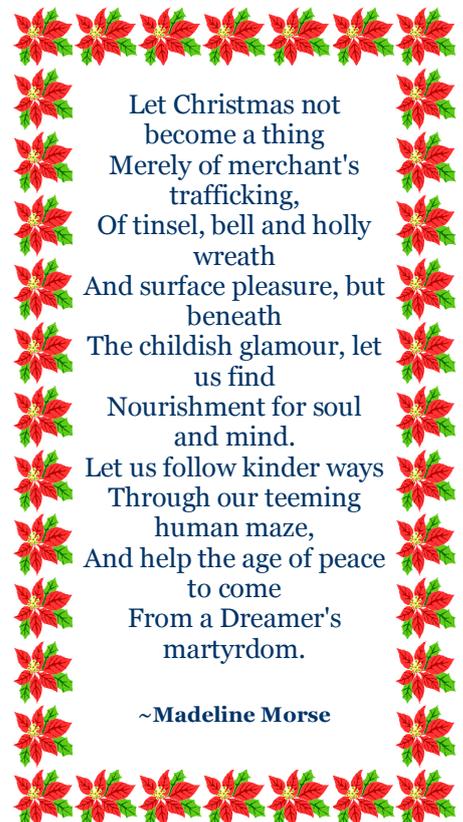
(because all babies are about hope for the future); a story for ordinary people (because the angels appeared to shepherds); a story about a star (a symbol of light in a dark world); a story about wise men (the search for wisdom); a story about love (Mary and Joseph's love for their baby born in dubious and uncomfortable circumstances); a story about angels (if God is love, then angels are messengers of love); and a story, above all, about peace and goodwill on Earth! We all need that story. We all suspend belief when it comes to turtles racing hares, but we all can get the message.

Dear Margaret,

I like your ideas, so I will just pass them on to my readers. Maybe we will have some terrific Christmas pageants this year all around the world.

-John Shelby Spong

(Minister's Note: Bishop Spong's books are widely read and still somewhat controversial to many Christians. What do you think?)



UNITED CHURCH ISSUES CALL TO ACTION FOR CONGO

Toronto: The United Church of Canada is calling on its members to take action in support of the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The church's call to action comes in response to growing concerns over the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis unfolding in the eastern province of North Kivu. Fighting between armed rebel groups and the armed forces of the DRC recently escalated in the east with attacks on Goma, the capital of the province of North Kivu.

The United Church of Canada's partner in the region, Église du Christ au Congo (ECC), is working with other agencies to provide humanitarian relief and offer shelter in churches and homes for those seeking refuge.

"The humanitarian situation in North Kivu is catastrophic," says the Rev. Milenge Mwenelwata. "More than 1.5 million people are without shelter, food, and water, and are displaced each day with no destination, fleeing hostilities. The population is without assistance."

In October, renewed violence drove 250,000 people from their homes, adding to the million-and-a-half people already displaced in the province, almost one-third of its population. Since 1998, an estimated five million people have died in the DRC from conflict and related consequences. Rape, forced prostitution, and abduction of civilians as sex slaves are widespread. Perpetrators of these crimes mostly go unpunished.

The causes of this long-standing conflict are complex, and include a breakdown of the state, the legacies of Mobutu Sese Seko's 31-year regime, the lingering aftermath of the genocide in neighbouring Rwanda, and competition over the DRC's vast natural resources.

The Amani Program (amani is Swahili for peace), signed during the Goma conference in January 2008, established a disarmament and mobilization process and laid the foundations

for a reconstruction program in the region. All the Congolese armed groups, including the Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple (CNDP), accepted it. In early October, the CNDP reneged on its promises and renewed its military operations.

"The people of Congo are yearning for peace," explains Wendy Gichuru, The United Church of Canada's regional coordinator for East and Central Africa. "This new crisis is undermining their advances toward peace and democratization, which had been supported in large part by the international community and Canada."

Gichuru adds that the United Church has already allocated some emergency response funding to support partners' humanitarian and relief efforts in the region.

Through Église du Christ au Congo and Action by Churches Together (ACT) International, the first interventions have concentrated on water supply, small-scale food and other assistance, and supply of medicine to the looted medical facilities of the area. Despite the lack of humanitarian access, several ACT International members have been able to deliver some initial assistance.

The United Church is also participating in the ecumenical coalition KAIROS' appeal to the Canadian government to actively work for peace and justice for the Congolese people.

The United Church's call to action for the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo is asking church members to

* write to Prime Minister Stephen Harper, calling on Canada to actively support peace and respect for human rights in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

* pray for the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo as they strive for peace and harmony in their country.

* contribute to the United for Peace Campaign, increase support to the Mission and Service Fund, or earmark a designated donation to the "Eastern DRC Crisis." Individuals can either donate online at www.united-church.ca or mail cheques to Financial Services Unit, The United Church of Canada, 3250 Bloor St. West, Suite 300, Toronto, ON M8X 2Y4. (More detail on the website.)

For details regarding this call to action for the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo, please visit The United Church of Canada's website at www.united-church.ca.

For more information, please contact: Mary-Frances Denis
Communications Officer
The United Church of Canada
416-231-7680 ext. 2016 (office)
1-800-268-3781 ext. 2016 (toll-free)
mdenis@united-church.ca

A GREAT CHRISTMAS CARD IDEA

When doing your Christmas cards this year, take one card and send it to the address below. If we pass this on and everyone sends one card, think of how many cards these wonderful special people who have sacrificed so much would get. You can send a Christmas Card to our Canadian troops in Afghanistan [free of charge](#).

Mail to:

Any Canadian Forces Member
OP Athena,
PO Box 5058 Stn Forces,
Belleville, ON
K8N 5W6

Submitted by a 'Supporter of our Troops'

CHRISTMAS AROUND THE GLOBE



Millions of children around the world are familiar with plump and jolly Santa Claus, much loved of North America, with his red suit, black boots and twinkling eyes.

He arrives Christmas Eve bearing gifts from the North Pole in a sleigh pulled by reindeer. Other countries have their own native gift bearers of the holiday season as well.

In Italy, children receive gifts from the good witch La Befana, old, bent and dressed in black. La Befana was a widowed, childless woman when the Three Kings passed on their way to see the Christ child. When they asked her the way to Bethlehem she was busy cleaning and sent them away. Realizing her mistake, she left to search for the Baby Jesus. To this day she is still searching going from house to house on Epiphany, January 6, leaving a gift for good children.

Russian children await gifts from Babouska, a farmer's wife who offered food and shelter to the Three Wise men on their journey to Bethlehem, Baboushka declined their offer of travelling with them to visit the Christ child. Realizing her error on the eve of Epiphany, she tried unsuccessfully to find them, but handed the presents she had intended for the infant Jesus to children she passed along the way.

In Spain, Mexico, Puerto Rico and South America, the Three Kings or Wise Men bring Christmas gifts to children, while in France children eagerly await the coming of Father Christmas or Pere Noel who brings their gifts.

In some cultures, Saint Nicholas travels with an assistant. The old bishop

Sinterklass arrives in Holland on December 6 in his red bishop's costume astride a white horse. In many port towns, he is said to have sailed in on a ship from Spain. Beside him walks Black Peter with a black sack and a book recording each Dutch child's behavior through the year. Good children receive a gift from the bishop while bad children may be carried away in Black Peter's sack.

In Germany Saint Nicholas also travels with a helper, known as Knecht Ruprecht, Krampus, or Pelzebock, and comes with a sack on his back and a rod or switches in his hand. Saint Nicholas gives gifts to good children, while those who have been bad are punished by the assistant with a few hits of a switch.

Swedish children wait for the gnome Jultomten, who dresses in red and carries a sack of gifts on his back. He flies in his sleigh pulled by the Julbocker, the goats of Thor, the god of thunder. Elves hide in the attics of families throughout the year, eagerly waiting to help him. Children leave bowls of milk or rice pudding in the attic for the elves, hoping they will be empty in the morning.

In Austria and Switzerland it is the Christ Child who arrives bearing gifts. In some towns children await the Holy Child and in others they await ia beautiful girl-angel who comes down from heaven bearing gifts.

And in England a thinner version of Santa Claus known as Father Christmas, wearing long red robes with sprigs of holly in his hair, delivers gifts to children.

**MAY YOUR
CHRISTMAS BE
BLESSED BY HIS
GOODNESS,**

Holly, Alan & Family

HIGH FLIGHT

In December 1941, Pilot Officer John G. Magee, a nineteen year old American serving with the Royal Canadian Air Force in England, was killed when his Spitfire collided with another airplane inside a cloud. Several months before his death, he composed his immortal sonnet "High Flight," a copy of which he mailed to his mother in the United States.

Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of
earth
And danced the skies on laughter-
silvered wings;
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the
tumbling mirth
Of sun-split clouds - and done a hun-
dred things
You have not dreamed of - wheeled and
soared and swung
High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring
there,
I've chased the shouting wind along,
and flung
My eager craft through footless halls of
air.

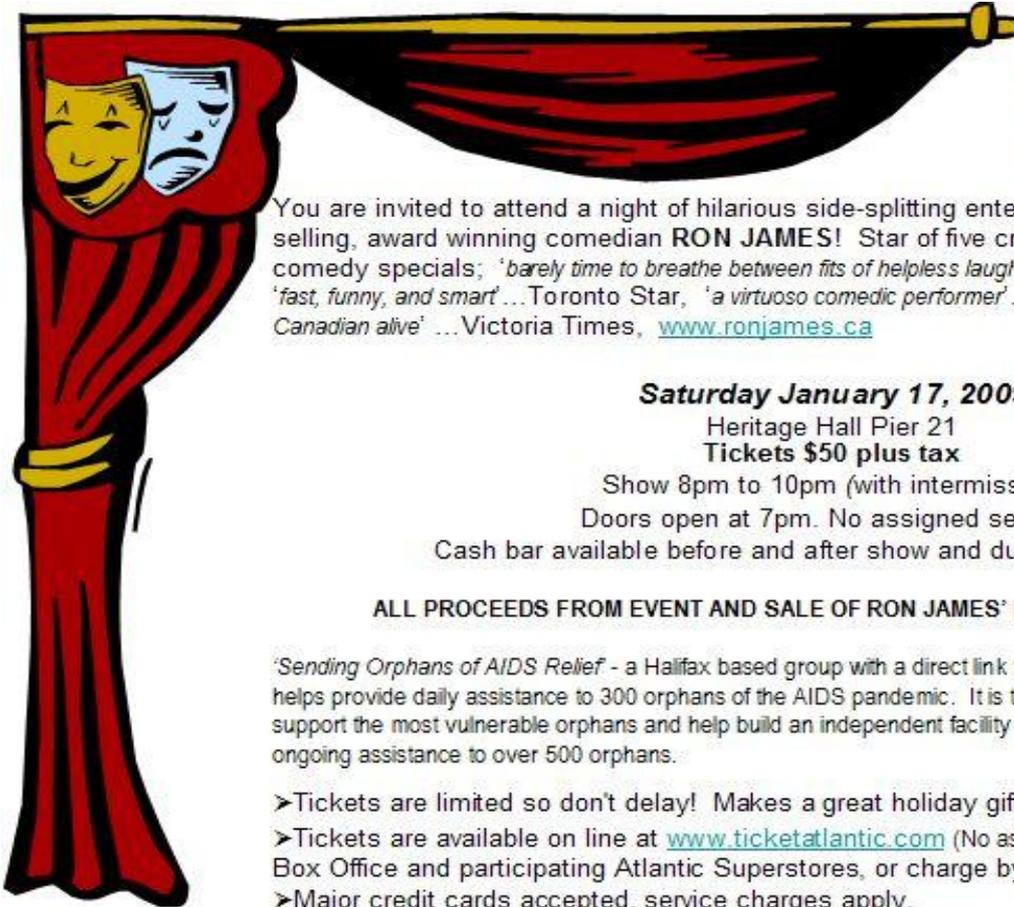
Up, up the long, delirious, burning blue
I've topped the wind-swept heights with
easy grace
Where never lark, or even eagle flew -
And, while with silent lifting mind I've
trod
The high untrespassed sanctity of
space,
Put out my hand and touched the face
of God.

This poem was written during WWII and when I was a student at QEHS we were required to memorize it. Thought I'd share it with you.

Submitted by M. Jean Brown



John Gillespie Magee, Jr.



Ron James SOAR Benefit Performance

You are invited to attend a night of hilarious side-splitting entertainment by Canada's best selling, award winning comedian **RON JAMES!** Star of five critically acclaimed network comedy specials; '*barely time to breathe between fits of helpless laughter*'... Halifax Chronicle Herald, '*fast, funny, and smart*'... Toronto Star, '*a virtuoso comedic performer*'... Globe and Mail, '*the funniest Canadian alive*'... Victoria Times, www.ronjames.ca

Saturday January 17, 2009

Heritage Hall Pier 21

Tickets \$50 plus tax

Show 8pm to 10pm (with intermission)

Doors open at 7pm. No assigned seating.

Cash bar available before and after show and during intermission.

ALL PROCEEDS FROM EVENT AND SALE OF RON JAMES' DVDS TO BENEFIT SOAR!

'*Sending Orphans of AIDS Relief*' - a Halifax based group with a direct link to Nkobongo, South Africa. SOAR helps provide daily assistance to 300 orphans of the AIDS pandemic. It is the goal of SOAR to raise money to support the most vulnerable orphans and help build an independent facility which would provide extensive ongoing assistance to over 500 orphans.

- Tickets are limited so don't delay! Makes a great holiday gift!
- Tickets are available on line at www.ticketatlantic.com (No assigned seating), at Ticket Atlantic Box Office and participating Atlantic Superstores, or charge by phone 451-1221.
- Major credit cards accepted, service charges apply.

UCW NEWS

As you are all aware, we had a terrific snowstorm (over 30 cm) on our *Tea & Sale* day, November 22nd, and had to postpone the Tea until Sunday, November 23rd, after church.

Well, through partially plowed streets and sidewalks, and with no parking (cars were parked and buried in the snow on both sides of Tobin Street), they came!

Set to open the doors from 11:30 am to 1:30 pm, by 11 am people began arriving, and they just kept coming. People filled our tea tables (in our newly painted lower hall) and enjoyed the food (many compliments) and also enjoyed the lovely music supplied by Kevin Robarts and Beth Du-bois playing their flutes.

When the money was counted we had raised nearly \$2000. WOW!!!

On behalf of the UCW, I would like to thank ALL the volunteers who helped

make the event such a success under such difficult circumstances.

Irene Parks, UCW President

FMC AVOIDS MAJOR LOSS IN WORLD FINANCIAL CRISIS

Although the 136th annual meeting of Fort Massey Church passed a motion that the management of our endowment investments should be moved to a national United Church investment program (timing to be at the discretion of the FMC Trustees), late-in-the-year action on the part of the Trustees paid off big time for the congregation. The Trustees were, in fact, hoping to meet some time before the end of the year to enact the motion of the Annual Meeting. However, the

world financial crisis arrived in the fall. Call it what you will, *the luck of the Irish* or *intervention from the Almighty*, the bottom line is that the loss in our investment portfolio has been minimal up to the point of the writing of this story. As is the case each year, a full accounting of the investments will appear in our treasurer's financial report in the 2008 Annual Report, due out in February 2009.



THE BIBLE, BUT NOT AS YOU KNOW IT



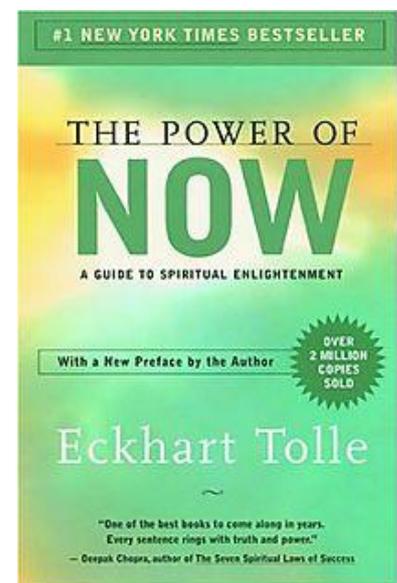
PC's MEET @ FMC

(That's Progressive Christians)

Every Thursday morning the coffee's on and chairs are added to the seating arrangement in the parlour as people gather to study Gretta Vosper's book, With Or Without God, at 10:30. In the beginning it was thought that this group *had bitten off more than it could chew*. However, chapter after chapter, week after week, one could begin to understand what it was that Vosper was telling us in this compelling read. Indeed, she makes a convincing argument *why the way we live is more important than what we believe*. The discussion is open and honest. The mornings go by all too quickly. And another *community of faith* is born at Fort Massey.

The group concludes 2008 with a potluck lunch on December 11th. In the new year we will study other books, beginning with Eckhart Tolle's The Power of NOW: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment. This book has been #1 on the *New York Times* best seller list, and is guaranteed to be a life-changing read.

Start your new year on a good note. Join us on Thursday mornings in the parlour (beginning Jan 7/09). The coffee and conversation is always good.



Most people think of the Bible as a densely printed book with no pictures, but a version of the scripture that resembles a glossy coffee table magazine aims to change that. It's part of a wave of radical presentations of the Bible, including a manga version and a Lego gospel. But how do Christians feel about these attempts to spread the word?

It's the kind of magazine you might find in a doctor's waiting room next to *Cosmopolitan* or *Reader's Digest*. On the front is a pale face heavy with mascara. A flick through throws up striking images: urban flooding, a Nigerian abattoir, a girl eating noodles, a pooch in a limo.

It's only when and if you get round to reading the text that the incongruity strikes you: "Go and sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven." What kind of problem page is this?

Bible Illuminated is the latest attempt to bring the Bible into the modern world. In the format of a 300-page glossy magazine, it contains the whole text of the New Testament in a popular translation, with no chapter or verse numbers.

The images are by turns beautiful, violent, oblique and provocative - much like the book itself.

The text "She will have a son, and you will name him Jesus" is illustrated with a veiled Muslim. One verse has a photo of a pair of knickers draped over high-heeled shoes, sending you back to the passage to find out what it's really about.

The person behind this remarketing of holy writings is Dag Soederberg, a Swedish businessman. And contrary to expectations, he is not a Christian hoping to convert anyone. "I'm not on a mission from God," he explains. "I'm not particularly religious. I'm not telling anyone they should believe."

What he sees in the Bible is a profit-

able chance for people to look again at their world. "We are all affected by it," he says. "Morals are based on it, rightly or wrongly, government, laws. I'm saying to people: this is your history, read it."

"It's the most sold book in the world, but the least known. I want to take it off the shelves and put it on the coffee table."

It's the kind of thing that might provoke tuts and headshaking in the pews, one imagines. "Some people will feel it's dumbing down," says David Ashford of the Bible Society, an organisation that exists to "make the Bible heard". "How can it be the Bible when it's got Angelina Jolie in it?"

He, however, welcomes it with open arms. "You have to understand that what we think of as the traditional serious-looking leather-bound Bible is actually a relatively new format. In the Middle Ages, picture books - with people in contemporary dress - were the way most people read the Bible.

"At first the Bible was a collection of scrolls, then illustrated handwritten volumes. When printing was invented they were produced in Latin with pictures. Later they were published in plain closely printed text, in the common language, to get them into as many people's hands as cheaply as possible."

So, ironically, Soederberg's attempt to popularise the Bible by getting away from its traditional format is exactly what the people who created that format were doing.

If you're looking for an alternative way into the Bible, there's no shortage of versions to choose from.

By Stephen Tomkins (from the BBC News Magazine, November 2008)