

15 December 2013

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Free On Request: office@nlife.com.au

Bible Translator Killed In Central African Republic

ELISEE Zama, a Bible translator in war-ravaged Central African Republic was shot and killed on 6 December as he attempted to escape mounting violence in Bangui, according to Wycliffe Bible Translators. Zama, who served as a translator with ACATBA, Wycliffe's partner organization in CAR, was shot while transporting family members to the relative safety of a hospital compound.

Violence began intensifying in CAR following a coup in March 2013. Many humanitarian organizations have withdrawn from the country or cut back services, and government health clinics have largely been abandoned.

'Reprisals against Christians in particular in Bangui are of great concern,' said Larry Robbins with SIL, a Wycliffe partner in CAR. 'There have been ... reprisals in certain neighbourhoods of Bangui, resulting in thousands seeking refuge on the airstrip of the international airport,' he said. 'Our SIL colleagues report a quieter night. They remain within the security of the School of Theology compound until further notice. There are French patrols now in evidence. We are grateful for the unanimous passing of a UN resolution which gives the French troops a mandate to take appropriate force to protect the civilian population and it appears that this has had an immediate effect.'

Robbins requests prayers for Zama's widow and three young children, and for ACATBA leaders as they prepare for his burial under very difficult circumstances. 'Please continue to pray for safety,' added Robbins, 'and an end to the violence which has shaken so many communities over the last days.' Last month, the UN warned the CAR was at risk of descending into genocide and France described the country as 'on the verge of genocide. Christians make up 50% of the population and Muslims 15%, according to the *World Factbook*. – Mark Ellis, <http://blog.godreports.com>



GyMEA Baptist Church Celebrates 17 Years Of Community Carols

GYMEA Baptist Church will be holding its hugely successful Carols by Candlelight for the 17th year running on Sunday 15 December from 6.30pm at Kareela Oval.

Featuring a superb 16 piece band and vocalists, organisers are expecting over 4,000 people to join in celebrating Christmas at the event. Featured performer for almost all of those 17 years has been one of Australia's best known entertainers, Colin Buchanan. His role in *Playschool* has endeared Colin to tens of thousands of Australian children and his Christian themed children's albums have made him popular around the world.

Garage Hymnal, a Sydney based Christian worship band, who have just released a new Christmas album called *Lowly*, will perform two of the songs from the album at the event.

Supported by Sutherland Shire Council and business sponsors from across the Sutherland Shire, GyMEA Baptist Church Carols will have something for everybody. Commencing with kid's craft activities from 6.30, plus a sausage sizzle, the event is ideal for young families and grandparents alike.

GyMEA Baptist Church Senior Pastor, Rev Karl Faase, said that the night could not be possible without the help of so many volunteers. 'It's fantastic to see so many people embracing the event and giving up their time at such a busy time of year,' he said.

– Martin Johnson via Worldwide Photos.



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Of Time And Eternity ...

CHRISTMAS greetings from one of my best friends who with his wife laboured long for the Lord in an isolated and dangerous corner of the Kingdom, brought this challenging thought: 'We are pushing 72 years now, and we realise with many of you, that our time is short. I read something like this from Don Carson a couple of weeks back: "Ten billion years into eternity, do you think that the car you drive today, the house you live in, the money you now have in the bank, the education standard you reached, the measure of fame you may have attained to, whether you lived a healthy or an illness-plagued life, will have the slightest importance whatsoever?"

'You and I have 10,20, maybe even 30 years remaining. We might by God's grace have another 10 years, and then billions of years of eternity, in fact beyond this – unending billions and billions of years of eternity. We will never come back for another chance. Shouldn't this affect the way we live every day, and the things we count as important every day? Shouldn't it mean that we do what Jesus commanded all true Christians to do, to live as He lived and to be His witnesses, fearlessly? In that Great Day it will profit us nothing if we say, "Well, I didn't say anything, because I was afraid," or "I was too busy doing church things," or "I held onto things that I now see were completely unimportant". 1 John 2.6 says that "He who says he abides in Him, ought himself also to walk just as He walked".

'What an incredible standard that sets for us – for us to live just as Jesus lived, and only by His Spirit who lives in us!'

Christmas reminds us of this: that at 'just the right time' in human history the God of Eternity broke into time and space by coming in the person of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, so that 'whoever believes in Him would not perish, but have eternal life.'

But Christmas also challenges us to set aside our pre-occupation with the things of time and space and contemplate the things which are eternal as we put our faith in the Eternal Son of God for salvation and then follow Him in all godly living.

*'Only one life to live, it soon will be past;
only what's done for Christ will last.'*

Along with all the usual blessings of the Christmas season, may the Lord in His mercy and grace give us a greater perspective of eternity.

- Bob Thomas

MATTERS FOR PRAYER

INDIA: Terror And Impunity In Hostile Rajasthan

HINDU zeal is no doubt soaring in the desert state of Rajasthan. There is a general election looming (April-May 2014), as well as State Assembly elections just held on 1 December. [Votes to be counted on 8 December.] Whilst Rajasthan is presently ruled by the Congress Party, there is a strong sense that the people are hankering for change. Around 74% of those eligible cast their vote. Rabid Hindu nationalist and Bharatiya Janata Party presidential candidate Nahendra Modi – who is proving to be extremely popular with youths – campaigned in Rajasthan through mid-November. Many analysts are predicting that the BJP could ride back into power in Rajasthan on the back of the 'Modi wave'. India's population is around 80% Hindu and officially 2.3% Christian, though unofficially from 4 to 9%. However, in Rajasthan Hindus comprise 89% of the population while Christians make up only some 0.1 to 0.4%. According to *Operation World 7th Edition* (2010) there has been significant church growth in the south of Rajasthan since the turn of the century. In 2008, when the BJP ruled Rajasthan, the Assembly passed a draconian, highly controversial anti-conversion bill designed to 'check rampant religious conversion'.

Harish Gemethi lives in Gamdi village, Dungarpur District, in the deep south of Rajasthan. In 2003 Harish and 45 others put their faith in Jesus after witnessing the miraculous healing of Harish's older brother. Anti-Christian sentiment is strong in the area and the believers know what it is to 'carry a cross'. Harish told *Morning Star News* that during the last 10 years certain local Hindus have repeatedly threatened to harm or even kill his family. The most recent death threat came in early November.

Harish and his wife have a seven-year-old son, Anugrag Gemethi (nicknamed Anmol), who is a faithful believer. At 10am on Sunday 17 November Anugrag waved goodbye to his parents and skipped off to Sunday School. After the Sunday service, Anugrag had lunch at the home of Christian friends in the neighbouring village of Tadi Obri, after which he headed home. Anugrag's friends waved him goodbye as he crossed the little bridge that joins their two villages, but Anugrag did not arrive home. By dinner time his parents had become anxious and phone calls and searches yielded nothing. The next morning, Harish went to the police station and filed a missing person's report. At 4:30pm, family and friends found Anugrag's mutilated body in a pond. Local police were called but took two-and-a-half hours to arrive.

Anugrag had either been brutally tortured to death, or killed and sadistically mutilated. There is little doubt that Anugrag's death was designed to terrorise and traumatise not only his parents, but all local Christians. Despite having been burnt, dismembered and disfigured to the point he was unrecognisable, the police autopsy reported that Anugrag died from drowning and that apart from animal bites, the body was 'normal'. Clearly the police do not want to intervene. Harish told *Morning Star News*: 'I have repeatedly mentioned the names of these people who constantly threatened to take my life and my family in connection to my son's death to the police, but sadly they are not paying heed to my suggestions.' The Christian community is deeply concerned by the reluctance of the police to act. If Hindu nationalists find they can torture, kill and terrorise local Christians with impunity, then security will evaporate.

– This RLPB was written by **Elizabeth Kendal**, international religious liberty analyst and advocate, and issued as a ministry of the Evangelical Alliance in Australia.

PLEASE PRAY:

- that the God who miraculously healed Harish Gemethi's brother in 2003, resulting in significant church growth in Gamdi and Tadi Obri villages, will now do a miraculous work in the hearts of Gamdi's and Tadi Obri's persecuted Christians, comforting them in their grief, healing their trauma, calming their fears, sustaining their faith and filling their hearts with amazing grace that will then spill into their communities;
 - that God will open the eyes of many Hindus in Gamdi and Tadi Obri, so they see clearly the demonic nature of this evil and profoundly reject it; may the hearts of many Hindus be softened and opened to receive the Gospel. May the killers lose their sanction and the police be forced to act.
 - that the God of all grace will continue to build His Church in India.
- 'But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!'*
(Amos 5:24 NIV)



TURN BACK THE BATTLE: Isaiah Speaks to Christians Today.

With persecution escalating globally, **Elizabeth Kendal** calls us to revisit the prophecy of Isaiah, maintaining that Isaiah 1-39 provides an unambiguous treatise on how God's people are to respond to persecution, suffering and existential threat. For purchasing options, visit:

www.turnbackthebattle.com

'WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT ...'

Zac's Last Prayer ...

AS 19-year-old bodyboarder Zac Young was being pulled to shore near Coffs Harbour on 23 November, bleeding heavily from a shark attack, he turned to his good mate Kurt Gillan and prayed as he was being dragged to shore. 'He passed away peacefully, no pain, with his last words to me being: "I love you brother",' Mr Gillan, 18, wrote on Facebook. 'He began to pray "please God, my Lord and Saviour, help protect my friends and help me through this time of need.'" He then went unconscious.'

Zac has been described as a cheeky teenager who once struggled with the usual distractions of his peers but who had a 'revelation' a few years ago, which prompted him to redesign the way he was living. 'He was loving, compassionate and always happy ... I can't remember a time he wasn't smiling,' Kurt Gillan said.

Regional co-ordinator of the Christian Surfers Network, David Malvern, who was a good friend and mentor and worked daily with Zac, said the teenager 'would have changed the world.' Zac's regular pastor, Steve Covetz of The Point Community Church, Port Macquarie, said the teen had already changed the world of those who knew him. Pastor Covetz said that though the phrase 'he's in a better place now' can be overused, Zac's friends truly believed it. 'The difference was the conviction with which they said it. It was so compelling. They know he's happy now.'



—The Australian via NACL Email.

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Special Feature
WORD

Dominic Smart **Rory Shiner**

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A CALL TO PRAYER

Franklin Graham Requests Prayer For His Father

MY father, Billy Graham, turned 95 last 7 November, and I am pleased to say that my family was able to be with him as he celebrated another milestone in his long and productive life. Joined by many colleagues and friends from around the nation and the world at this celebration, he spoke briefly of these friendships and did not fail to point people to the Lord Jesus Christ. This will forever be his legacy which is, as the Bible says, a testimony to the faithfulness of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Since that night a few short weeks ago, he has had another bout with a respiratory infection and was hospitalized briefly before returning home to recuperate. He is extremely weak but his vitals are good. Our family would appreciate your prayers for him, that the Lord would strengthen him. He has been so encouraged by the release of his most recent book *The Reason For My Hope – Salvation* that he immediately began work on another book about a subject he feels that God has laid on his heart. Only the Lord knows what is in store as we move forward in service to Him.

To all who have stood with us – some for 60 years – supporting us financially and undergirding through prayer, thank you for your faithful support. We are encouraged with how God has blessed the proclamation of the Gospel through *My Hope*. This evangelistic outreach will continue for the next five years as the Lord is using it so effectively in people's hearts. We are thankful that He is touching hearts as tens of thousands have responded to the invitation to confess their sins and receive Christ as Saviour.

We value your prayers – in fact, we depend on them. We find words of comfort and praise in the psalms, 'Oh, bless our God ... and make the voice of His praise to be heard, who keeps our soul among the living, and does not allow our feet to be moved. Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will declare what He has done for my soul. Blessed be God, who has not turned away my prayer" (Psalm 66.8,9,16,20 NKJV).



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HERE TO HELP

Top Speakers For Belgrave Heights 96th Summer Convention.

DOMINIC Smart, minister of Gilcomston South Church in Aberdeen, a thriving city-centre church in 'Europe's Oil Capital', will share the teaching ministry at the upcoming 96th Belgrave Heights Summer Convention with **Rory Shiner**, assistant pastor at St Matthews, Shenton Park, Perth, where he leads City Church and Unichurch.

Dominic is in strong demand as a speaker at various churches, universities and conferences including Keswick. The author of several books, he also works with Langham Preaching and has been involved in Faraday Institute's *Test Of Faith* program as well as lecturing at Highland Theological College.

Rory was born and raised in Albany, WA, and studied English and Anthropology at the University of Western Australia and Theology at Moore College. His first book, *One Forever*, was published this year.

The theme of this year's Summer Convention is *The Kingdom And Its King*, with Rory speaking from *Isaiah* and Dominic speaking from *Matthew* and *Luke*.

For further details go to: www.bhc.org.au or call (03) 9752 6855.

**WHO CAN YOU
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IN partnership with Missions Interlink, Myles Wilson is coming to Australia to run his renowned Partnership Support Workshops. The two day workshop is for those needing to raise support, to learn how to build a strong network of supporters and advocates for your ministry, as well as practical tips on how to raise support for your ministry. The three day workshop is for staff from agencies who have a role coaching others in partnership support, and incorporates the two day workshop as part of the training.

These workshops are based on Myles Wilson's book, 'Funding the Family Business' and outlines the biblical principles of giving and receiving, and is a space to learn and share with others in similar positions to you.

Learn more at: www.fundingthefamilybusiness.org

VENUES: Melbourne: 18-20 March, 1330 Functions 1330 Ferntree Gully Rd, Scoresby; Sydney: 24-26 March 2014, WEC International, 48 Woodside Ave, Strathfield. To book, go to www.trybooking.com/EAWL

Download the flyer for more details or contact Rachel for more information and enquiries: admin@missionsinterlink.org.au (03) 9890 0644.

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SPEAKERS:

- **MURRAY CAPILL** – Principal, Reformed Theological College, Geelong Vic.
- **SIMON MANCHESTER** – Rector, St Thomas, North Sydney NSW.
- **IAIN MURRAY** – Edinburgh UK.
- **JOEL RADFORD** – Pastor, Baptist Church, Drummoyne NSW.
- **STEPHEN TURNER** – Pastor, Shore Baptist Church, Auckland NZ.
- **NOEL WEEKS** – Elder, Christian Reformed Church, Macarthur NSW.

ENQUIRIES TO:

**Mrs Robyn Phillips,
PO Box 29, Sylvania Southgate NSW 2224.
Email: ajp162@bigpond.net.au**

CHURCH AND NATION

ACL Welcomes Vic Liberal State Council Decision Supporting Doctors' Conscience

THE Australian Christian Lobby has welcomed the motion passed by the Victorian Liberal State Council supporting an amendment to abortion laws to allow doctors to exercise their conscience and not refer women seeking abortion to another practitioner. This follows recent petitions seeking such an amendment as contained in petitions tabled in the Legislative Assembly recently by a National, a Liberal and two Labor MPs' with a total of 4,314 signatures. Furthermore an online change.org petition seeking this same reform, has over 3,300 signatures.

ACL's Victorian Director Dan Flynn said the Liberal State Council motion is good policy that recognises freedom of conscience. 'The current effect of the referral element of Section 8 is to shut down conversations between the doctor and the patient that explore other options apart from abortion,' he said. 'This is evidenced by the plight of Dr Mark Hobart who is currently under investigation by the Medical Board for failing to refer a woman for abortion in response to a request to abort a 19 week old unborn girl because she was a girl instead of a boy. The importance of conscience is not confined to abortion. In a healthy society, medical practitioners must be free to take into account matters of conscience in providing holistic patient care across the full range of medical services,' he said.

Mr Flynn said that the proposed amendment would not affect access to abortion in the state. 'Currently a woman doesn't need a referral from a GP, unlike many other medical procedures, to access abortion in Victoria. This proposed amendment seeks to remove the requirement that health practitioners with a conscientious objection must refer a patient to someone they know does not have such an objection,' he said. 'The Australian Christian Lobby urges politicians of all persuasions to make this sensible amendment so that Victorian medical practitioners are no longer forced to act against their consciences.'

Rev Fred Nile Condemns ACT Government

THE Rev Fred Nile MLC, Leader of the Christian Democratic Party, has condemned the ACT ALP Government for its contempt of the High Court.

'The ACT Government is to be condemned for allowing same-sex homosexual "marriage" to go ahead while the Commonwealth's Appeal to the validity of the ACT law is under review by the High Court. It is not good enough for the ACT Government to mislead the same-sex couples that their so-called "marriages" would be valid if the High Court rules the ACT law is invalid.

'Is this a strategy designed to put additional pressure on the High Court to declare the ACT law is valid?' asked Rev Nile.

High Court 'Upholds Common Sense'

FAMILYVoice President Dr David Phillips praised the High Court's 'common sense' unanimous decision to overturn the ACT Marriage Equality Same-Sex Act. 'As judges' comments during the hearing on 3 December made clear, the ACT law was never going to produce "equality",' Dr Phillips said. 'This law was about something other than the marriage every other Australian married couple has.'

The court said that the whole of the ACT Act has no effect because federal legislation – which defines marriage as a union between a man and a woman – is a comprehensive and exhaustive statement on the law of marriage. 'It is good to have judicial confirmation of what most Australians already knew – that any state or territory laws for so-called same-sex "marriage" would be unconstitutional,' Dr Phillips said. 'Debates in state parliaments on this issue have been a waste of time.'

Dr Phillips said that while the court had ruled that Federal Parliament has the power to change the definition of marriage, such a change would not be in the best interests of Australian society. 'Calling a same-sex union "marriage" would normalise the deliberate, artificial creation of children who would grow up without one of their biological parents,' Dr Phillips said.

'Most of the gay parenting studies touted in the media are seriously flawed, using volunteer parents who report on the progress of their own children. The only methodologically sound research shows that children are safest by far when raised by both their biological married parents. I hope that federal MPs will continue to recognise that marriage between a man and a woman has been recognised by governments and given status for one reason – that it provides the safest environment to raise the next generation.'

NEW WAYS TO TELL THE OLD, OLD STORY

A Foretaste Of Heaven

THE last module of the year at Worldview Centre, St Leonards, Tas, was *Ethnodoxology*, which culminated in a Global Worship Event on 29 November. The lecturers were Ian Collinge from England and Birthe Papenhausen from Germany, core members of Resonance, the WEC International Creative Arts ministry. Students could specialize in either music or drama.

The course looked at how the creative arts can maximize the communication of the Gospel, enhance discipling and strengthen worship in churches. The module also gave many ideas which could be incorporated into Australian multi-cultural churches.

Songs had been learnt from many different languages and on the night of worship songs in Urdu, Chinese, Zulu, Japanese and Nepali were sung. Students learnt a process for writing their own songs and how to encourage new Christians from other cultures to express themselves in song.

The drama students learnt how to script dramas on a theme or from a Bible passage. They learnt about dramatised Scripture reading and Bibliologies. You've possibly seen living statues in tourist centres but students learnt how to take a passage of Scripture and form a tableau of figures to communicate a truth. Students presented *The Whole Armour Of God* from Ephesian 6 as living statues. They also performed a drama on human trafficking which was very powerful.

THE Global Worship event was a foretaste of what it might be like when people from every tongue and tribe and nation surround the throne and worship Jesus as King. Worldview Centre specializes in training for cross-cultural mission so it is no surprise that such a module is offered. – Marylou Townsend



'A Wise Man?' – Great Way To Start Christmas Day

CHRISTIAN Television Australia's Christmas program for 2013 titled *A Wise Man?*, will air at 6am nationally on the Seven Network on Christmas Day. Produced by Australian Christian Multimedia, who produced CTA's Easter and Christmas shows last year, the program focuses on the fictitious Abe Collins – a Professor of Astrophysics, a Nobel Prize winner, and probably the most respected figure in his field. *A Wise Man?* follows his revelation of a new star or comet and looks at how he and his two colleagues embark on a journey to plot its course, and of the startling discovery they make as a result.



In essence this is a modern re-telling of the Christmas Story, but it also raises the issue of Faith In An Age Of Reason. The program draws on skepticism from within the scientific community, who would consider themselves the champions of wisdom and knowledge, in the face of supernatural events.

The program is based on ACM's 2012 Easter program which used modern-day television techniques to re-tell the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus. CVC Network Ltd. have partnered to promote the program, sharing the program after its screening through their social media networks and sharing platform yesHEis, and directing interested people to discover more about Jesus – Immanuel, God with us.

A promotional teaser of the program can see be seen at the CTA Web site:

<http://www.christiantelevision.org.au>

– CTA via Worldwide Photos

REGRESS ON GAMBLING REGRETTABLE

ACL Disappointed Parliament Set To Repeal Poker-Machine Reforms

THE Australian Christian Lobby has expressed disappointment that Federal Parliament looks set to repeal the Gillard Government's modest poker-machine reforms. ACL's Managing Director Lyle Shelton said legislation introduced by the Coalition to repeal the 2012 legislation looks set to be supported by Labor in the Senate.

'We can't ignore the harm of poker-machines and the fact that there are 95,000 problem gamblers addicted to poker machines. Leadership is needed from both sides of politics,' he said. 'The reforms introduced by the Gillard Government were modest and a step in the right direction,' Mr Shelton said.

'Those reforms included a trial to be conducted in the ACT of mandatory pre-commitment technology before the switch could be flicked on machines at a later date. ATMs at gaming venues were to be limited to \$250 limits and a national gambling regulator was to be established.'

Mr Shelton said it was unclear how the Coalition would tackle the problem gambling issue with the power of the clubs lobby and state government addiction to gambling revenue. 'Social services minister Kevin Andrews has foreshadowed reforms in the future that would include more counselling for problem gamblers.

This is welcome but it is widely accepted that tougher measures to limit losses such as mandatory pre-commitment or limiting machines to \$1 bets are what is needed to help addicts,' he said.

'There is enormous impact on the community from problem gambling. Problem gambling can ruin families, harm children, cause gamblers to lose their jobs and homes and can affect their health.'

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Ramon A Williams - Worldwide Photos -

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'... We... know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.' (Galatians 2.16)

GOOD NEWS FROM ABROAD

CLTC Graduates Challenged By John Anderson

JOHN Anderson, the former Deputy Prime Minister of Australia, delivered a challenging address to the 2013 graduates at the Christian leaders' Training College in Papua New Guinea.

Mr Anderson gave three challenges from 2Timothy4.6-8. He encouraged the graduates to accept that they were bought at a great price through the death and resurrection of Jesus to be part of the great family of God where we are all one in Christ. Then he reminded the graduates that their life ahead was a spiritual fight, but God is their Guide. Finally he challenged the graduates to fix their eyes on Jesus, as He will bring them finally to the finish of the race and the spiritual fight.



John Anderson, as Chairman of the Overseas Council, was a part of a team from the Overseas Council of Australia which visited the College for four days. The Overseas Council of Australia supports students at the College and provides finance for the running of the Master of Theology course.

This was the 46th graduation at CLTC, in which 57 men and women graduated from the Diploma, Advanced Diploma, Bachelor and Master Courses.

It was also a special time in the life of the College as the new Principal, Dr William Longgar was commissioned to be the new Principal of the College.

CLTC is at present urgently in need of a person to fill the position of General Manager, Business. Anyone interested should contact CLTC in Australia at: (03)9881 7800. — John Hunter.



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By Email: using the *Make A Donation* button on our website (www.nlife.com.au)

PERSECUTION WATCH

The Hunt For A Forbidden Missionary

IN Chanakya's part of the country where he lives, villagers have a nearly endless need for water filters. Iron levels in the local water are so high, Gospel For Asia missionaries give away 150 filters every month. But for Chanakya, getting a BioSand water filter wasn't an option – the people of Chanakya's village are very strong in their traditional religion, and when it came to missionaries, the rules were strict: Missionaries were forbidden to share the Good News or perform any kind of Christian activity in the village. That included acts of charity. However, when Chanakya heard that GFA workers were distributing filters in other villages, he couldn't resist the temptation to see if he could get one.



His family had suffered for years from contaminated drinking water. A quality filter would change their lives, but Chanakya was too poor to buy one himself. Rejecting his village's ban, he decided to search for a GFA missionary.

Making Friends From Enemies

Tarachand ministered a long distance from Chanakya's village, but eventually, Chanakya's searching brought him to the GFA pastor. Just as Chanakya had hoped, Pastor Tarachand was happy to help his family – and two others in the village.

Once the filters were installed in their homes, the families were thrilled to see the clean water coming through the filter, and Chanakya asked Pastor Tarachand to have tea at his house. While he visited, Pastor Tarachand shared the Good News with Chanakya's family and gave them a New Testament and some Gospel literature. Soon, Pastor Tarachand became good friends with Chanakya's family. After seeing the effectiveness of the BioSand water filter, no one in the village opposed the pastor, so he was free to visit as often as he pleased.

Within two weeks, Chanakya's family and a neighbouring family decided to follow Christ, and now, Pastor Tarachand leads a small fellowship in Chanakya's home. As Pastor Tarachand continues to minister, he prays many more in Chanakya's village will come to know the Lord. And now, because of three simple water filters, there is truly hope that they will.

BioSand Water Filter

Many poor regions of Asia have no source of pure drinking water. Using concrete and sand these bio water filters remove impurities providing water for drinking and cooking that is 98% pure. For \$32 you can help provide pure water in an Asian village – and a chance for them to hear of the living water Jesus offers. Go to: www.gospelforasia.org.au/ for more details.

– Gospel For Asia via ASSIST News Service.

Pressure Mounts In Sudan

PERSECUTION in Sudan isn't just hanging around: it's getting worse. Matt Parker of *Kids Alive International* says, 'What we've seen over the past year is a real increase in the amount of persecution of Christians. There's real intimidation. There's a lot of fear, a lot of concern about what the future holds.' Some believers are being forced to check in with police daily. Many Christian organizations are being forced to shut down. 'That includes schools and orphanages that are providing care and support to the vulnerable.' Thankfully, Kids Alive has a boys' home that's still up and running, but staff are facing tremendous pressure. 'It's

been a really tough year for our ministry there. Pray for our staff, for the strength, for the energy and wisdom to carry on.'

Problems In Revised Vietnam Constitution

A REVISED constitution for Vietnam, which was passed by a vote of almost 98% on 28 November, has disappointed religious leaders, intellectuals, activists and former officials hoping for political reform by preserving the dominance of the Communist Party. The amended constitution includes caveats prohibiting the misuse of religions or beliefs to violate the law, which officials opposed to the growth of religion can use to repress religious leaders and groups.

HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE ... *With Barbara Furman*

Hospital Vozandes-Shell Closing

HOSPITAL Vozandes-Shell, a 28-bed facility on the edge of the Amazon rainforest in Ecuador, will shut its doors on 31 December after 55 years of ministry. 'It was a difficult decision to close HVO, but the hospital has become financially unsustainable and we don't have adequate staff to operate a 24-hour inpatient hospital,' explained Dan Shedd, Executive Director of HCJB Global's Latin American region.

The shortage of missionary medical staff is due to new government regulations which stipulate that foreign doctors complete a rural year through a public hospital in Ecuador. They can no longer enter the country as missionaries on a missionary visa but as professionals on a professional visa.

HCJB Global will continue to serve people in the Amazon region with medical caravans (land and air) and clean water projects. These are already operating out of Shell and have their offices and personnel there.



– *Voice & Hands*, December 2013, www.hcjb.org.au

Christmas Message Of Hope

'CHRISTMAS DAY in the port of Melbourne is usually a lonely and difficult time for seafarers,' write European Christian Mission Port Chaplains Ian and Vivian Dennis. 'They are separated from their families when they obviously want to be home but cannot because that is the nature of their profession. 'Seafarers come from all sorts of religious backgrounds and have all sorts of ideas as to why we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, and many ideas are far from the truth. So the opportunity and need to give tracts with a Christian theme, usually in the language of the recipient, is obvious. It is the time of year when they will listen carefully as you explain the identity of Jesus Christ and why He came into the world. Many seafarers have their ideas of Christmas moulded by the secularism of this world, even to the extent that when you visit their ships,

some can only say, 'Where is my present?' The answer we give is that Jesus Christ is their present, then we give a tract and further explain that God gave them the gift of His Son as their Saviour if they will only believe and receive Him as such. 'Apart from tracts we also give them a gift of a Christian calendar, usually in their own language, and encourage them to think why the calendar is changed by the birthday of our Saviour.'

– *ECM News*

Prayer Answered

MUKTI Mission is rejoicing in answered prayer. They have just received the required Licence for Child Care and for Adoption for which they have been waiting. There is still an outstanding application for a licence to work with women, so they invite our readers to stand with them for this to be resolved quickly also.

– www.mukti.org.au

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HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE ... With Barbara Furman

An Indian Tentmaker

A TESTIMONY in the November issue of Indian Evangelical Mission's *Outreach* magazine reveals the importance of tentmaking in the subcontinent: 'India is considered as a super power in information technology. Many graduates moved into lucrative IT sector jobs offered mostly for or by the western countries. I am part of that generation. I graduated as an engineer in 1997 and moved into information technology, working in cities like Chennai and Bangalore.

'These years brought me to think about the need for Christian witness in different parts of India. I realised that the impact of all the IT is hardly felt in rural India. I started praying specifically: if God opens doors, I want to be a tentmaker in North India with the primary focus of helping student ministries but earning my livelihood with my skills. In 2003 God gave me a life partner with the same burden. In 2010 we left our jobs and started working in an area addressing information technology needs in rural India. The new area of work took us to different Christian mission hospitals in North India, opening my eyes to see how God used committed foreign missionaries to move to very remote parts of India many years before to establish His work.

'The ministry of tentmaking is the need of the hour. This needs to go hand in hand with full time missionaries supported by organisations. Together with missionaries, tentmakers can make a major impact to show the world around them a Jesus-driven culture.'

Launch Teams In The South Asian Islands

ONE reason Pioneers is committed to Launch Team is for the purpose of mutual encouragement and support. Many serve in hard places, and that reality makes it difficult to attract new team-mates. Working alone can lead to serious overload issues which, in turn, make it more difficult to help any new teammates adjust to their new life. So Launch Teams were started where members learn the main language of the area, giving them a head start on other related group languages. They engage in training and mentorship during the initial difficult stages of cultural adaptation. While on the Launch Team they visit existing teams to find a good fit for long-term ministry.

Being on a Launch Team means that one is freed up from giving into the ever-present temptation to

jump into other ministry too early.

– Team Leaders J & R, *Xpress*, December 2013.

Centurion Run Report

'A WONDERFUL experience in kindness and fellowship' is how Norman Frazer described the Centurion's Run, conducted to raise funds for the proposed Caulfield Messianic Centre in Melbourne. Norman, Hugh and Salma completed an amazing 150km of the 226km route in under 24 hours before having to stop due to fatigue and injury. The overwhelming support from church groups around the Bay and the commitment of volunteers to go the extra mile with the runners enabled them to achieve their goal, with \$12,000 raised to assist building the first Messianic Centre in the Southern Hemisphere.

– www.caulfieldmessianiccentre.org.au

20th Year Of Christmas CD Release

2013 marks the 20th anniversary of a great Christmas tradition, the release of the annual Myer *The Spirit of Christmas CD*. The list of stars who have donated their time and talent to record their favourite Christmas songs over the past two decades reads like a 'who's who' of the Aussie music industry, and this year is no different – Delta Goodrem, Keith Urban, Guy Sebastian, Human Nature, Marina Prior and Jimmy Barnes, just to name a few. *The Spirit Of Christmas 2013* features 20 tracks – a song to celebrate each year the CD has been produced.

The money raised from sale of the CD goes to the Salvos who have helped a lot of people over the years, and this year they're specifically aiming to help families with food vouchers, toys and shelter. It is available from Myer stores (\$19.95) and on iTunes (\$16.99).

Another great Christmas gift idea is the *Tribute To General Eva Burrows*, released in November. Arguably the most respected member of The Salvation Army ever to come out of Australia, this book explores her years as General and her incredibly active retirement, as well as details of her earlier life. Available from Salvation Army Supplies 1800 100 018, www.salvationarmy.org.au/supplies (\$35 pp)

– War Cry.

Dear Friends And Partners In The Gospel,
WE hope you enjoy this 'bigger, better, brighter' Christmas Bonus Issue, with extra reading matter to tide you over the vacation period, and we look forward to being with you again in the New Year (on 15 February 2014).

Knowing God's Plan

(Read Romans 6.1-14)

FOR REFLECTION:

What does it mean for you to have eternal life (6.10)? See John 17.3. How does this section help you resist temptation?

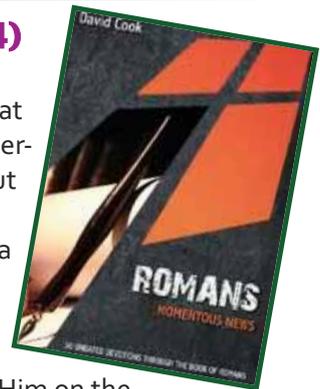
PAUL anticipates the big question: Since grace increases to cover sin (5.20), why not sin more so that God's grace increases even more? If God sees us perfect because of the work of Jesus, why worry about sin?

Paul responds to any thinking that encourages a slack attitude to sin with 'By no means!' (v.2). He goes on to tell us why we are to be holy.

We are to be holy because we died with Christ. His death was a proxy death for us. We were with Him on the cross, with Him in the tomb, and with Him in His resurrection (vv.3,4). When Christ died for sin, we died to sin. Baptism, Paul says, is a constant reminder of our participation in Christ's death and resurrection. Union with Jesus is the key to our justification and holiness.

When we died with Christ, we died to sin. Sin did not die; rather our physical body, which sin used as its instrument, was taken out of gear (v.6).

Conversely, we have been raised with Christ to a new life (vv.4,5,8). This new life is never ending (v.9). Qualitatively, it is a life lived in knowledge of God and in reverence for Him (v.10).



Significantly, to this point in the letter, Paul has not given one command. When it comes to justification, we have no contribution to make, so nothing can be commanded of us. But in vv. 11-14, he gives a number of orders.

The first (v.11), is attitudinal. We are to make the same calculation about ourselves as God has made about us; that is, that we are dead to sin and alive to God. As God sees us, so we are to see ourselves. Then (v.12), we do not let sin reign over us. Next (v.13), we do not keep going to sin's temple to make offerings there. Rather (v.13), we commit ourselves once and for all to God's lordship. The reason for this is that we live in a relationship not ruled by observing law, or by earning merit. We live in an unconditional, undeserved relationship of grace.

The key to holiness is to recognise our solidarity with Christ and to stop sinning. As we resist temptation, God will help us to resist it (see Philippians 2.12,13).

Content taken from 'Romans: Momentous News' by David Cook, published by 10Publishing, used with permission.

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YOUTH VIEW ...

CHRISTMAS - It's Worth The Challenge

IT was only October when I started to see giant, inflatable Santas swaying from the roadside. The one that I saw was advertising for a Christmas warehouse. Printed on the front wall of the warehouse were bold, capitalised letters which announced their message to anyone who would look in that direction: 'Christmas Sale: Lights, Decorations, Trees ...' Now, with only a couple of weeks until Christmas, the lights have begun to pop up around the neighbourhood to signal the dawn of the festive season, supermarkets and corporate big businesses are taking advantage of the Christmas values of love, giving and community spirit in their quests for profit.

The mindset of the Christmas consumer was characterised surprisingly well by a friend of mine who works in retail. He pointed out that consumers were driven to make seemingly irrational purchases in their desperation to find gifts. Society's place of worship seems to have shifted to the shopping centre.

As a result of the capitalist system, Christmas has turned into a holiday defined by consumerism and superficiality. Despite this, most people still see Christmas as a time of love, giving and community spirit. The gift-purchasing is merely a reflection of these values. These values are indeed good things, but what grounds them?

As I look around the streets of Sydney, something seems to be missing. Hidden behind the lights, the trees, the Rudolfs, the Santas, and behind the Christmas rituals of carols and gift-giving is the most important element of all: contained within the word 'Christmas' itself, is the word 'Christ' – the most powerful, yet the most hidden element of Christmas.

Here is the challenge of Christmas to the Christian: 'Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, whom though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.'

'Let the love, giving, and community spirit you experience this Christmas season be centred on Christ' is the Christmas message which should shape the life of the Christian.

– Anton Zhang

Anton Zhang is studying aeronautics and arts at the University of Sydney. He is part of a family of four. His hobbies include music, hiking and fencing.

He is an active part of the Christian youth work at Padstow (Sydney) Chinese Congregational Church.

*This article was first published in **Christian Today Australia**.*

Other articles by Anton Zhang may be viewed at:

www.pressserviceinternational.org/anton-zhang.html



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BOOKS WORTH READING

THE WORKS OF WILLIAM TYNDALE: TWO VOLUMES, Republished by the Banner Of Truth Trust, 2010. ISBN 978-1-84871-072-6 and 978-1-84871-073-3.

THIS two volume set is a reprint of the 1848 Parker Society edition of Tyndale's works. As is well-known, Tyndale was the first translator of the Bible from its original languages into the English vernacular (his New Testament was published in 1525) and he was punished for this crime by being martyred in 1536. A 70-page biography of Tyndale opens the first volume. Tyndale saw that there was no way to establish the people in the truth of the Gospel unless they were supplied with an English translation of the Bible. His prayer when tied to the stake was uttered in a loud voice: 'Lord, open the King of England's eyes'. His dying prayer was answered, and before the year was ended, Tyndale's New Testament came forth from the king's own printer. What is forgotten today are the many other works Tyndale wrote.

A Pathway Into The Holy Scripture is a revision of his *Prologue To The New Testament*. It provides an exposition of the Gospel message, explaining the relation of law and Gospel with wonderful clarity, so that it is a joy to read despite the old English diction. *The Parable Of The Wicked Mammon* is a treatise on justification by faith (the title referring to the parable in Luke 16). Tyndale insists that faith is a gift from God and that faith produces a life of love and good works. This explanation of the connection between faith and works is both biblical and masterful in its careful handling of all the difficult texts and objections to this key doctrine. Luther-like, he finds the Gospel in every verse of Scripture that speaks of works and reward, with works viewed as the fruit of faith and the reward as a gracious gift on the basis of Christ's merit.

The Obedience Of The Christian Man was read and delighted in by Anne Boleyn. Its preface is a brilliant argument in favour of the translation of the Bible into the vernacular, answering all the usual Roman arguments to the contrary. Tyndale upholds the right of rulers and condemns the Pope's claims to temporal power, urging the king to resist such tyranny. In complaining of the greed of the Roman clergy, Tyndale reminds his readers that Christ commanded Peter 'Feed my sheep', and not 'Shear thy sheep' (page 257). He goes on to give a lucid explanation of the sacraments in *A Brief Declaration Of The Sacraments*. They are signs pointing to Gospel promises that feed faith.

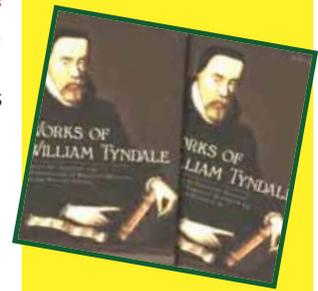
Tyndale provides brief *Prologues* (introductions) to the different Bible books, including the Five Books of Moses, the Four Gospels and the Epistles of Paul. He explains what moved him to translate the New Testament. I quote: 'Because I had perceived by experience, how that it was impossible to establish the lay-people in any truth, except the Scripture were plainly laid before their eyes in their mother-tongue, that they might see the process, order and meaning of the text' (p. 397). On *Leviticus*, he gives helpful counsel about the use and abuse of the Old Testament ceremonies and types, his main point being they are not to be used to establish doctrine but to illustrate doctrine. His *Prologue to Romans* is basically a translation of Luther's famous *Preface* to that letter. He argues that the letter of *James* does not undermine the doctrine of justification by faith.

In his polemical work, *The Practice Of Prelates*, he exposes the faults of the Roman clergy, likening them to the Scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day, and particularly condemning their temporal power and acquisition of wealth. Tyndale's argument can be simply summed up in this way: 'Christ's Kingdom is not of this world (John 18); and the Pope's kingdom is all the world'. He illustrates this by giving a history of the papacy and of the infamous career of Cardinal Wolsey.

Then, we have Tyndale's answer to *Sir Thomas More's Dialogue*, that explains the true (biblical) meaning of 'church' and defends his use of the word 'congregation' (instead of church) in his translation of the New Testament, and likewise his use of elder not priest, love not charity, favour not grace, and repentance not penance.

The last substantial thesis is *The Supper Of The Lord*, largely an exposition of John 6 and 1 Corinthians 11, repeatedly contradicting and correcting his opponent Thomas More. To take the time and effort to read through these two volumes will pay rich dividends, for the reader will gain a crystal-clear understanding of Gospel principles.

— Greg Goswell



'Tyndale saw that there was no way to establish the people in the truth of the Gospel unless they were supplied with an English translation of the Bible.'

BOOKS WORTH READING

Two Little Gems From Banner Of Truth:

FINDING PEACE WITH GOD – Justification Explained, Maurice Roberts, Banner Of Truth, Edinburgh, 2013. ISBN 978 1 84871 278 2.

EVERYTHING in this concise, 43 page booklet leads up to the challenge given at the end: 'Is anything here in this life half so important, then, as this one thing: to be freely justified by God's grace?'

To bring us to that point our author explores the logical steps of *Our Relationship With God, Our Need Of Justification, God's Gift Of Righteousness and Salvation By Faith Alone*, followed by *The Teaching On Justification In The Early Church, Errors And Falsehoods To Be Avoided, The Classic Statement, The Healthy Fear Of God* and *Justification: The Way To Glory*.

While others have written lengthy and deep theological tomes on these themes, Maurice Roberts, recently retired as Minister of the Free Church Of Scotland (Continuing) in Inverness, writes primarily for those unfamiliar with or recently introduced to the great doctrines of the Christian faith. Here is a book to share with a new believer or a not-yet-Christian friend in a coffee shop or to leave carelessly on the bus for someone else to pick up – and for when they want to dig deeper there's an excellent bibliography in the back of the book.

The Way To True HAPPINESS, Ralph Venning. ISBN 978 1 84871 288 1.

IMAGINE walking beside St Paul's Cathedral and finding a little preacher in an open-air pulpit calling passers-by to find true happiness by coming to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and following Him in every way on every day. Our preacher is Ralph Venning, the Puritan known for his learning, moderation, godliness and exemplary life. No wonder people stopped and listened to him. This little booklet brings us a summary of much of his outdoor preaching, and it can edify us half a millenium and half a world away every bit as much as it did in the shadow of the great cathedral. As the publishers say: 'Venning was admired not only for his preaching but also for the consistency of his life. This, together with his powerful calls to a pleasure-obsessed world to seek happiness only where it may be found, are perhaps the reasons why his writings continue to speak so powerfully to us today.' Full of wise words and memorable sayings, this is another book to share with the enquirer and the new believer.

– Bob Thomas

LAMP UNTO MY FEET, Peter Barnes, Christian Focus, Ross-Shire, 2013, Paperback, ISBN 978-1-78191-121-1, also available as epub and mobi.

GOOD books make great gifts, and here is a book that fits the bill. If you are still looking for that Christmas present to encourage a friend or for your own holiday reading, this is one for you. It consists of short biographical pieces on Christians from the time of the Early Church to the present day. Peter Barnes writes with his usual mix of knowledge and humour. Each person is introduced with Bible texts that are relevant to their lives and sprinkled through each succinct account are verses they clung to in times of trouble and which moulded their lives. These are Christians who have stood out for their faith but they are human accounts. You will read of people with struggles both externally and within themselves. Some were excommunicated, some were martyred, some were imprisoned, some were jeered, but all turned to the Word of God for direction in life and death.

Who was proclaimed the patron saint of Television in 1958? Who could grasp complex languages but could not remember the names of his students? Who always read his sermons following his manuscript with one finger? These somewhat amusing insights are intertwined with often moving and always thoughtful accounts.

The book's title is from what many of us grew up with as the Scripture Union verse from Psalm 119.105 'Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path'. The reader will find that to read the verses in every chapter will not only give a clearer picture of each person written about but also provide a meditation on key Bible verses. You can read through the sketches but there will be plenty of scope to go back and re-read the texts and see how these fitted into the lives of these saints of God. It is the emphasis on Bible verses that sets *Lamp Unto My Feet* apart from other books of its type. As we are told at the end of the book, the aim is not for us to 'pick a hero' to follow but to encourage us to see how God has used His Word in the life of the believer throughout the centuries – and indeed is still doing today.

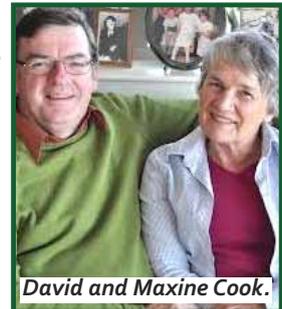
– Mignon Goswell



The Important Message Of Christmas

A FEW STATISTICS PUBLISHED RECENTLY DISTURB ME:

- Australia is second only to Switzerland as the nation people are most fortunate to be born into and live in.
- Australia is second only to Switzerland in terms of high life expectancy.
- Australia is the wealthiest nation on Earth, the mean worth of each of us being \$US219,505, and 5% of us are millionaires.
- But the fifth highest cause of death in Australia, after heart disease, stroke, lung and bowel cancer is self harm, prevalent especially among 19–26 year olds. Why, when we live in what is virtually paradise on Earth?



David and Maxine Cook.

It was the French philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal who said that inside each of us is a God-shaped vacuum and try as we might to fill it, only God can fill that space.

Christmas is all about Jesus' entrance into this world. In John 14.6 in response to Thomas' gloomy question, Jesus says, 'I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No-one comes to the Father except by Me.'

This is surely an arrogant claim – unless, of course, it is true.

At Christmas we remember that the One who is the way to God has come; the One who reveals all the truth we need to know about God has come; the One who is the source of life itself has come. There is a way to God, there is truth and real life available in Jesus. The apostles always declared that there is only one way to God. Saul went to Damascus to persecute followers of *the Way*, not *a way*.

Of course other religions make exclusive claims, so what is so special about Jesus' claim? Jesus' claim is unique because it is backed by His death and His resurrection, better attested by ancient manuscripts than any other ancient events. No other religious leader has risen from death, thus Jesus uniquely authenticates His claims: The way. The truth. The life.

This Christmas, Think About C.S. Lewis's Challenge:

'If Christianity is untrue, it is unimportant.

If Christianity is true, it is infinitely important.

The only thing Christianity cannot be, is moderately important.

Jesus says He is the only way, the exclusive truth and the sole source of life.

Since that is true, the most loving thing we can do is to declare it and warn others that they are on a path which is a dead end street, leading to disappointment and catastrophe.'

'He Loved Me And Gave Himself For Me'

On 3 January 2014, as a member of the SCG, I will get up at 5am, queue up at the members' gate at 6am and then run from the gate, in what is called 'The Paddington Gift' to secure my seat for the day, in the Members' Stand. I will try to reserve the seat next to me for a friend. He will get up at about 9.30am, wander into the ground at 10.30 for the start of play, secure in the knowledge that I have reserved a seat for him. I pay the member's subscription, I get up at 5am, queue at 6am, race for a seat at 7am – I do all the work; he wanders in and enjoys the fruit of my labours.

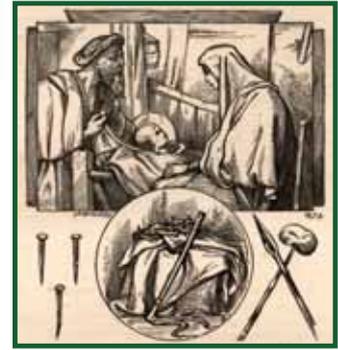
What makes Christianity so unique? All religions tell you to line up, join the queue, run the race, do your best. But you will never be sure you've done enough. If you get a seat in Heaven or Paradise it will reflect well on you. But Jesus came into the world to live perfectly, die substitutionally and rise bodily. Believer, He has secured a seat in Heaven for you, and He says: 'In My Father's House are many seats, I have reserved one for you.' (John 14.2)

Jesus came at Christmas to win a place for you at God's family table, your being there will reflect well on Him. Jesus asks you what he asked Philip: do you believe this? (John 14.10). Then He tells Philip the basis of such belief; it is the words of Jesus, or belief in the evidence of the miracles themselves (John 14.11). Do you believe that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life? Believe on the basis of His words or His works, on the basis of His resurrection itself.

– David Cook, Moderator General, Presbyterian Church of Australia.

'For This Purpose ...'

*AT Christmas time we can get so caught up with celebrating the **fact** of Christ's coming that we forget the **purpose** of His coming ...*



THE birth of Jesus Christ is a unique event in human history because it involved the incarnation of God. God the Son became a human being in the womb of a young virgin woman named Mary. He was born in a stable and laid to sleep in a feeding trough. Angels announced His birth, shepherds worshipped Him, and wise men gave Him gifts. A king tried to kill Him, but His stepfather kept Him safe by smuggling Him out of the country – remarkable events, well worth remembering and celebrating! But why did they happen? **God The Son Became Christ The Child For A Reason.**

There was a purpose to His coming; and He Himself explained that purpose when He grew to be a man and began His ministry. He said to the people of a certain town, 'I must preach the good news of the Kingdom of God ... for I was sent for this purpose.' (Luke 4.43).

The Son of God came from Heaven to Earth for this purpose: to 'preach the good news of the Kingdom of God.' What is that good news? It is this: 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.' (John 3.16).

God's gift of His Son to us required the death of His Son for us. Jesus understood this perfectly well and spoke about it several days before His crucifixion. He said, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified ... Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour.' (John 12.23,27).

The Son of God came from Heaven to Earth for this purpose: to experience the terrifying hour of His death, to be glorified by being lifted up on a cross, to be crucified as a sacrifice for sinners.

It is interesting to note that Jesus did not command His disciples to remember the hour of His birth, but He did command them to remember the hour of His death. Just before His crucifixion, at the Last Supper, He instituted a memorial service whose sole focus is His body broken and His blood shed for us, a service to be conducted repeatedly by Christians throughout the world until He returns. (Matthew 26.26-29; 1 Corinthians 11.23-26).

This is not to suggest that we should not celebrate Jesus' birth: it is simply to emphasise that we should never forget His death because His birth finds its meaning in His death. Hence, to be fully meaningful and beneficial, Christmas celebrations should be tinged with Easter lamentations.

*Why lies He in such mean estate, Where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christians, fear, for sinners here The silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spear shall pierce Him through, The cross be borne for me, for you.
Hail, hail the Word made flesh, The Babe, the Son of Mary.*

*So bring Him incense, gold and myrrh, Come peasant, king to own Him;
The King of kings salvation brings, Let loving hearts enthrone Him.
Raise, raise a song on high, The virgin sings her lullaby.*

Joy, joy for Christ is born, The Babe, the Son of Mary. (A Christmas Carol by William Chatterton Dix.)

At Christmas we remember that the Son of God came to Earth. But we should also remember why He came. He came for this purpose: to preach the good news of the Kingdom of God and to open a way for us to enter that Kingdom by facing the hour of His death.

(Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version of The Holy Bible, 2001)

– Andrew Lansdown, a widely published and award winning Australian writer, whose poems and stories have been published in numerous magazines and newspapers and are represented in over 90 anthologies. His published books include ten collections of poetry, two collections of children's poetry, two collections of short stories and three novels. andrew@andrewlansdown.com



The Centre Of The Universe



IO, Europa, Ganymede and Callisto are the names of the four largest moons of the planet Jupiter. They cannot be seen by the naked eye, even on the clearest night from the highest mountain. In fact they were not seen by anyone until 1609 when the astronomer Galileo observed them through a telescope. Over several days he watched the four moons. Each night they changed their position. The discovery of these four moons was important in the history of science, because they were the first objects in the sky to be observed which did not go around the Earth.

Everything we can see in the sky with our own eyes seems to go around the Earth. The Sun goes up in the east, goes across the sky and goes down in the west. The Moon goes up in the east, goes across the sky and goes down in the west. The stars go up ... Well, you get the idea. It's only natural that people think that the Earth is the centre of the Universe and everything else in the sky revolves around it.

Have you ever met someone like that? Someone who thinks that they are the centre of the universe? Someone who thinks that everything revolves around themselves? If someone else hurts them, they make it all about themselves. If they hurt someone else, they still find a way to make it all about themselves – about how they can't help hurting other people because they are hurting so much inside, because their parents were so cruel to them, when they were little children. Or something like that. You know the kind of person. They don't say sorry. They can't say sorry. They don't check to see if the other person is all right. They are too busy justifying themselves – everything revolves around them.

Of course it's only natural to think this way. We see the world through one pair of eyes. We can see to the far horizon. But in the middle of everything is ourselves. And unless we can read minds, we only have access to our own thoughts. We've got no idea what other people are thinking. For all we know they're not people at all, just robots put here to do what we want. It's only natural that as we go from one experience to another we think of our life like the story in a book with ourselves as the main character. And everyone else exists to make us happy.

Psalm 8

*Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is your name
in all the earth!*

*You have set your glory
in the heavens.*

*Through the praise of children
and infants you have established
a stronghold
against your enemies,
to silence the foe
and the avenger.*

*When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
what is mankind
that you are mindful of them,
human beings, that you care
for them?*

*You have made them
a little lower than the angels
and crowned them
with glory and honour.*

*You made them rulers over
the works of your hands;
you put everything
under their feet:
all flocks and herds,
and the animals of the wild,
the birds in the sky,
and the fish in the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.
Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is your name
in all the earth!*

NEW LIFE CHRISTMAS EXTRA

The Real Centre Of The Universe

BUT in Psalm 8 we learn that what actually lies at the centre of the Universe is the God who made it all, the God who is above and beyond the Universe, the God whose special love and care is for us.

Psalm 8 begins and ends with these words, 'O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your Name in all the Earth.' The first two words, 'O Lord,' remind us that this psalm is in fact a song of praise addressed to God. It is not a poem addressed to you about Him. It is, in fact, a prayer to God addressed to Him. Again and again the psalm mentions the word 'You', and by the word 'You' he doesn't mean 'you'. He means the Lord.

'How majestic is Your Name in all the Earth.'

'You have set Your glory above the Heavens.'

'From the lips of children You have ordained praise.'

'When I consider Your Heavens, the work of Your hands ...'

In the very first line, from the very first syllable, Psalm 8 directs our attention away from ourselves and to Someone else. Another Person. With thoughts and plans and feelings.

A Person who speaks and hears and promises and answers. A Person who is more fit than we are to take His proper place at the centre of the universe. He is the Lord, the Creator of Heaven and Earth.

Not only is He the Lord. But He is our Lord. 'O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your Name in all the Earth.' He is not just the impersonal God who lives way up there somewhere above the dome of the sky. But He is the personal God who has made us for Himself. He is our God. And we are His people. We belong to each other – not just because He has made us, but because He has give us His great and precious promises so that our destiny is not just to be born and to live and to die and to return to dust, but to live with Him forever as He wishes.

It is this God, our God, whose glory and praise and majesty are sung in this psalm. 'O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your Name in all the Earth. You have set Your glory above the Heavens.' Every corner of the globe, every extremity of the universe bears witness to the wisdom and power of its Creator. From the beauty and strength of diamonds found in mines deep under the Earth, to the heart of suns where diamonds are made in the heat and pressure of that furnace.

They all proclaim the glory of the God who made the cats and dogs and dodos and dinosaurs; the God who made the Moon, the moons of Jupiter and the moons of distant planets in the furthest galaxy; the God who smashes continents together to pile up the highest mountains; the God who tears them apart again to form the depths of the seas; the God who sends the rain not just to fill our dams and to water our crops, but so that the rivers will run to water all the Earth; the God who acts not for our pleasure and convenience, but to do His will and to fulfil His purpose. His praises are sung as much by the dance of the stars at night and by the cries of infants and babies in their need and distress as they are by the largest choirs in the tallest cathedrals. He is the Lord. He is our Lord.

In verse 3 we see David, the writer of this psalm, standing under the stars. He is possibly thinking back to a time when he was caring for his father's sheep, remembering a cloudless night when the stars shone, their light not drowned out by the bright city lights but shining like precious jewels in the sky. David does not know that the closest one is 40 thousand billion kilometres away. He does not know that the furthest one he can see is 20 billion billion kilometres away. He has no idea that all those stars form a spinning disc we call a galaxy, which contains 5000 stars he can see and another 100 billion that he can't. He will never know that if the galaxy was only as large as the Earth then the Earth would be smaller than the finest particle of dust. But as he stands under the dome of the night sky, as he feels its immensity pressing upon his mind, he can't help but feel incredibly small.



NEW LIFE CHRISTMAS EXTRA

God – So Inconceivably Immense

'WHEN I consider Your Heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars which You have set in place ...'

And yet the Scriptures teach him that behind the vastness of space is a God so inconceivably immense that the universe is simply the work of His hands, and the stars have been set in place with His fingers. So David's mouth erupts in questions that can't even begin to express adequately his astonishment.

'What is man that You remember him? What is the son of man that You care for him?'

If our planet is nothing more than the dust that floats in a sunbeam, then who are we to think that we are special to the God whom the whole universe is too small to contain? Who are we to imagine that our petty concerns are of interest to Him? Who are we to presume for a moment that the whole world revolves around us?

But the Scriptures teach us that God's love is upon us. He has made us to know Him, to love Him and to serve Him. He has given us life, He fills our hearts with joy and He has given us

the curiosity and determination to search out the Earth and space to discover all its secrets. Our Creator has made us to be creators too so that we can imagine, design and build things of beauty and usefulness. He has stooped so low, like a grandfather bending down to play with his grandson, in order to communicate with us and He invites us, even commands us, to speak with Him in prayer. The night sky with all its vast emptiness can make a man small, but the God who made it all can make him stand tall.

'You have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings. You have crowned him with glory and honour. You made him ruler over the works of Your hands. You put everything under his feet, all flocks and herds and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air and the fish of the sea.'

If only it were true. If only we were able to live up to this great dignity. If only we were able to match this great power that is within our grasp with even greater responsibility. For we can dam up rivers so that our crops never die. We can carve through mountains so that our cars drive fast and straight. We can bridge wide valleys. We can sail the widest ocean. We can put a human being on the moon. We can tame all animals so that they obey us and yet we cannot tame ourselves so that we do what is good for ourselves.

The Lord has made us only a little lower than Himself. We have the power to build or to destroy, to imagine possible futures and to make the one we choose come true, yet we cannot match that God-like power with a God-like love and care for our world or for our neighbours.

The French philosopher Blaise Pascal said that humanity is both the glory and the shame of the universe. How can we believe, as Psalm 8 says, that all things are under our control, when we cannot even control ourselves?



NEW LIFE CHRISTMAS EXTRA

Who Is In Control?

HEBREWS chapter 2 answers this question by saying that only Jesus fulfils the great destiny revealed in Psalm 8. Only He could match His God-like powers with His God-like love and care. We do not see everything under our control. But we do see Jesus. For a little while He too was made a little lower than the heavenly beings. He became one of us. The Creator of the Universe became a creature of flesh and blood, but now He is crowned with glory and honour because He suffered death for us all. Of all human beings He was the most worthy to make Himself the Centre of the Universe, to bend everything to His will, to use all others for His own purpose and plan. Even so, He bowed His head to His Father's purpose and gave His life to fulfil His Father's plan. He took our sin and suffered on the cross for our shame. God gave us life but we turned our back on Him and chose death instead, so Jesus took it from us and restored us to life again.

By His life and death Jesus showed us that to live in God's good world and to live well, to live according to the purpose for which we were made is to set the Lord, our Maker, our Creator, not only in the centre of His universe, but at the centre of ours as well. All our hopes, all our plans, all our desires must take their proper place in revolving around the will of our heavenly Father, whose will for us is that we might live with Him and for Him, for the Father raised His obedient Son Jesus to life and crowned Him with glory and honour. Jesus has been made the Lord, our Lord. At the right hand side of God sits the true heir to the promises made in Psalm 8, and we long for the day when He will return and everything will be placed under His feet, when every tear will be wiped away and we will be made new according to God's original purpose.

Jesus – Alpha And Omega

SO Psalm 8 begins and ends with the same words, 'Lord, our Lord, how majestic is Your Name in all the Earth! Only now we are wiser and better able to appreciate just exactly what they mean: 'O Lord, our Lord, our Maker, our Creator, who became our Brother, our Friend, how majestic is Your Name in all the Earth – the great Name of Jesus, the One who truly belongs at the centre of our universe.'

– Rev Richard Keith,
Leeton, NSW, Presbyterian Church.

CHRISTMAS Means That:

- He descended that we might ascend.
- He was born that we might be born again.
- He became a servant that we might become sons.
- He was stripped that we might be clothed.
- He was bound that we might go free.
- He was made sin that we might be sinless.
- He died that we might live.
- He was raised that we might sit with Him in Glory.

– Contributed