

SAT-7 KIDS Celebrates 10 Years On Air

SAT-7 KIDS was the first 24-hours-a-day Christian satellite TV-channel broadcasting exclusively for Arabic-speaking children in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). On 10 December, the channel will celebrate its 10-year anniversary.

Since launching on 10 December 2007, SAT-7 KIDS is more popular than ever among children as well as adults. The channel has built up an incredible, regular viewership, with almost 80% of its viewers (4.6 million total) watching at least once every week – most on a daily basis. The channel is watched in every country in the region. The largest proportion live in Egypt with the next-largest audiences being in Syria, Morocco, and Yemen.

'It still amazes us that SAT-7 KIDS receive messages not only from children and their parents but also from other adults across the MENA. Many of these people grew up watching SAT-7 KIDS programs but did not stop as they got older. Others discovered the channel in their adulthood, finding peace and connection with God through its simple messages,' says Rita Elmounayer, Chief Channels Officer and Deputy CEO. Ms Elmounayer was a key figure in establishing the SAT-7 KIDS channel.

Children's programming is crucial in a region where 30% of the total population is estimated to be aged 14 or under. When the dream of a 24-hours-a-day dedicated channel for children was realised, the breadth of the programs was able to grow enormously. Today its output ranges from drama and comedy through children's prayer and worship, quiz and talent shows, cartoons, news reports, and programs that address children's general questions about the world.

With many of the programs now broadcast live, and giving viewers the chance to call into the show, thousands of Arab children and their families regularly tell SAT-7 KIDS how much they appreciate the programs. Rita Elmounayer has hosted the popular show *Bedtime Stories With Rita*. She comments: 'It's a blessing that SAT-7 KIDS impacts children's spiritual lives, helping them to know His love, understand His Word, pray for His peace, and seek His forgiveness. Many of these children now have an unflinching hope in God with which to face their futures, and are equipped to change the face of the Middle East, applying what they have learned from our screen and sharing it with their families, neighbours and friends! I pray that SAT-7 KIDS will always bring joy, love, peace, reconciliation and hope but, above all, faith, to millions of children in the region, whom God so dearly loves.'

Children's programming is crucial in a region where 30% of the total population is estimated to be aged 14 or under. When the dream of a 24-hours-a-day dedicated channel for children was realised, the breadth of the programs was able to grow enormously. Today its output ranges from drama and comedy through children's prayer and worship, quiz and talent shows, cartoons, news reports, and programs that address children's general questions about the world.

Christmas Joy For The Shire
Carols In The Park, presented by Gymea (Sydney) Baptist Church will once again bring the joy of Christmas to Seymour Shaw Park, Miranda on Sunday, 17 December from 7.30pm. With a line-up headed by Emma Pask and the ever-popular Colin Buchanan, *Carols In The Park* will be a wonderful night for the whole family. The entertainment will start from 6pm, with a live nativity experience complete with real animals plus craft activities and Christmas face-painting for kids. There will be a BBQ and food vendors on hand to make sure no-one goes hungry. The program will also feature a superb sixteen-piece band and choir with organisers expecting over 5,000 people to join in celebrating Christmas.
– Worldwide Photos



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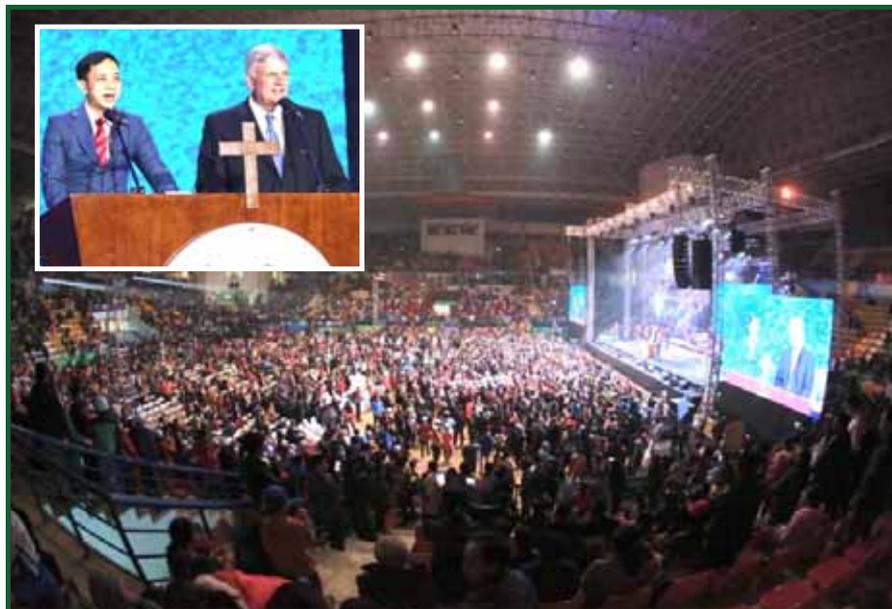
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AUSTRALIA'S CHRISTIAN NEWSPAPER

LATE NEWS:

Persistent Prayers Pay Off in Hanoi, Vietnam



The Love Hanoi Festival with Franklin Graham was the first of its kind in communist Vietnam, where hundreds of churches persevered in prayer ahead of the event. Now they're praising God for the crowds of people who responded to the Gospel message.

Four hundred buses brought thousands of people to this evangelistic rally in Vietnam, when Evangelist Franklin Graham conducted the first evangelistic event of its kind in the northern part of Vietnam.

He preached the Gospel to 10,000 people who filled a sports complex and watched outside on giant screens. The CEO of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and the charity Samaritan's Purse reports that many people responded to God's offer of salvation through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

Mr Graham says that though there is evidence of persecution, Christians in Vietnam are gaining more religious freedom while people in the West are gradually losing theirs. He told the *Christian Post* he hopes the Vietnamese government will see that Christians are not enemies, but are some of the best citizens in the country.

Story: Christian Post. Pictures: Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

PLEASE NOTE:

Following this issue, *New Life* takes its annual break.
We thank all our subscribers, advertisers and donors
for their support during 2017
and look forward to serving you in 2018.

Our next issue will be posted on 15 February 2018.
Meantime we wish everyone a blessed holiday season.

Jesus Bids Us Shine, However Dark The Night

There's never been a better time than now to be a Christian, and to offer to our world the way of hope. God encourages us to shine like stars in the universe as we hold out the Word of Life (Philippians 2). And it's never been more timely to do so than now. **It's official: the trifecta is in.**

1. The unborn child has no protection. It's legal to take his or her life up to 24 weeks gestation and beyond that if two doctors agree (in Victoria). Though fearfully and wonderfully created in the image of God (Psalm 139), the unborn child is not safe even in the womb.

2. The national same-sex marriage poll has delivered a fundamentally different view of what a marriage can be. In rebellion against God's creational design and purpose for man and woman, sinful desires and unnatural relationships between persons of the same sex (Romans 1) are now given dignity through the redefinition of marriage.

3. With Victoria leading the way, it will become legal to allow and assist people facing the prospect of a painful end, to take their own life. No longer content to rest in the providence that God gives life and God takes away (Job 1), the state has become God.

It's sad that the unborn are vulnerable to a parent's decision, that God's beautiful design for marriage is trampled on, that even the frail elderly are not safe from pressure to go for a do-it-yourself end. It's tragic we've come to this, and it grieves God.

In this sadness it's possible to feel overcome, as if it's never been as dark as these times, and the world has never been in such rebellion to the light of Christ. But that's simply not true ... there never has been a time when the world hasn't rejected the claims of Christ. I believe that we're feeling it more now because our culture has swung right past us and is swinging to places we've not necessarily been expecting. Whether we've expected it or been caught by surprise, we Christians belong to a distinctly minority group and our beliefs are increasingly marginal.

Which brings me to my theme: there's never been a better time to be a Christian, to delight in the truths of God and to hold out a better way and a clearer light and a surer hope to a lost world. We are not dismayed or downcast.

Consider Paul and the fierce opposition he faced, as did the whole generation of the earliest Christians. While writing these words he was already hated, ridiculed and also imprisoned, and he speaks of being Christians in a 'crooked and depraved generation'. It's from the context of moral blackness that Paul expects the Philippian Christians to shine like stars in the universe and hold out the Word of Life.

Consider Athanasius (who wrote in the 4th Century): 'It isn't right to fear mobs who fight against Christ and conspire against godliness. Indeed, we should please God all the more through these things. We should consider such matters to be the test and exercise of a righteous life.' Athanasius lived in a crooked and depraved generation. In his day, the rulers of the empire stood against him as a preacher of Christ - he was exiled and threatened five times by four different rulers.

Christians living righteously and lovingly have a magnificent opportunity to be fountains of love, beacons of light and vessels of Gospel truth in this confused and deceived generation.

The church must consistently represent the truths of Christ and the power of the Gospel to change lives. It's my privilege to be part of different forums around the country where I find endorsement from fellow Christians when they see a church speaking with a united and consistent Biblical witness to the creational position of marriage as being between one man with one woman. In fact, Christian people will always be thankful when the church gives consistent biblical teaching on the issues of life.

The church must fulfil its duty before God in leading the people of God to affirm the Biblical teaching of the right to life (especially as this applies to the unborn child), that all life is sacred to God, and that human life is a gift of God from conception; that God condemns homosexual behaviour along with all other forms of sin and provides forgiveness of and redemption from all sin through Christ, and commissions His church to proclaim this message to all people;

(Continued on Page Four)



*John and
Paula
Wilson.*

CHURCH'S REPORT CARD: THE RESULTS ARE IN

(Continued from Page Three) and affirm that marriage is a covenant between a woman and a man, and that the church cannot allow its ministers to conduct celebrations of same-sex marriage.

But while we know where we stand as God's church and people, grace must be the hallmark of our conversation. Let our words and debate be seasoned with love, so that in the way we engage and through the lives we live, the truths of God and the power of the Gospel will shine.

It matters how we engage. May we be seen first as people who love Christ Jesus as Lord, not as moral police wanting to enforce Christ's standards on the world. May our engagement be understood as pointing to the power of a crucified Saviour to change lives, rather than just upholding values-driven conservatism.

Yes, everything has changed – unborn children are taken, marriage is re-defined, the frail can be assisted to die, gender is spoken of as fluid. Yet nothing has changed – read Philippians 2.14-18 again.

Which is why we're not overcome or downcast – there's never been a better time to shine. To the praise of His glory, God the great Creator of all things upholds, directs, disposes and governs all creatures, actions and things, from the greatest to the least. Which means God has brought us to this. The trifecta didn't catch God by surprise. By His wise and inscrutable providence, He's brought the church to where we are today and, marginalised as we are, He wants us to live righteously and testify truly.

I suspect the church will be stronger and brighter and even more powerful when we accept our weakened and less-privileged position in society, embrace our place on the margins and with integrity testify to a loving and perfect Saviour – the Lord Jesus Christ. And I suspect that, through the sovereign persuasion of God, everyone is bound to have a neighbour, a friend or a family member, who's going to be disturbed by what's happening in their culture and look to us for help. Are we ready?

– Rev John P Wilson,
Moderator-General, Presbyterian Church of Australia

'Christians living righteously and lovingly have a magnificent opportunity to be fountains of love, beacons of light and vessels of Gospel truth in this confused and deceived generation.'

A CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONAL

Three Gifts To Make The Christmas Moment Last

Jesus' birth restricted an infinite God to a finite human body, so He may personally understand the limitations of our time/space world – its pressures and its possibilities.

The Magi's three gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, which they offered after worshipping Jesus, depict three healthy ingredients that God seeks to build into our emotional and spiritual vitality, so our attitudes and actions can help those around us.

With daily reports on its value, gold is highly-prized; being refined (not destroyed) by fire. The Magi's gold forecast Jesus' authority, royalty and power. The gold that God builds within us combines alertness to recognise opportunities with the desire to seek and to achieve our best; and the generosity to share the benefits.

Frankincense reflects worship; inviting us to lift our values and viewpoints beyond urgent but temporary assessments, and open our hearts and minds to God's presence wherever or whoever we are. Worship also opens ways for others to respond to Him.

Myrrh, a fragrant embalming-oil, foreshadowed Jesus' death; also recognises that no matter how ambitious, successful or generous we are, pain and death will confront every one of us. But Jesus' death ushers in resurrection, to generate hope, healing and recovery on the other side of our pain. As we learn to let His grace infuse any scars we may later carry, He will mature us with insights, encouragement and time for others who may feel overwhelmed by their struggles – but under-equipped to face them.

– Noel Mitaxa, *'Inviting you to explore God's love!'* noelmitaxa.wordpress.com



PHILIPPINES: Battle For Mindanao Far From Over

In a military offensive on 16 October the Armed Forces of the Philippines killed Isnilon Hapilon (former leader of Abu Sayyaf and Islamic State's 'emir' for Southeast Asia) and Omarkhayam Maute, leader of the pro-ISIS Maute group and the last of the Maute brothers to be killed. Commenting on the killings on 16 October, Singapore-based terrorism expert Kumar Ramakrishna warned: 'Just because the Marawi siege is coming to an end does not mean the threat is over. ISIS-linked militants there will regroup ... and lay low for a while, while rebuilding their strength.' Recent reports from Mindanao indicate that this is precisely what is happening.

Whilst the Battle for Marawi is now over, the conflict has left Marawi City uninhabitable. The city is mostly rubble, all the banks have been emptied and every house and business has been looted and destroyed. Eager to exploit the situation, Islamic State recruiters target displaced Muslims and Islamist sympathisers who are furious about the destruction of Marawi, which they blame on the AFP (rather than on the jihadists whose plot to seize Marawi for their Caliphate started the conflict). Sources report that ISIS is actively recruiting across Mindanao, including in Western Mindanao State University in Zamboanga. Recruits receive a 'sign-up purse' (one-off payment) with the promise of further payments and benefits if they join a battlefield. Rommel Banlaoi from the Philippine Institute for Peace, Violence and Terrorism Research warns that cashed-up ' sleeper cells are everywhere'.

Ominously, Banlaoi also warns that Islamic State is encouraging the Philippines' four main pro-Islamic State groups – the Bangsamoro-Islamic Freedom Fighters, the Abu Sayyaf Group, Khilafah Islamiyah Mindanao and Ansarul Khilafah Philippines – to unify. Lt-General Carlito Galvez Jr, commander of the Western Mindanao Command, warns that Cotabato City (around 60% Muslim and 35% Christian) in Mindanao's Maguindanao Province 'could be the next Marawi'.

Furthermore, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front is exploiting the situation for political gain. During the conflict, MILF (which seeks to rule an autonomous Islamic sub-state Mindanao) took up arms against IS-linked BIFF, which split from MILF in 2010. Though it was doubtless little more than a power struggle, it afforded MILF the opportunity to present itself to Mindanao's Muslims and to the Philippine government as a rescuing counterforce compared with the ultra-hardline transnational ISIS, and the best hope for peace. MILF maintains that peace on Mindanao can be secured only through the creation of an autonomous Islamic sub-state, with local Muslim rulers and Islamic Sharia Law. Not only would MILF defend this Bangsamoro Autonomous Region, it maintains that Muslims living there would no longer have any reason to sympathise with transnational groups like ISIS which threaten the central government. President Duterte (a 'Catholic') does not need convincing – he is eager to see the potentially unconstitutional Bangsamoro Basic Law passed and enacted by March 2018.

Pressure is mounting and Christians in western Mindanao are exceedingly anxious about the future. While the predominantly Christian cities of Zamboanga and Davao would not be forced to join the Bangsamoro political entity, thousands of Christian villages throughout western Mindanao will be offered a plebiscite, which (I fear) could trigger ethnic-religious cleansing. [An analysis of the proposed Bangsamoro Basic Law will be posted to Religious Liberty Monitoring in the coming days.]

On 9 November vandals broke into a Catholic chapel in a village in Shariff Aguak town in Maguindanao Province. The intruders gathered the Catholic icons onto the central table, doused them in gasoline and burnt them. No group has claimed responsibility and residents suspect that jihadists (possibly from BIFF) are attempting to generate religious conflict between the town's Muslims and minority Christians. Late on Sunday 3 December some 30 BIFF fighters attacked a village in Shariff Aguak, Maguindanao, killing two and wounding seven (including four pre-schoolers) in homes adjacent to a military base. The Battle for Marawi is over, but the Battle for Mindanao most certainly is not.

PLEASE PRAY FOR:

- the Lord to protect, bless, fortify and sanctify Mindanao's Christian minority; may the Church grow in prayerfulness, faith and grace, that God will be glorified in Mindanao;
- the Holy Spirit to energise, empower, sustain and bless all those who minister to Mindanao's multitudes of harassed and helpless Muslims and displaced persons; may the Lord provide all their needs and send out more workers into that harvest field; (Matthew 9:35-38)
- the Almighty Creator God, for whom 'nothing will be impossible' (Luke 1.37) to intervene in the political process so that conditions in the south will be improved as constitutional freedoms are retained.

Elizabeth Kendal is the author of *Turn Back The Battle: Isaiah Speaks To Christians Today* (Deror Books, Melbourne, Australia, Dec 2012) which offers a Biblical response to persecution and existential threat; and *After Saturday Comes Sunday: Understanding The Christian Crisis In The Middle East* (Wipf and Stock, Eugene, OR, USA, June 2016). See www.ElizabethKendal.com

CHURCH AND NATION

MPs Call For Ban On Franklin Graham From UK Ahead Of Blackpool Visit

A number of MPs have added their voice to concern over an upcoming visit to the UK by US evangelist Franklin Graham. Over 5,000 people have signed a petition stating he shouldn't be allowed into the country. They claim he has homophobic and islamophobic views and is 'likely to promote prejudice and hatred'.



The preacher, son of legendary evangelist Billy Graham, is due to speak at Blackpool's *Festival Of Hope* at the city's Winter Gardens in September next year, but after recent endorsements of Donald Trump and what has been seen as inflammatory statements about Islam, many are unhappy about the visit.

Labour MP Gordon Marsden is calling on the Home Secretary to refuse him entry into the UK. Speaking to BBC Lancashire, he said some of his previous comments were 'incompatible with what Jesus said in the Bible'. (*More of a reflection on himself than on Franklin Graham – Ed.*)

His visit, however, is being supported by many local church leaders. Franklin Graham has led evangelism events across the world in his role as president of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. He's also reached millions of people through his aid work with the charity Samaritans Purse.

The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association says: 'The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association is working in partnership with local churches to hold this event next year in Blackpool. It will be a positive and encouraging event with music and also a message from Franklin Graham about the hope that can be found through a relationship with Jesus Christ. It will be free and everyone is invited to attend.'

– Marcus Jones, Premier News



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A Decade Of Showing Mercy

A doctor has performed the 30,000th surgery, ten years after he operated in the very first surgery on board the hospital ship *Africa Mercy*. During his time with the ship, ophthalmic surgeon Dr Glenn Strauss has also trained 47 ophthalmic surgeons who will provide tens of thousands of cataract surgeries in Africa and around the world.

Currently in Cameroon, the ship has docked in nine African countries in those ten years. The volunteer doctors cover a wide range of medical specialties.

Don Stephens, president and founder of *Mercy Ships*, says Dr Strauss is typical of their doctors, dedicated to changing lives every day. *Mercy Ships* has worked in more than 70 countries since 1978, providing services to 2.5 million people.



– *Mercy Ships*

New Bible Translation For Malawi's Chewa People

A people group of 9.5 million Africans now have their first full Bible. The Chewa people in Malawi, known internationally for their mosques and secret societies, can finally read the Bible in their contemporary language. Previously they had a New Testament in a language very few people understood. The new Bible, released by Biblica, took three generations to complete. A spokesman for Biblica says the new Bible will show Malawians God's involvement in the world and His plan of Salvation. One lady was so excited about the new translation she wanted to buy a whole box of Bibles to share with her village. Rather than distributing free Bibles, Biblica prefers to affordably price them so they will be better valued and cared for. Malawi, one of the least developed nations has had a confusing mix of Islam, animistic religions and Christianity.

Christmas Joy Comes To Togo's Children

Children in the West African nation of Togo are about to receive almost 306,000 shoe-boxed Christmas gifts. Samaritan's Purse volunteers have packed and delivered the boxes to Togo. The shoe-box gifts, donated by churches around the world, include toys, school supplies and hygiene items. *Operation Christmas Child* shares a message of encouragement, hope and God's love through the project. Since 2010 Togolese children have also participated in the Samaritan's Purse discipleship and evangelism program, *The Greatest Journey*. Volunteer Annette Sova told the *ASSIST News Service* that the gifts, along with the Gospel message, play a vital role in sending God's love to needy children. Since 1993, *Operation Christmas Child* has collected and delivered more than 146 million gift-filled shoeboxes to children in more than 160 countries and territories. *(I once had the privilege of joining in a Samaritan's Purse distribution team in a township near Durban, South Africa. The joy it brought to those children was really something to behold. I*

heartily encourage support of this wonderful ministry. The bitter, twisted and ill-informed attempts by some people to discredit Franklin Graham and the ministry of Samaritan's Purse are best ignored by Christians. Samaritan's Purse and Operation Christmas Child are worthy of our full support. – Ed.)

Doors Open For Open Doors In SE Asia

Christians leading discipleship programs in Southeast Asia are helping hundreds of Muslims learn about and accept Christ. Persecution watchdog Open Doors is sponsoring discipleship classes for Muslim background believers in several house churches. One group leads more than a hundred people, ranging in age, education and cultural background. *The Christian Post* reports that despite heavy persecution in many Southeast Asian countries, the number of Muslims converting to Christianity is on the rise. As part of its efforts, Open Doors has also been distributing new discipleship training called *The Straight Journey*, a series of 12 books written by a Bible theologian and expert on Islam.

– *Christian Post*

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Take A Walk Thru The Bible To Make A Well-Worn Track Along The Narrow Path That Leads To Eternal Life

The place and importance of the Bible in the Christian Church can never be under-rated. Belief in and obedience to the Bible are foundational for true Christian faith and practice, and foundational to this is the Bible itself, concerning which at this time of year we are bidden to pray: 'Blessed Lord, who has caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of Your Holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which You have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.'



We should therefore seek ways and means of learning the Bible so that we can measure up to the ideals set forth in this prayer (the Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent, *Book Of Common Prayer*).

Walk Thru the Bible is a teaching method that uses hand signs and/or memory cards as memory triggers to aid in learning, retention and recall of key Bible verses and events. Knowing the framework of the Bible and the major events, helps to understand God's grand story.

You can learn these by: participating in Live events held by Walk Thru at any church prepared to host one of their instructors; using the six-video series in a small group setting; using the 11-video series to teach teachers to deliver the program to students in schools; or using it by the Do-it-yourself (DIY) method with the memory cards.

Contact Al Watson, Walk-Thru's dynamic Australian Director, on 0418 368 866, or go to walkthru.org.au for details of other resources and events, including their forthcoming tour to Israel (see ad in NL 2017-12-01 p.4).

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– Jeff M. Sellers, Editor, Persecution News Service, Morning Star News.

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FROM ALL QUARTERS

TPTL Sees 50,000 Gospels Placed In Bangladesh



The Pocket Testament League of Australia, in partnership with Global Recordings of Bangladesh which began three years ago has seen 50,000 copies of *The Gospels* distributed in what was a moderate Islamic environment but which now has changed to an aggressive Islam. The workers are now at risk but in spite of this the ministry continues and is bearing fruit. New Christian believers will face persecuton.



Go to www.tptl.org.au to learn more about this mission and receive their Newsletter. Call Fred Strong, TPTL's Associate Field Officer, on 0419 329 334 to speak and sing at meetings in Victoria representing TPTL in churches and mid-week fellowships.

See Changes In Canberra-Goulburn And Bendigo

The Anglican Diocese of Canberra-Goulburn has lost two senior leaders, with the resignation of Bishop Stuart Robinson (pictured left) and the appointment of Bishop Matt Brain (right) as Bishop of Bendigo. Bishop Robinson has led the diocese for nine years after 20 years serving in the Sydney Diocese and a three-year secondment to Belgium, part of the Anglican Diocese in Europe.

The Bishopric Electoral Board in the Diocese of Bendigo has chosen Dr Matt Brain as the 10th Bishop of Bendigo. Bishop Matt currently oversees Ministry Training and Development in the Canberra-Goulburn diocese, as well as Parish Support Chaplaincy and Mission. He has worked in both lay and ordained capacity in five dioceses including North-West Australia where he was ordained and gained valuable experience in rural and remote ministry.

– *Anglican News*



A Website Worth Watching:

An article casting light on the present wave of unrighteousness engulfing Australia can be found at:

<https://australia.thegospel-coalition.org/article/how-to-survive-the-moral-revolution-what-you-should-know>

Ridley College Adds To Staff

Rev Andrew Judd has been appointed to the position of Associate Lecturer at Ridley College. Andrew will join Dr Lindsay Wilson and Dr Jill Firth in teaching Old Testament at college. Andrew is currently a licensed Anglican clergy staff team member of City On A Hill church, having arrived in Melbourne early this year. He is about half way through a PhD at the University of Sydney in Old Testament hermeneutics. He is a gifted teacher and preacher, is passionate about ministry formation of students and future leaders, and has great potential for thought leadership and a productive involvement in Ridley Online. Andrew is described as a team player who will be a great addition to the faculty.



Church Extension Continuing In Difficult Places

Through local field committees, Middle East Reformed Fellowship continues to support pastors, evangelists, and church plants, assisting indigenous churches in Indonesia, Pakistan, Lebanon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan, and South Sudan. The goal is to strengthen churches, helping them reach out in their communities. Specific new projects are sponsored and needy local workers are supported.

– www.merf.org

US House Of Reps Unanimously Votes To Protect Little Girls – Strong Penalties For Female Genital Mutilation

The bill will go to the Senate where advocates urge swift passage. People who mutilate the genitals of young girls in the name of religion or culture in the US may soon face tough new penalties. The House of Representatives voted unanimously for the *Stopping Abusive Female Exploitation Act, (SAFE)*. The legislation triples the penalty for female genital mutilation from five to 15 years in prison and calls on states to implement reporting requirements for this heinous crime.

– *Jennifer Wishon, Breaking Christian News*

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using the *Make A Donation* button.

PAKISTAN – Seven-Year-Old Child Killed In Grenade Attack On Christian Colony

A seven-year-old Christian boy was killed in a grenade attack on the gates of a Christian community in Chamal, Balochistan, on Friday 1 December. Two other people were injured in the explosion, which shattered the windows of nearby homes. The apparently deliberate targeting of the Christian colony in Chamal took place on the final day of Mawlid – the annual observance of the birthday of Muhammad. The attack raises concerns for the safety of Christian communities and churches over Christmas.



– Dawn.com via Barnabas Fund

KAZAKHSTAN – Restrictions On Christians Set To Become Tighter

Authorities raided a Christian Sunday service in Ekibastuz, north-eastern Kazakhstan, and arrested over 20 Christians on 29 October. They were made to sign police statements, fined, and warned not to 'meet for worship until they register.' Kazakhstan's secular constitution guarantees freedom of religion, but the government places tight restrictions on Christian groups via a 2010 law to prevent terrorism and extremism. Church congregations must be registered. The 2011 Religion Law requires them to have a minimum of 50 adult members to register. An amendment proposed this year would require churches to re-register and limit their meetings only to registered 'religious' buildings. Sharing one's faith will be made harder, and it will be tougher for parents to take their children to Christian services. The amendment is likely to become law in the new year.

– Forum 18 News Service

Evangelical Christian Families In Eritrea Are Being Arrested, Even Children

Reports from human rights organizations are pouring in that entire Christian families, even children, are being arrested in a new religious persecution campaign by the Eritrean government. According to Todd Nettleton of *Voice Of The Martyrs USA*, 'Since May of this year, nearly 200 Christians have been arrested. The interesting thing about this (is that) they have shifted tactics ... Instead of just raiding church services or Bible studies, now the government is going to the homes of Christians, and they're arresting the whole family.' Nettleton explained to *Mission Network News* that the children are taken into custody separately from their parents. In November alone, 16 school children were taken by law enforcement simply for praying. 'Even as bad as it was [before now],' Nettleton added, 'this seems like even a step further in the persecution of Christians — to arrest even children who are involved in Christian activities.'

– Alyssa Duvall, *Hello Christian*

Indian Pastor And Wife Beaten Up

Please pray for Indian pastor David Livingstone and his wife Aram, who were beaten up when Hindu extremists attacked their church in north Karnataka. A group of about 25 extremists interrupted a church service and dragged the pastor and his wife outside before beating them. They also vandalised the building and destroyed the cross from the top of the small church. Release's partner in India is currently providing them with legal

assistance. Pray that they will know God's grace, strength and courage as they continue to witness for Christ.

– Release International

MEXICO: Multiple Expulsions Of Religious Minorities In Jalisco State

Multiple expulsions of religious minorities from their homes in Tuxpan de Bolaños in Mexico's Jalisco State led to 64 men, women and children from the Huichol indigenous group being forcibly displaced on 4 December. Christian Solidarity Worldwide has also been informed that 13 adults were expected to be expelled on 6 December, along with a group of minors, because of their religious beliefs. 42 Jehovah's Witnesses were forcibly displaced from their homes, along with seven Protestant adults and 15 Protestant children. They were violently removed from the town and taken by truck into the mountains, where they were abandoned. Dr Jorge Lee Galindo, director of the Mexican religious freedom organisation Impulso 18, told CSW the local authorities destroyed most of the homes, so it will be difficult for them to return. According to Dr Lee Galindo, the Emanuel Regional Baptist Convention, which oversees Baptist churches in the area, sent transport to the area to provide support to the victims. The 22 Baptists are now sheltering in Puente de Camotlán Church in Nayarit State, while the 42 Jehovah's Witnesses are currently in the municipal auditorium in Bolaños, Jalisco State. Government officials took no action to defend the expelled groups or their properties.

– Christian Solidarity

‘Striving Together For The Sake Of The Gospel’

ACTS 25.

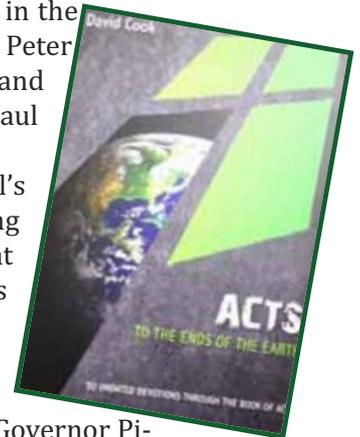
There is a solidarity between the Lord Jesus and His apostles. We see it in the records of Jesus healing a paralytic and then also healing a paralytic through Peter (Acts 3) and Paul (Acts 14). Also, Jesus raised the dead (Luke 7.11ff; 8.51ff) and He raises Dorcas through Peter (Acts 9.39ff) and the dozing Eutychus through Paul (Acts 20.10).

There is another remarkable parallel going on here, in the record of Paul’s trials. First, in Acts 23.27–30, the commander sends a covering letter regarding Paul’s case, to Governor Felix. In it, he says there was no charge against Paul that deserved death or imprisonment (23.29). Secondly, Governor Festus declares before King Agrippa: ‘I found he had done nothing deserving of death’ (25.25). Finally, King Agrippa declares of Paul: ‘This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment’ (26.31). Three times, Paul is declared innocent.

In Luke 23, when charges are brought against the Lord Jesus, the Roman Governor Pilate says: ‘I find no basis for a charge against this man’ (v 4). He repeats this in v 14 and refers to Herod in v 15, again saying: ‘He has done nothing to deserve death.’ Three statements of innocence.

All that is happening is under the direct oversight of God. Neither the Lord Jesus, nor His apostolic representative, is tainted by a criminal record. Both have been declared innocent three times.

Paul defends himself before Festus, Felix’s replacement (v 8), but because he has no confidence that Festus will stand up to the persistence of the Jews, he claims his right as a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar (v 11). That right must be respected. In Acts, Paul claims his citizenship rights when, as far as he can see, to do so would be to further the witness of the Gospel.



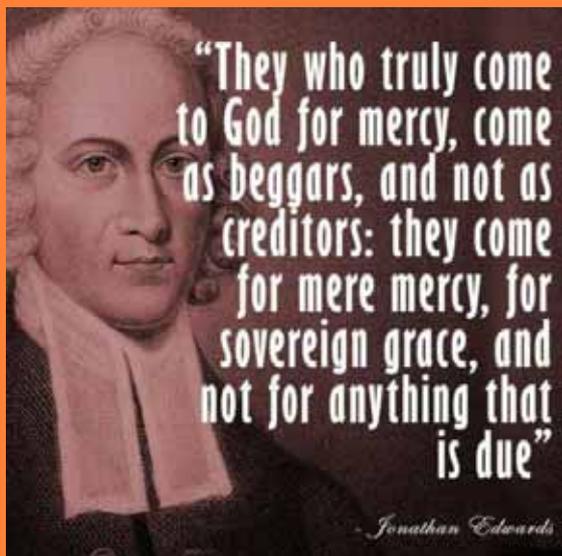
FOR REFLECTION:

Think about these two quotes from John Calvin in light of today’s reading:

- ‘The more brightly the light of doctrine shines, so as to press more closely on wicked men, they are driven to a greater pitch of madness.’
- ‘No man is fit to preach the Gospel, seeing the whole world is set against it, save only he which is armed to suffer.’

Content taken from 'ACTS – To The Ends Of The Earth' by David Cook, published by 10Publishing, used with permission.

SEEN ON FACEBOOK:



**Matthew 7.18
Your Faith Works**

Words Of Wisdom:



BOOKS WORTH READING

WHO SHALL ASCEND THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD? A Biblical Theology Of The Book Of Leviticus, L. Michael Morales, NSBT 37, Nottingham: Apollos, 2015. ISBN 978-1-78359-368-2.

We ignore the book of *Leviticus* at our peril, for it is the centre and theological heart of the *Pentateuch*, and so it is just too significant to consign to the 'too hard basket'. Michael Morales has provided an important Bible help to assist an intelligent and faithful use and application of this key biblical text. Dr Morales is Professor of Biblical Studies at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Taylors, South Carolina, and formerly taught at Reformation Bible College (founded by R. C. Sproul), and so he has impeccable credentials.

Morales shows that the dominating concern of *Leviticus*, as of the whole Bible, is how humanity may come to dwell in the house of God, living in God's presence and enjoying His favour and blessing. Further, he argues that the literary and theological centre of *Leviticus* is the instruction given about the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16), being the time of humanity's closest encounter with the Living God (when the high priest enters the Holy of Holies).

The creation portrays the cosmos as God's house (Genesis 1), and the sabbath day is about communion with God as the goal of human existence. As well, Noah's ark is a kind of floating Garden of Eden and anticipates the later tabernacle. Against that backdrop, Morales helps us to see that the tabernacle of *Exodus* is a mini-cosmos and the high priest is an Adam figure, so that the ritual of the Day of Atonement is a pointer to the destiny of redeemed humanity at the end of time.

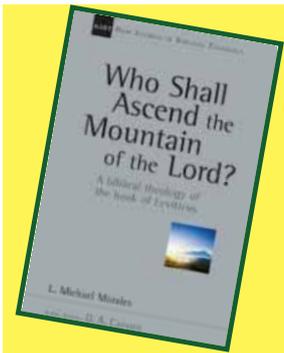
Morales next shows that Canaan and the altars set up by the patriarchs are linked to the same theme of the sanctuary of God. The goal of the exodus deliverance was the building of the tabernacle that captured the encounter with God on the top of Mount Sinai and it enables God's presence to go with the people as they journeyed to the Promised Land. Morales exposition is full of exegetical and theological insights. He is neither superficial nor does he get bogged down in unnecessary details. He has the balance just right.

The book of *Exodus* ends with the note that Moses was not able to enter the Tent of Meeting (= tabernacle) (40.35), and so the following book of *Leviticus* is the explanation of who may and how to enter the presence of God. The 107 pages that Morales needed to get the reader to this point have been necessary to show the gravity and urgency of the question answered by *Leviticus*: who may ascend the mountain of the Lord?

The instructions about sacrifices (Leviticus 1-7) and the consecration of priests (Leviticus 8-9) is the divine solution for how God's glory may appear to the people. Morales argues that a doctrine of substitution is to be found in the procedures for sacrifice: the death of the animal symbolises surrender to God, and its burning and transformation into smoke symbolises the cultic journey into God's heavenly presence.

Morales also demonstrates the progression in the structure of the book of *Leviticus* as laws dealing with uncleanness (chapters 11-15) are succeeded by regulations about holiness (chapters 17-27), reflecting a deepening relationship with God. The ritual of the Day of Atonement is a symbolic re-entry of Eden, and the high priest is a cultic version of the immaculate Adam. In the overall story of Scripture, Christ is the Last Adam who offered the ultimate sacrifice that enables God's redeemed people to come into his presence.

The Tabernacle is the place where sabbath by sabbath Israel meets with God, and all the festivals of the Jewish liturgical year fill out (Continued on P.16)



'Don't preach on Leviticus until you have read and digested this excellent book, and after you have read it, you will be ready and eager to make Leviticus part of the teaching program of your church or Bible study group.'

BOOKS WORTH READING

(Continued from p.15) **The Tabernacle is the place where sabbath by sabbath Israel meets with God**, and all the festivals of the Jewish liturgical year fill out the sabbath principle (Leviticus 23-25), the goal of creation being that God's people might enjoy the sabbatical bliss of God's immediate presence. In regard to the laws of holiness (Leviticus 17-22), Morales shows that holiness is a positive concept: being like God, being sanctified by God, and experiencing nearness to God. In essence, it is a return to Adamic perfection and enjoying Eden-like fellowship with God, God walking among His people (Leviticus 26.12). **Finally, Morales shows how the cultic theology of *Leviticus* is taken up later in the Old Testament** (especially in Zion themes), and how Jesus' redeemed people are the New Temple and the Household of God, with the final and permanent dwelling of God with His people depicted in Revelation 21-22.

My advice is: don't preach on *Leviticus* until you have read and digested this excellent book by Morales, and after you have read it, you will be ready and eager to make *Leviticus* part of the teaching program of your church or Bible study group.

– Greg Goswell

Three New Books For Children

THE WOMAN WHO LOVED TO GIVE BOOKS (Susannah Spurgeon); **THE MAN WHO PREACHED OUTSIDE** (George Whitefield); **THE WOMAN WHO HELPED A REFORMER** (Katharina Luther); Rebecca Van Doodewaard, Banner Of Truth, Edinburgh, 2017.



There's nothing like starting them young, as they say in the classics, and these are three books of classics cut down for the kiddies. Brightly printed in full colour on light cardboard with text aimed at six year olds (or younger if helped by their grandparents), they will equip the youngsters with words which could surprise, even shock their teachers, and names to drop which their teachers have probably never heard of: preached ... serve the Lord ... minister ... reformer ... blessing ... Spurgeon ... Whitefield ... Luther – all nice additions to their growing vocabulary. Truly, kids who read these books or have them read to them, will be able to say, 'I have more knowledge than all my teachers.' And in later years when they've read Spurgeon's Autobiography, Arnold Dallimore's magisterial biography of George Whitefield, and Luther's Commentary on Galatians, they'll remember with affection their first books about these men whom God made great, and the great women behind two of them.

Speaking of women, what about The Woman Whose Job Was To Keep Her Husband In The Pulpit (Bethan Lloyd-Jones) ... The Woman Who Raised Her Children For The Lord (Susannah Wesley) ... The Woman Who Waited (Polly Newton) ... The Woman Who Was Saved By The Letter M (Selina, Countess Of Huntigdon) ... ?

Attractively illustrated in full colour by Blair Bailie, these books would make great Sunday School prizes, gifts for the grandchildren, presentations to school libraries ... and charming bookends for the libraries of ministers who are prepared to loosen up a little.

– Bob Thomas

NAMING GOD, Irene Voysey, Cornerstone Books, Erina NSW, 2017.

Irene Voysey's latest book, *Naming God*, records the recent history of Christianity in Mongolia, where the majority of missions and church members refer to God using the title for Buddha. Patrick Johnstone, Author Emeritus of *Operation World*, says: 'The translation of the Bible into Mongolian is an extraordinary story. I have prayerfully followed the development of this ministry at a distance over nearly 40 years – since John Gibbens' time in communist Mongolia. What a story of tenacity, courage, human frailties, broken relationships, cultural insensitivity, and often the breaking of many basic missiological principles. This is a cautionary tale written with warts and all, but yet with a desire for accuracy and honour for God's name. May it stimulate prayer for the triumph of God's Word in that land, and provide instruction for a new generation of Bible translators.'

'As a documentary this book is careful, balanced and well-documented,' adds Rev Dr Tim Foster, Vice Principal of Ridley College, Melbourne. 'As a story it is great narrative; with all the tension, heroes and villains that make a story compelling. *Naming God* also functions as a textbook for those wanting to become missionaries, highlighting the dangers and challenges, as well as some of the key issues in translation and cross-cultural communication. But beneath that is a tragic account of Christians behaving badly. It serves as a sober warning of the profound damage to the Gospel that comes from pride and ego.'

Court To Hear Christian Report On Key Sharia Case

The **European Court of Human Rights** was due to hear on 13 December a landmark case concerning Sharia law, which UK Christian experts warn could have 'dire' consequences. Representatives from Christian Concern and the Christian Legal Centre previously submitted a ten-page document to the Strasbourg-based court, warning that Islamic law is 'incompatible' with the Western legal system.

Prior to the proceedings, Christian Concern's Head of Public Policy, Tim Dieppe, said: 'We hope that our intervention will help to show the judges that they should not allow Sharia law to overrule a member state's domestic law.'

The legal dispute concerns a Greek widow from a Muslim family who claims she is entitled to the estate of her late husband, under Greek law. But two of her husband's sisters claim that the inheritance should instead be adjudicated by a Muslim legal expert (a mufti), in accordance with sharia law. Commenting on the Molla Sali v Greece case, Christian Concern warned that Sharia law is 'discriminatory by nature'. It added: 'A ruling at this level that sharia law can have supremacy over a member state's domestic law could have dire effects on the Council of Europe's 47 member states, including the United Kingdom. Sharia law is fundamentally incompatible with human rights, and our intervention explains that the Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights restricts freedom of speech and freedom of religion, as does the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights.'

A Gathering Storm In Vietnam

Evangelist Franklin Graham has met with a communist government official in Vietnam during his current Gospel outreach. At the meeting Deputy Prime Minister Phạm Bình Minh praised Mr Graham's charity Samaritan's Purse for its help with education and water supply. Mr Graham says he told the communist leader he was meeting with churches to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. Although Vietnam is one of the world's four remaining one-party communist nations, it officially claims to promote freedom of religion. However, the watch dog group Open Doors says that Christians in Vietnam are being subjected to increased persecution. CBN News reports that last year the government adopted a new Law on Belief and Religion, which has considerably limited freedom of religion.

– CBN Christian World News

God At Work Through Open Doors In Northern Nigeria

Esther (name changed for security purposes) was just 17 when Boko Haram militants attacked her town in northern Nigeria. She was held captive for a year. They pressured her daily to become a Muslim, but Esther refused to deny Jesus. In captivity she became pregnant and gave birth to Rebecca. When Esther was rescued, she returned home to live with her grandparents. They called her names and referred to her daughter as 'Boko'. 'I had no idea how on Earth I would ever be able to love this child [but] she has become my joy and laughter amidst sadness,' Esther says.



Open Doors partners are helping Esther deal with her trauma. During one session, Esther was encouraged to write down her sorrows and hand them over to God. 'When I pinned that piece of paper to the cross it felt like I was handing all of my sorrow over to God,' Esther said. 'It felt light within me. When the trainer later removed all the pieces of paper from the cross and burnt it to ashes, I felt like my sorrow and shame disappeared, never to come back again.'

Esther now works on a farm. She knows the love of God and can experience His joy again!

Prayer Points:

- Pray for continued healing for Esther and others who have suffered at the hands of Boko Haram.
- Pray for provision for Esther and her family.
- Pray that baby Rebecca will grow up to know she is loved by her mum and by God.

'He ensures that orphans and widows receive justice.

He shows love to the foreigners living among you and gives them food and clothing.'

– Deuteronomy 10.18

A Day In The Life Of A Pilot With MAF

Have you ever thought about becoming a missionary pilot? Mission Aviation Fellowship is always looking for men and women who want to serve God and the Great Commission. While there are several different roles in the ministry, pilots are a key component to what MAF does every day!

Just ask Brian Marx, a pilot with MAF based in Papua, Indonesia. He grew up overseas and his parents served with MAF. Even as a teenager, the importance of the airplane to mission work was obvious to Marx. When two pilots died, the missionaries, ministries, and organizations they flew in to remote and hard-to-reach areas suddenly had to find less convenient travel options. This hampered Great Commission work such as Bible translation and evangelism.



'I just saw this gap and the struggle, and God began working on my heart and I began to pray and say, 'God, if You'll open doors, I will step through them and I could maybe fill the shoes of those pilots who are gone now.' From there, Marx attended Moody Bible Institute for a Bachelor of Science in Mission Aviation Technology. He then got the rest of his necessary licences and joined MAF as a pilot.

So what does a day in the life of an MAF pilot look like? Marx gives us a glimpse into one of his personal reflections after a day of taking missions to the skies:

'Flying home today, I thought back to what had been accomplished with the plane. It was just an average day. Nothing particularly out of the normal. The first leg from Nabire, which is where we live, to Pogapa I had half a dozen schoolkids who had been boarding in Nabire and now were going back to their village and their parents for Christmas.

'The second leg was a very sad one. In Pogapa, a young lady was experiencing a miscarriage. She was into her second trimester and the baby had passed. Now she seemed to be in quite a lot of pain. I would evacuate her to Nabire where doctors can help her. There's a special account where I can charge emergency medical needs. The flight for her would be free. Suddenly, one of the local teachers came running up to the plane. "Mister pilot! Could you please wait for my friend? She just found out her father passed away and she needs to fly home." I did my best to comfort these two passengers as we headed back to Nabire. Such a sad flight; but for me, a huge privilege to help during their time of deepest need.

'Third leg was a plane full of pastors headed to Beoga. As I gave the before-flight briefing, there were many "amens!" and enthusiastic "praise the Lords!". It was pretty funny but terrific at the same time. Their culture is different to mine and I appreciate and enjoy it.

'Fourth leg was full of folks headed over the mountain range to Timika and probably further for the holidays. I had to fight some really tall rain clouds, maintaining max climb performance all the way to 14,500 feet where I donned an oxygen mask and maneuvered to a safer air route where I could punch through the weather to better skies on the other side. I landed in moderate rain and heavy crosswind in Timika.

'My fifth leg would take me back through that weather.' He pauses for an audible shudder. 'Last week, I picked up some 60 pastors from interior villages for a ministry planning conference in Timika. Now I would take nine of those home to their village on Dofu. I briefed my passengers about the weather we'd face and then decided to swing out west hoping to find a better situation. Things were not quite as bad. I only had to climb to 13,000 feet to clear the building storm. Dofu was clear and hot. From the ground, I had the chance to chit-chat with John, a Bible translator who's been working here for 20 or more years. John and his wife are doing well. His young teammate, a relatively new arrival, is making progress building his home with supplies that MAF delivered this autumn. Pray for John and his team of Edopi tribal pastors who bring salt and light to a very dark corner of the jungle.

(Continued on Page 19)

(Continued from Page 18)

'Then I found myself on the last leg back home to Nabire with three nurses and the doctor from Dofu all headed home for Christmas. I filled out the paperwork for the day, and I thought, "Wow, it's unbelievable that today is just another average day at MAF. Only God could take a group of simple pilots and little airplanes and do so much with them."

So what about you? Would you like to become a pilot with Mission Aviation Fellowship? Check out their website, maf.org and learn more! – *Lyndsey Koh, MNN (Photo courtesy of Mission Aviation Fellowship)*

MATTERS FOR PRAYER**Christian Prisoners In Captivity At Christmas**

For most Christians, Christmas is a season of immense joy. For Christians separated from loved ones and fellow believers due to incarceration or captivity, it can be particularly painful. Christians are incarcerated in Algeria, Burma, China, Eritrea, Indonesia, Iran, North Korea, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Vietnam and possibly elsewhere. Christians are also being held captive by Islamic jihadists in Mali. Some are pastors and evangelists and some are 'prophetic voices' of righteousness, whilst others are simply pawns in a much larger game. Whatever the cause of their incarceration or captivity, we cannot overestimate the ferocity of the spiritual and emotional struggle taking place within these prisoners' souls. Traumatized, isolated and condemned to harsh and often dehumanising conditions designed to break the spirit, Christian prisoners need our prayers!

'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.'

(John 1:5 ESV)

PAKISTAN: Asia Bibi, Christian Prisoner In Crisis

The November showdown between the Pakistan government and the hardline Islamists of the Tehreek-e-Labaik political party could well have a devastating impact on Asia Bibi's appeal. Asia Bibi was imprisoned in June 2009 after being accused of blasphemy and was sentenced to death by hanging in November 2010. Her appeal is currently pending in the Supreme Court. However, to end the siege of Islamabad, the government acquiesced to numerous Islamist demands, including: that there would be no difficulty in registering blasphemy cases; that no leniency would be given to those convicted by the courts of blasphemy; and that Asia Bibi (also known as, 'Noreen') will not be allowed to leave Pakistan and that her execution will be expedited. Asia's lead counsel, Attorney Saiful Malook (a Muslim), is risking his life to defend her. Malook prosecuted the case against Malik Mumtaz Qadri, the security guard who assassinated Punjab Governor Salmaan Taseer in January 2011 over his support for Asia Bibi. Tehreek-e-Labaik formed in the wake of Qadri's February 2016 execution and Malook has been on an Islamist kill-list ever since. The Supreme Court must decide and the government must uphold that decision. May Asia Bibi not be sacrificed on the altar of appeasement.

CHINA: Gao Zhisheng, Christian Prisoner In Crisis

Since his first abduction in August 2006, devout Christian human rights lawyer and religious liberty advocate, Gao Zhisheng, has suffered savage cruelty and dehumanising treatment at the hands of the systemically corrupt and criminal Chinese Communist machine. For refusing to be silenced, Gao has now been returned to 'hell'. While in prison in 2012, God graced Gao with a vision of the collapse of the Chinese Communist Party. Gao was totally convinced the collapse would occur in 2017. Whether he projected that date onto the vision himself or simply misinterpreted an element of it is uncertain. Maybe when the CCP does collapse (which it will) we will see with hindsight that 2017. Its escalating Big Brother-like repression, and the 19th CCP National Congress which saw Xi elevated to the heights of Mao marked the beginning of the end, as distinct from the end itself. That said, Gao Zhisheng must be incredibly confused and conflicted right now. Doubtless he is experiencing relentless and ferocious spiritual attack. In his book, *Unwavering Convictions*, Gao provides an insight into how he survived three years in darkened solitary confinement in Shaya Prison (2011-2014): 'For anyone of faith, infinite light and freedom await us when we close our eyes.' Gao will need all the faith, light, truth and hope the Spirit of God can give him if he is to survive this captivity.

– Elizabeth Kendal

Preparing Our Hearts For Christmas

The Christmas season brings with it a heightened feeling that something wonderful is coming. Can you sense it? Like a faint sound in the distance drawing nearer. Like the waiting at the airport to be reunited with a loved one as they emerge from the terminal. Like the moment right before the sun peeks out from behind the horizon. Like a promise about to come true. Something wonderful is coming.

'For a second you catch a whiff in the air of some fragrance that reminds you of a place you've never been and a time you have no words for. You are aware of the beating of your heart. The extraordinary thing that is about to happen is matched only by the extraordinary moment just before it happens. Advent is the name of that moment', says Frederick Buechner.

Advent. It means, something wonderful is coming.

We are presently in the middle of Advent, a season in the liturgical calendar that starts every year on the fourth Sunday before Christmas. It is a time for making room and priming our hearts to treasure Christ. And yet amid all the frenetic end-of-year chaos, it's far too easy to squander these precious moments of waiting. We know all too well what it is like for December to go by in a blur and to arrive on the doorstep of Christmas as another exhausted casualty of our consumeristic age. Amid all the frenetic end-of-year chaos, it's far too easy to squander these precious moments of waiting. We know all too well what it is like to arrive on the doorstep of Christmas as another exhausted casualty of our consumeristic age. Reacting ... Organizing ... Shopping ... Planning ... Wrapping ... Budgeting ... Stressing ... Eating ... Stress-eating ... So I am writing to those, like me, who need to slow down and embrace the oft-missed words of the famous carol, 'Let every heart prepare Him room.'

Advent is a season of remembering. As we remember God's promises fulfilled at Christmas, we are reminded of just how intensely the incarnation of Christ shook the world! The meaning of Christmas goes miles deeper than a public holiday, family traditions, pretty lights, and a chance to refresh your depleted stockpile of socks.

Christmas means revolution! Christmas means miracle! Christmas means God has come to us!

The King of Heaven exchanged His throne for a cradle.

The Almighty swaddled Himself with vulnerability.

The Creator entered into His own creation.

The Author put Himself on the page.

The Infinite became an infant.

The Giver became the gift.

Jesus came as Immanuel—

'God with us.'

Advent is a season of Anticipating. Remembering that God has drawn near, deepens in me an appetite to seek Him. There is something in observing Advent that awakens not only joyful remembrance over the first coming of Christ, but also a deep, yearning eagerness for His second coming (Revelation 22.20). In many ways, the Church of this present age is in a similar position to God's people toward the end of the Old Testament—marginalised in exile, hoping in the darkness, waiting in the stillness for the Day when Christ returns and (in Tolkien's words) 'makes every sad thing come untrue.'

Like a child on Christmas Eve caught between the joyful memories of the Christmas that was, while waiting with breathless anticipation for the Christmas about to be, so are God's people living between the Hallelujah! of Christ's resurrection and the Maranatha! of Christ's return. It is here—in the waiting of Advent—that God's people discover a unique species of joy that can only be glimpsed through the lens of worshipful anticipation.

Advent is a way of reminding us that we are pilgrims passing through, that the brokenness of this world isn't how it's always going to be, that the true King will indeed soon return, and a time for preparing our hearts for Christmas, so slow down each day and cultivate worshipful anticipation through the Advent season. For families, observing Advent together might just be the perfect time to rekindle the fire of family devotions, or light them up for the very first time. December will be busy. But it doesn't have to be a blur. Let's begin preparing room in our hearts this Advent for Immanuel—the God who is with us.

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