

Jurong Christian Church

The Vine

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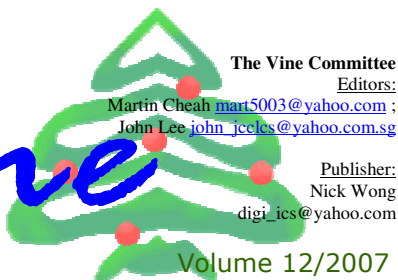
Blessed Christmas



Even as you reflect on why Jesus came to earth more than 2000 years ago, you may suddenly realize that He is a gift to you from God. The Holy Bible says in John 3:16, **“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”**

However, is this a gift that never get opened? Do you keep aside this gift and forget about it throughout the year? Every Christmas, you are reminded that God has given you a gift. This year, you should accept this gift, open it and enjoy what is inside.

What will you find inside this gift? You will find an all expense paid ticket to Eternal Life. Jesus has paid it all when he died on the cross for you. When



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Easter comes, you will be painfully reminded of the price Jesus had to pay. This gift is not cheap but it is freely given to you.

How do you open this gift? Just believe in Jesus and Light will come into your life. You will begin to see clearly as you walk in the Light. *For God made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.* (2 Corinthians 4:6)

You will understand the love of a Father, who waited patiently for you to make that discovery.

The Christmas story is not just another story. Sink your mind and heart deep into it to explore the full gamut of joys and tears associated with the Nativity and you will realize what the greatest historical event is all about as it is celebrated throughout the world year after year. Let us see beneath the glitter of Christmas commercials and behold the Christ who is a high priest to us, able to sympathize with our weaknesses. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Heb. 4:15-16)

The Editors



In the Christmas season, we wish everybody peace and good will. Sadly, peace is often not felt and good will hardly present. Think about wars and civil commotions, think about politics that rule office relations, think about human self-centredness comfortably ensconced behind facemasks, think about government and rulers of questionable morals ... I think the list is endless and familiar to all. The reason is not alien to anyone – It is human nature. Very true, all have sinned and come short of God's glory. The major culprit – sin – that takes away peace and good will, and brings forth feuds and animosity. We are all wary about it, yet can do nothing. Really? Not quite.

Christmas is the good news – God sent His Son. Christ is born! Glory to God in the highest, and **on earth peace, good will** toward men. (Luke 2:14 KJV) Here is the solution to man's restiveness under the weight of sin that makes him feel no peace and no good will. The world (Singapore included) is facing a crisis of sin. Christ is the only way, the only hope we have to break free from sin's stranglehold. Man's bondage to sin is like being in the vice-like grip of drugs. It is difficult to break free. Even making the attempt carries withdrawal effects that call for tremendous courage. It requires grit. Many drug addicts failed to quit their habit; yet, a significant number of the repentant did succeed. What made the difference to one group continuing in their enslavement by narcotics and the other group giving deliverance its golden chance to work? So sin, the root that grows deep pulling us into the ground, requires us to take the strong first step of raising our hand to Jesus in order that we may be helped to break free.



God did not create us as robots. He created us with a free will. How people exercise this free will explains why there are those who bask in peace and

good will in the midst of turbulence around them while others (the greater majority in the world) sink themselves in complaints and anguish.

Christmas is a thrilling season for celebrating the coming of the Christ Child, the celebration of hope for a lost world. "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11). This good news – this gift of love from God – is for all people. However, there is a basic, very reasonable and very commonsensical condition: By the free will we possess, we have to decide whether to accept or reject the gift. Our good Father in heaven does not force it on us. All slaves to sin, like all slaves to drugs, can make the choice to take the active step to lift their hands to Christ in assent to God's redemptive plan through His Son. Alternatively, they may adopt passivity to the angels' proclamation of the good news and continue in their acquiescence to the "human nature" that they are so accustomed to. The outcomes of the two choices will obviously be poles apart – the presence *vs.* absence of peace and good will in our life.

Making the right choice is easier said than done, given the notorious intransigence of man. Remember the story of Exodus? Pharaoh hardened his heart despite the onslaught of plagues. Let's not be too quick to pass judgment. Even the very people whom God by His mercy delivered from slavery forsook patience and chose the easy path of intransigence to craft and worship a golden calf. More than a millennium later, the Pharisees and Sadducees were no less unaffected by the miracles of Jesus that they witnessed. Another few thousand years later, it is today and we all witness within and around us the same intransigence of man in the neglect of Christ as the temptations of the world overwhelm. Are we watchful of the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod as Jesus warned in Mk 8:15? Obviously, the disciples whom Jesus spoke to also failed the test of faith. People today hear about Christ during the Christmas season as well as the people 2000 years ago. We also read about Christ's teachings in the Bible, preached in sermons week after week and discussed in countless literature. Yet, it is hard to give honest answers with a straight face to these questions Jesus asked, "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember? When I broke the

five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?” (Mk 8:17-19)

Truth escapes us when the heart is hard. We do not have the privilege to see baby Jesus in his humble manger or witness the rapture of excitement in the heavens on His birthday. However, this is hardly a reason for us not to believe in the true Christmas story and embrace Christ as our Lord and Saviour. If any do not believe what is written just because they “have not seen”, then the rebuke in Mk 16:14 is fitting. (cf John 20:29)

Hardness of heart makes us insensitive to rights and wrongs. There is no greater illustration of this hardness of heart than in our adoption of what we condemn in others. For example, as a consumer, we accuse businesses of poor practices or censure them for profiteering; but when we are in business ourselves, we carry out the same practices and blame the customers for their lack of understanding and for being over-demanding and justify our profiteering by ascribing the price increases to GST and other businessmen for raising costs. This is just a tip of the iceberg of human behaviour. Put in another way, the hardness of man’s heart is so pervasive in the world that it becomes not a mystery why the peace of Christmas is so elusive.

Those who genuinely celebrate the birth of Christ know that Jesus is the reason for the Season. We can experience the peace and good will toward men only if we are genuine in our heart to embrace the Prince of Peace. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor 5:21) We have to discard our self-righteousness – our hardness of heart! In Jer 7:23-26, the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says,

“... I gave them this command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you. But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts. They went backward and not forward. From the time your forefathers left Egypt until now, day after day, again and again I sent you my servants the

prophets. But they did not listen to me or pay attention. They were stiff-necked and did more evil than their forefathers.”



The free will is ours – to obey or to follow the same stubborn inclinations of our forefathers. Where there is no peace and good will, there is turmoil in our life and hostility in relationships. If men would not mend their ways, running to the temple for cover or solace in the hope that grace may abound notwithstanding their persistence in sin is vain – no profit to be had, as Jeremiah 7:1-16 cautions. Obedience is required. (Jer 7:21-28) This Christmas season, let us resolve to be the blessed peacemakers (burying all

hatchets) to take hold of the elusive peace and share good will with one and all in obedience to Christ.

John Lee

Remembering Why Christmas Is Celebrated

A woman was out Christmas shopping with her two children. After many hours of looking at rows of toys and hearing both her children asking for everything they saw on those shelves, this woman finally made it out of the store and to the elevator with her two kids.

She was feeling overwhelming pressure of getting the kids everything they ask for.

Finally the elevator doors opened--there was already a crowd in the car. This woman pushed her way into the car and dragged her two kids in with her, along with all her bags of stuff.

When the doors closed, she let out a big sigh and decided she couldn't take it anymore, saying out loud, to no one in particular, "Whoever started this whole Christmas thing should be arrested and strung up!"

From the back of the elevator, a quiet calm voice responded, "Don't worry ma'am, I believe they crucified Him."

My Journey of Faith in 2007

During last April, Poh Kiat was diagnosed with breast cancer that became the turning point for our family. Although I was in a relatively stable job for almost 10 years, I realised that my family should come first and started looking at new job opportunities, so as to allow me to have more time with my wife and support her in raising the children together, without having to be travel extensively. It was God's gracious provision to grant my desire for a career switch that I was able to secure a local job offering in October of a totally different nature, with minimal travelling requirements.



During the period of job transition, I was able to support my wife through her difficult times in her surgery, chemo and radiation treatments which ended in December. We were even blessed to go for a holiday during the Chinese New Year period in 2007 that coincided with an overseas conference in my new job. It was the wildest dream that came through for our family.

It was about the same time early this year that the church conducted a 10 week program called "Christianity Explored" for us to invite non-believers to come and understand the Christianity faith better. The first question during the program was, "If you could ask God one question and you knew it would be answered, what would it be?" Though I have accepted the Christian faith back in 1978, for almost 30 years, and seen God's miraculous working through my mother's salvation and PK's illness, sometimes I still question His sovereignty and why I need Him? Is He really in control? And does He really care? There is too much suffering and injustice in this world. My "faith" in God was more of positive thinking and determination to be strong, as I was telling myself that I cannot fall throughout the difficult period in order to see my wife through her recovery, both physically and emotionally. One statement that somehow troubled me during the 10-week program was, "Today's world real problem is man's sin, not global warming." Jesus Christ is real and He is the ultimate solution for mankind to be saved from sin. We need to truly believe and accept Christ as our Saviour and Lord.

I was very confident that I would be successful in my new job as I perceived that if I could overcome the illness crisis of my wife, I could overcome any other obstacles ahead. However, I was proven wrong. A new twist in my job started in May this year that brought about a major change in the management and job demands that I felt overwhelmed. I had difficulty adapting to the new management's style. After much struggle, I was convinced that I did not fit well into the job and my self-worth should not be in my job, but my relationship with God. Finally, I decided to leave the job in August without securing a new job, which put me on a journey of faith beyond my imagination.

The adjustment to my family's financial loss and the need to trust that He would provide was truly a faith-stretching experience for me. Initially, there were frantic actions to take a hard look at our current financial situation and attend seminars to identify possible career opportunities. Subsequently, I started to seriously examine my true purpose in life and what I should be doing for the second phase of my life. I realized that seeking God's will should be my top priority in life; that is, to love and enjoy Him and to glorify Him. In a practical sense, I must learn to trust and obey Him in all situations, and seek to be a blessing to the people around me, my family, church, friends, workplace, etc. Life is no longer focusing on building my own career and financial security, but to touch the lives of others because He has touched mine (1 John 4:19).

In September, I was offered an opportunity to return to my previous regional job. However, after much prayers and seeking Him, there was this conviction to wait upon Him that He had something better in place for me, since He had graciously provided an opening for me to leave my regional travelling job last year. I decided to turn down this golden opportunity to be employed again, and also not jumping into some other jobs and business opportunities that came along the way. The decision to close the doors of opportunity before me was truly faith-stretching, knowing that I would be putting the family into further financial constraints. Not actively searching for other openings, I was left with one job opportunity which was mentioned to me casually in August at the company I just left. I have had two informal interview meetings in early September and mid October, and was considered for an opening, subjected

to management approval. Finally, an official offer was made to me in early Nov, which was almost 4 months of waiting since the opportunity was made known to me. God has indeed shown His grace and mercy upon me and my family, as I personally cannot comprehend by human understanding that I am offered the job, except for His miraculous provision. He has refuted me of my self-sufficiency and mediocre faith, and revealed His supremacy that I truly need Him, and He cares and is in control.

Beyond the assurance of God's gracious provision, I have learnt the most invaluable lesson and developed my resolve to build my faith and focus on Him, and not treat any of His messages in Scripture just as another Bible story. I am thankful that I survived this faith journey, which I almost gave up at certain junctures, harbouring anger against Him and wondering if He is real. It was the constant encouragement and prayer support from family, cell group, church and friends that kept me going. I have experienced God's unselfish love through these groups of people who have been available for me and stood by me, when I felt lost and devastated.

This faith journey is truly God's legacy in my life, and my children can now testify how our family were kept closely bonded throughout this trying period of uncertainty and change. It was a period of testing of our faith and character to remain calm and united, and press on by fixing our eyes on Christ without growing weary and losing heart (Hebrews 12:1-3). I anticipate that my journey ahead will be faced with more changes, challenges and uncertainties, but I have experienced glimpses of God's mercy and grace, and the bountiful care and concern of loved ones, encouragements from brothers and sisters, to help me to persevere on this faith journey.

All glory and praise to our loving and all powerful God, who has assured us that He will never leave us nor forsake us, and He will grant us victory with His peace and joy in our unknown faith journey ahead!

Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our

eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Kin Cheong

The WRITE Thing To Do

Dear readers & members of JCC,

December is the last month of the year. It is the first month into the 19th year of the Vine ministry, which had its first issue in November 1989. Shall we aim for the ‘adulthood’ age of 21 years? We have just been reminded by a blessed reader that the Vine ministry is God’s idea. So we shall continue to look to Him for inspiration to grow this ministry.

This month is also a good time for you to make your New Year resolutions. The editors of the Vine would like you to include in your consideration how you can be a part of this ministry. The fact that the Vine can survive 18 years is due in no small measure to the encouragement and support of members of the church. We need more of these as we move forward into the 19th year.

You can contribute as a writer, printer, distribution coordinator, reporter, technology helper ... — whatever your talents (not limited to writing skills) and availability, we trust that the Vine ministry can depend on you

to flourish. Perhaps you have ideas to share on how we may improve. Maybe you wish to commit to write an article once every 3 months (or any period that won’t be too much of a burden to you). By the way, anyone with a minimal primary school composition-writing experience is welcome to share in writing. By letting the editors know your commitment, it will greatly assist in editorial planning.

If God has blessed you well financially to sponsor colour printing (which isn’t cheap) for selected issues in the year or for all issues, it will be welcome news.

If you are still unsure how you can help but your heart is urging you to step forward, why not speak to Martin Cheah or John Lee?

May God continue to bless readers of the Vine for years to come!

*Yours in the Lord’s Service
The Editors*

WINNING LOTTERIES - GOD'S BLESSING?

I have a Christian colleague who is always very enthusiastic in treating others to her generosity. Every time when she strikes 4D or Toto, we would all benefit from her big-heartedness, as she would pay for our lunch, and pile us with drinks and fruits from the nearby NTUC Fairprice. She would always say that the Lord has been good to her, blessing her abundantly. Seems that no matter what number she buys, it will always be the lucky number. In her own words when I commented on her luck, as she seems to be always collecting winnings even if it's only S\$30, "Aiyah, anyhow buy, then anyhow win lah. God has been good... if He wants to bless me; anyhow buy also will win one lah." (A puzzle in my mind: Does she still have to work?)

I wonder what kind of testimony this Christian colleague is giving. Am I envious of her? I hope that I won't unwittingly be tantalised to stumble. Has God been so good to her and, in contrast, not been so good to me that I never seem able to win even a small lucky draw, let alone those Reader's Digest Sweepstakes which I joined in the past? Has God been partial in counting her more deserving of prize money because "she is more faithful" whereas "I am less faithful"?

No matter how much 'blessing' she claims to have, I do know that just because the Lord doesn't stop us from some wrongdoing, it doesn't mean He wants us to continue with it. We must ask God for the spirit of discernment and to strengthen our hearts so that we will be blameless until the day of Christ (Phil. 1 v.10-11).

Though my colleague always seems to be very happy, laughing and joking about how God has been good to her, how real it is I do not know. But I do know that true and lasting happiness cannot be decided by the luck of a lottery draw.

Comparing myself whose faith is like a mustard seed to her who has been a Christian for years, attending Church and serving regularly, even attending an 8-year Bible Studies class, I am incompetent to claim that I am more holy. After all, everyone has sinned and come short of God's glory; so we are all similar in a way – being sinners. It is written in Rom. 14:11-12: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before

me; every tongue will confess to God.' "So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. I pray for my colleague and for myself that we will all be wise to avoid our faith being stumbled by temptations.

Sally Lee

Ed:

Someone in fact asked this question on the Internet: "Is it correct for Christians to buy weekly lottery tickets?" (Implicit in such a question is the reality that there are Christians who engage in such betting activity for riches.) The best answer chosen by the questioner is as follows:

"As a Christian I believe that God is our source. He provided me with a job, and a salary. I give faithfully to God's work, through my church and other organizations, and to some individuals. I believe that God is my source, and so I don't need to do the lottery. God's purpose for me is not to get rich in wealth, but all that I own is already His. When God provides for things I cannot afford, then I know that He is indeed my provider. He has never let me down. The love of money is the root of all evil, and in participating in the lottery, I would really be saying, "I don't need God." I trust God - so I don't need to gamble."

Source: <http://uk.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20060924074307AAQcgc>

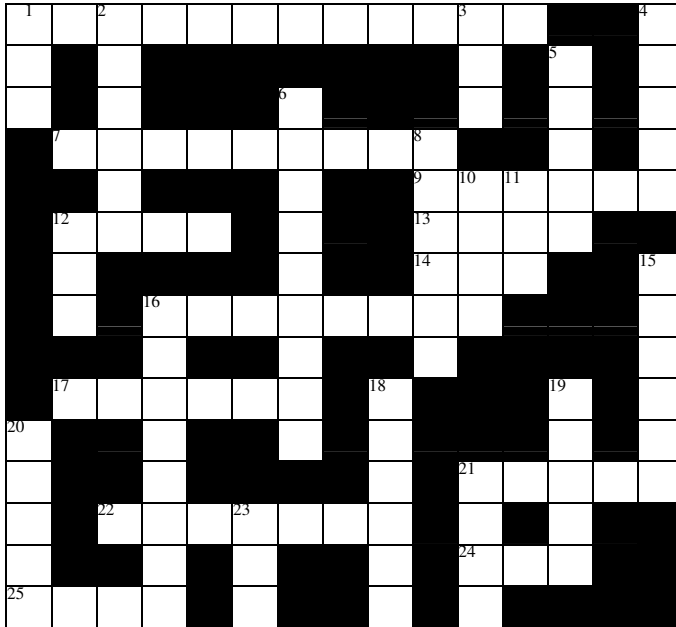
There are stories of big lottery winners who end up miserable for one reason or another. Small winnings do behave like the thin end of a wedge, feeding one's greed for more and then pushing deeper; before you realize it, you are slipping down a slippery slope to ruin. There are examples of Christians who don't win lotteries but live amazing lives of blessedness in Christ.

God encourages diligence and despises sloth. "Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth." (Proverbs 10:4) Could this suggest to us that lottery wins may only be short-term gains at long-term cost? Is winning lottery a curse or a blessing then?

†

EASY CHRISTMAS CROSSWORD

by John Lee



ACROSS

- 1 a fragrant gift brought by the wise men (12)
- 7 Jesus' birthplace (9)
- 9 They proclaimed the birth of the Messiah. (6)
- 12 the guide that led the wise men to Jesus (4)
- 13 Christmas celebration (4)
- 14 Jesus is more precious than any amount of this. (3)
- 16 God with us. (8)
- 17 Jesus is our _____ of Peace. (6)
- 21 one of the three gifts brought by the wise men (5)
- 22 Jesus is the _____ of sinners. (7)
- 24 whom we worship (3)
- 25 mother of Jesus (4)



DOWN

- 1 a major Christmas tree species (3)
- 2 holy season of the church before Christmas (6)
- 3 God sent his _____ to us on Christmas Day. (3)
- 4 The wise men had these with them for Jesus. (5)
- 5 a mode of transport used by the wise men (5)
- 6 Holy Land (9)
- 8 the bed on which baby Jesus lay (6)
- 10 Christmas celebration (4)
- 11 Jesus is more precious than any amount of this. (3)
- 12 If not for this, we wouldn't need Jesus for redemption from eternal condemnation. (3)
- 15 He was betrothed to the woman who conceived Jesus by the Holy Spirit. (6)
- 16 the climax of the Christmas season (8)
- 18 holy, entitled to reverence (6)
- 19 He ordered the death of boys under two years old. (5)
- 20 An angel of the Lord appeared in it to tell the son of David not to be afraid to marry the one he was betrothed to. (5)
- 21 the wise men from the East (4)
- 23 There was no room here, so baby Jesus ended up being born in a stable. (3)

A Russian couple was walking down the street in St. Petersburg the other night, when the man felt a drop hit his nose. "I think it's raining," he said to his wife.

"No, that felt more like snow to me," she replied. "No, I'm sure it was just rain, he said." Well, as these things go, they were about to have a major argument about whether it was raining or snowing. Just then they saw a minor communist party official walking toward them. "Let's not fight about it," the man said, "let's ask Comrade Rudolph whether it's officially raining or snowing."

As the official approached, the man said, "Tell us, Comrade Rudolph, is it officially raining or snowing?"

"It's raining, of course," he answered and walked on. But the woman insisted: "I know that felt like snow!" To which the man quietly replied: "Rudolph the Red knows rain, dear!"

A Strange Dream

I had a strange dream one night.

I found myself in a cemetery where there was a structure that looked like a temple. I saw an altar with an idol. As I took a look at it, I felt that the idol was moving towards me. It shocked me that the idol could move. Worse was to come. I began to move by an unknown force, most likely by the power of the idol. I was terrified.

Soon, I was brought before a bigger idol to worship it. I resisted. Then I passed by a party of people and chanced upon a Christian brother. I called out to him for help. He came to my rescue and cast the idol away in Jesus' name. My gladness was short-lived. Later, I realised that my rescuer himself got into trouble with the idol launching its attack. He needed help. This time, it was my turn to go to his rescue. In the spiritual battle that ensued, I told the idol that it had no right to possess this brother who belonged to God, with the blood of Jesus Christ. In the name of Jesus Christ, I commanded the idol to leave.

Finally, the idol left. I woke up too.

Did the dream carry a message? The Bible mentions demons a lot of times. In Mark 16:16-17, we are told that whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. And one of the signs to accompany those who believe is that in Jesus' name they will drive out demons. Amen.

James Sum
29th November 2007

Dear reader,

Do you like the above sharing by bro. James Sum? If you have any interesting dream, any fascinating nugget of daily experience, any motivating insight from your personal spiritual life, etc., please note that you are most welcome to share in The Vine for the edification or inspiration of fellow readers. If you do not feel comfortable putting your thoughts into words, you still have the option of using pictures or drawings (including cartoons), especially for anyone who is artistically inclined. At times, you may just need a little bravery to start off. Do not worry; nothing is too difficult. The Vine editors are available to facilitate your effort. Actually, the Vine editors also need help – your help, that is, in one way or another according to your God-gifted talents to make this publication continue beyond its 18th year to be a source of benefit to the JCC community.

Ed.

What time is it? It is X'mas Time

It's the time to understand what CHRISTmas truly is!

25th December – What time is it? It is X'mas time – Do we have the choice to replace the X by CHRIST (so it is CHRISTmas) or by CLAUS (the surname of Santa Claus, so it becomes CLAUSmas)? Every Christmas season, the Prime Minister would wish all Christians (instead of all Singaporeans) a Merry Christmas. Surely, there is good reason for it, and it is the same good reason for us to acknowledge that the cross (X)¹ in X'mas really stands for Christ instead of the less important person, Santa.

If you are a Christian, no doubt you already know what time is called the Christmas season. For the sake of non-Christians who are merrily in the dark, let me state it unequivocally: The Christmas season is the time Christians commemorate the birth of Jesus.

Unfortunately, for commercialism or for the sake of holiday fun, the season that was originally the festival of Christians has been turned into a universal public carnival. Particularly in the West, the celebration of it is matching the New Year in grandeur as alike in scale as the Chinese celebration of the Spring Festival in the East. Over generations of misguided emphasis on fun, frolic and gifts for the wrong reason, the true meaning of Christmas becomes lost to many.

Customarily, 25th December is taken as Christmas Day, the day Christians all over the world commemorate the birth of Jesus. However, it was not the exact date of Jesus' birth. No one knows for sure what the exact date was. In 354 A.D., the Philocalian Calendar² first recorded 25th December as the date of Jesus' birth. By the end of the 5th Century, the date had become generally adopted throughout the West as Christmas Day.

¹ Actually, the X in *X'mas* originated from the Greek letter pronounced as *chi*, used as a convenient abbreviation for CHRIST (CRISTOS) in early church publications. The Greek letter looks like the Roman letter X. Hence, *X'mas* does properly stand for CHRISTmas.

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calendar_of_Filocalus

Red, green and white are generally adopted as the festival colours. Homes are decorated with these colours – red is represented by flowers and candles. Green are the Christmas trees. To people who celebrate “CLAUSmas” with Santa as their focus, red and white of course reminds them of the jolly man in winter who promises children with presents, for which they “would better not shout, better not cry and better not pout ... and be good boys/girls.” In the West especially, in anticipation of Santa coming to town, they would be encouraged by their elders to place an oversized stocking by their bedside or in front of the fireplace before they

sleep. 🧑🏻👶🏻👶🏻👶🏻 In the morning, they would be excited by their finds in the stocking – thanks to kind Santa who would take the trouble to squeeze his rotund body through a chimney and make himself sooty to make the children happy. Such is the happy celebration of a myth. As a fact, nobody (except wide-eyed innocent kids taken in by adults’ fairy-tale) would deny the myth as what it is! 🤪

Given the different historical takes on the origin of the Christmas tree, I feel that it is necessary for a better understanding to differentiate the pre-modern “Christmas” tree and the modern decorated Christmas tree. The two might have similarity in their shape (coniferous), but they have nothing in common in their usage. According to one version of history, the “Christmas” tree first appeared in ancient Rome in connection with the pagan festival of Saturnalia (celebrating a god of agriculture) starting in mid-December. Strictly speaking, it was of course not the Christmas tree that we know of today;

it was just festoons of laurel (a genus of evergreen trees) or other green plants that the Romans liked to deck their halls with to add to their festive atmosphere. As another story goes, the tree was associated with a celebration of the Greek god,



Dionysus. The picture you see here (from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas_tree) shows “the god carries a tapering coniferous tree.” Clearly, the modern decorated Christmas tree is far removed from the ancient pagan-festival conifer. It is thus quite a stretch to connect the two, to determine the acceptability of the present-day decoration. In generality, if different ancient peoples could use greenery for decorative purpose in their varied festivities, there is no valid objection to Christians using the same and making it fit for celebrating the birth of Jesus, the son of God. One account states that the modern Christmas tree “dates back to the 8th Century Germany when an English missionary introduced a decorated fir tree in homage to the Christ Child.”³ In the early 16th century, Martin Luther is said to have taken home a small fir tree and decorated it with lighted candles to mimic the beauty of a starry night.

It is not really important what account you believe about the origin of the Christmas tree. However, it is handy for us to have the knowledge that the modern Christmas tree that people use for adornment of the home is completely detached from the ancient usage of similar greenery in association with pagan festivals. When you celebrate a birthday of a family member, you may decorate your home with flowers, colourful streamers, balloons and whatever else you fancy for a pleasant visual feast. There is no religious significance to these objects of decoration. Likewise, I see no religious/spiritual significance to the modern Christmas tree; for the fact that because some people started its use for some innocuous reason during the Christmas season, the usage has been passed down as a tradition.

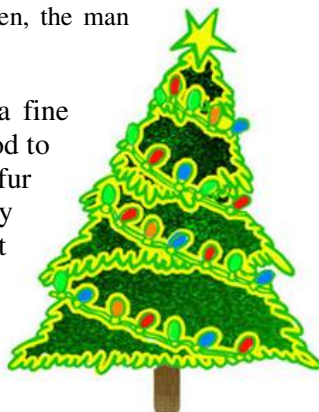
Do you invite your friends to your home for a feast on Christmas? If you do have a nice Christmas tree on display, it would be a good talking point, wouldn't it? A home decorated up and filled with food (the perennial human favourite) presents a non-intimidating atmosphere to non-Christians who ordinarily enjoy the excitement of Christmas for whatever they understand it to be. Let there be an excitement of new discovery, that Christmas is more than what the businessmen and fairytale carriers want us to know. Beyond your effusive and proud narration of how you got the tree in your house, how you decorated it, how you had the pleasure of a “reunion” of family members sitting around it on silent night, holy night,

³ http://www.bbc.co.uk/gardening/plants/plantprofile_xmastree.shtml

meditating on the true Christmas story and being blissful about the blessings you have and are eager to share ... To Christians, our celebration of Christmas had its beginning in a true historical event – the birth of a Messiah as foretold by Prophet Isaiah (Isa 7:14). “This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary ...” (Read Matt. 1:18-24)

What is the great import of Christmas to us? To us, a child is born, a child is given – but this is no ordinary child that Christians all over the world celebrate his birth with enthusiasm and as Prophet Isaiah proclaimed, “the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” (Isa 9:6) The birth was not the be-all and end-all gift to us from God. More was to be disclosed in the proper time, about “one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus ... a ransom for all men.” (1 Tim 2:5-6)

Sitting around a Christmas tree (if you wish) is a fine time to ponder about Christmas and Christ. It is good to think green as you look at the green leaves of the fur tree – have a green Earth, protect God’s creation by cutting down on Christmas waste. As you look at the beautiful red and white decorations on your tree, let the colours be evocative of the power in the blood of Christ to wash us white as snow. Thanks be to God for His redemptive grace in giving us His Son (John 3:16) – the best gift sinners can wish for!



John Lee

Sunday, 25th
November 2007

A
SURPRISE VISIT
from the
Indonesian
Armed Forces
while on training
in Singapore.



Dislocation Dancing

Dec 16, 2007. It all began with my handphone ringing as I was turning into the carpark of Raffles City. Since I was driving, I handed the phone to Joo See to answer. When she answered and I heard that it was Mindy calling, my heart sank. My handphone hardly rings and hardly ever do I get calls from the youths. I feared for the worst as I quickly exited the carpark and headed for NUH.

Many thoughts flashed through my mind. What was the extent of the injury? Why did it happen? Was it a punishment for sins or even for teaching the wrong things, as I had conducted a workshop for the youths the night before?

I wouldn't say that I raced to NUH but certainly I reached NUH even before the ambulance could reach PGP Hall at NUS. So I made a turn out of NUH and headed to NUS. Considering the distance between NUS and NUH and the fact that I was at Raffles City, I wonder about our ambulance service. I was told they have a GPS system on board. I guess the GPS only works when you are far from your destination and it fails when you are just back to back.

Anyway, when I reached the scene, I saw my daughter, Debra, sitting on the stage with Dorcas supporting her back and Sabrina

holding her hand and a whole host of her friends around her. Although immobilized, she seemed to be in no pain. Joo See later told us that she was so filled with fear that the youths noticed it and tried to comfort her. A number of able-bodied young men helped to stretch her to the ambulance and Pastor Anthony accompanied Debra in the ambulance as I followed behind in my car.

As we reached NUH Emergency Room, Debra had already gone in and Pastor Anthony was waiting for us outside. It was going to be a long wait and Pastor Anthony patiently waited it out with us. Debra went in at about 6 pm and it wouldn't be until after 9 pm that we got to see her again.

Debra's Story

When she was wheeled into the Emergency room, she was just sitting there, not showing any signs of pain. Shortly, a doctor passed by and asked why she was in Emergency when she looked fine. It happens that the doctor is an expert in the bone field and when he found out what was wrong with Debra, he said that he will take over the case.

Debra was very nervous and asked for pain killers. The doctor assured her that she will be given some. However before she

realized what was happening, the doctor had reset her knee cap without the pain killers. That was about 5 minutes into the emergency room. The rest of the 3 hours, she was just waiting for X-rays and a cast to support the knee.

While she was waiting, she had time to interact with a patient in the next bed. This young lady had a fall and had fractured her knee. She told Debra that while she was down, no one came to help her for some time and even now in the Emergency room, she had to wait her turn for treatment. As Debra reflected on her own situation, she was very grateful to the Lord, that when she dislocated her knee cap, while practicing a dance routine for the Pulse Camp, all her friends came around to support, console and pray for her. That a doctor with the right expertise could be passing by and setting her bone back within 5 minutes was also a wonderful gift from our Gracious Father, an answer to prayers.

Debra's Out

When the doctor brought Debra out at around 9.15 pm, she apologized for the long wait. She mentioned that a passing doctor had taken over her case to treat Debra and that the delay was due to the long queue for the X-rays. The X-rays showed that everything

was okay but Debra had to be in a cast for at least 10 days until her review with a specialist.

I fetched Pastor Anthony back to NUS to collect Debra's things as she could not continue with the camp. There I saw Dorcas alone lugging all of Debra's luggage and laptop, climbing up quite a long flight of stairs to bring it to me. Indeed a woman who is always doing good deeds. (Acts 9:36) Could it be that my workshop with the youths had an impact? Dorcas was in that workshop, which was about serving. She mentioned to Debra that I told the workshop that when we serve God, God is also serving us. Maybe I should use the word "provide" instead of "serve". God provides the talent or gift, He provides the health, wisdom, strength and even the sun and the rain, that helps us to serve Him.

What's Happening

Could this accident be a distraction to Joo See and I as we are involved in the planning of the CG Christmas Party? Could this be Debra's worst Christmas ever? I don't have the answers but I am thankful for all the help (Peter lending us a wheelchair, some of the CG members taking over some of the Christmas Party matters) and prayers and especially God's abundant mercies for my family.

Martin Cheah

THANK GOD FOR AFRICAN TRIP

A group of us from JCC went on an African trip from 19th to 28th November. It was a bit of an adventure, free-and-easy. It was also a refreshing end-of-year retreat from the daily grind of life.



"Coming out of Africa," my mind and heart is still lingering there. The majestic beauty of the landscape and scenery in the outskirts of Cape Town is beyond words. The rugged valleys and mountains are so naturally defined to remind us of their formation and origin in Genesis, to think about God's hand's wondrous creation that man cannot copy. The "cango cave" in Oudtshoorn is a must-see – the limestone formation through the years has produced the most spectacular masterpiece. The nature's art display was indeed awesome.

We had a beautiful two-room sea-facing apartment at Hermanus bay. It was a privilege to be able to see the sunrise and the waves coming up as we lay in bed.

The experience of a farm stay at a vineyard (with home-cooked meals from fresh vegetables, dairy products and natural mineral waters) is unforgettable. We also cherish the great feeling of being surrounded by wild beast (including the big five – lions, leopards, rhinos, African bulls and elephants) in the game reserve. There was also an opportunity for us to stay in a modern house with ostrich and other poultry at the backyard at our service to give us a wake-up call in the morning.



The Lord is good and His presence and faithfulness by His providence, protection and love is felt by all throughout our journey of about 2000 km from town to town and village to village.

This is just a brief account of our 10-day sojourn in a foreign land, taking in the unfathomable unique beauties in nature that God fashioned in each place and country, and enjoying the cordial dealings with the gracious locals. The time seemed to stand still there, providing no compare to the perennial rush hours here. Although the people there are not financially well off, living a hard life in their farms, they have happiness in their hearts enjoying time with one another and even with other nationals. I recall a moment standing at the supermarket with an African lady. It was so relaxing to converse with her wholeheartedly under the sun about life in Africa and in the little town of Hermanus. African hospitality was also shown by another lady, the host of the farmhouse where we stayed in Paarl. She (at about 60 years) and her two daughters managed the running



of the farm kitchen, from which she served us passers-by piping hot and delicious food with her impressively charming and calm disposition.

The African trip was an eye-opener to the presence of beauty of nature in the physical environment and in people, much of the same having been lost to city folks like us surrounded by the cityscape. I am personally thankful for the Lord's hands that held me and prevented serious injury in an accident on the first night at farmstay in Paarl. The small external wound and the bruise around my knees healed along the journey – It was completely healed upon my return to Singapore.






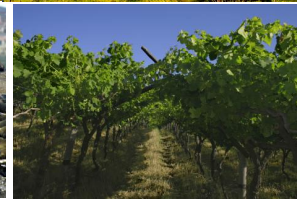


Praise the Lord!

Margaret Lee

COLORS OF AFRICA

By Nick Wong

Garden with pond	Hay along highway	Vineyard along Caledon
		
		
Vineyard along Caledon	Seal Island at Mossel Bay	Vineyard at Paarl

How to survive parenting advice

By Julie Hahn

1. **Keep your relationship with your heavenly Father** so vibrant that you always have the best wisdom to draw on. Listen to him and speak with him constantly.
2. **Keep open lines of communication** with your parents and relatives. Sure, they may have made mistakes, but you have survived. Ask them their opinion – they love to be asked – and you may receive new insights into some of their methods – successful and otherwise.
3. **Spend time in playgrounds.** Observe other parents and carers with children in a neutral environment. Be an objective observer of what works, what doesn't, and ask yourself why.
4. **Keep your heart and mind open,** but also be discerning with the information available to you.
 - Beware of anything that says a particular method is “God’s way”. Contrary to some claims, the Bible does not teach “methods” for raising children, but it does teach us about a love relationship from a perfect loving Father towards his ever prodigal children.
 - Be prepared to listen to all sorts of advice, but in grace accept that nobody has had the same background as your child and your child’s parents. Accept advice that you find helpful, and with a breath of kindness blow the rest away.
 - Beware of any advice that cautions you not to question the advisers or suggests that “others will not understand.” This kind of approach can cause isolation and alienation. It may also produce a burden of guilt. If you have received this kind of advice and followed it, please speak to your pastor or somebody you can trust.
5. **Find the phone number for your local parent helpline.** They offer practical advice and an understanding ear. And it doesn't hurt as much as pulling your hair out!
6. **Ask other more experienced parents** (whose children you like!)
7. **Be prepared to change strategies.** If you've been given a method that you hoped might suit your situation, had a decent trial and it didn't work, be prepared to change tack. Some strategies suit some homes, situations or children better than others. Some don't grow with the child, and some are based on control and are just plain bad news.
8. **Don't forget....most kids make it!** One day there will be more sleep. And remember, as G&N Williams put it in their book *Your Relationship Can Survive a Newborn*, most parents who had “angels” for children, may just be blessed with poor memories!