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Although the Mayans denied it, the whole world was aware of the predicted end of days – 21st Dec 2012. Did knowing this make a difference in people's lives?

Some, like the Doomsday

Preppers stored for themselves weapons, food, water, medical supplies and other physical needs. Others like the people in Noah's time were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, they *couldn't* be bothered whether the world ends or not. What is the Christians' response to this prediction? As Christians, we surely knew that the world was not going to end on 21st December 2012

because the Bible says so: "*Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.*" (Matthew 25:13) However, knowing that it is not going to be on this particular day does not mean we do nothing about it. Jesus warned that we will not know when He will return but He also admonished us to be always ready for that hour.



As to having the Outreach event before or after the predicted day, I think it does not make a great difference. However there might be a slight advantage if it was held a few days before because when we held it the day after, people might have been so relieved that the world was not going to end just yet, they were not willing to receive salvation then.

During the run up to 21st December, many of my friends and colleagues talked about it. However none of them took it seriously. They were not prepared to change their lifestyle and not prepared to receive Christ as

their Saviour. Even six days before the day, five men in India committed a gang rape on a young lady who later died in Singapore. Did they know about the prediction, probably yes but it made no difference. It dawned on me that even if I were to know the date when Christ would come again, it would be of no help in evangelizing to the people around me. Curiously, they must have no fear of Hell or they think they have lived such good lives that they deserve Heaven.

Then it was Christmas Day and we rejoice with those that were baptised during the English and Dialect services. They were Mark Ting and his son Jayden in the English service and Mr. Cheok Chee Kiang at the Dialect service.



We also welcome into the fellowship those who transferred membership. They are Mei Chen at the Dialect service and Jennifer Chee, Jacqueline Leow, Serene Yeo and Alvin Wong at the English service.



Also there were some people who accepted Christ after listening to the Dialect sermons during these past few weeks.



We may have expected all these conversions to happen during the Christmas Outreach but God has His own mysterious agenda. We tried and maybe felt disheartened because we see no results. However, continue to pray, especially for our loved ones that God will save them in His time. Just as a farmer waters the seeds, we labour not in vain if we trust God for the harvest.



CELEBRATING CHRISTMAS: WATCHING PRAYING FOR SECOND ADVENT

I suggested that our Christmas program “Follow That Star” should be held at least two days earlier instead of on the 22nd of December. I was a bit concerned that maybe the world would end on the 21st (according to the Mayan calendar) whereby the dinner program would be a day too late.

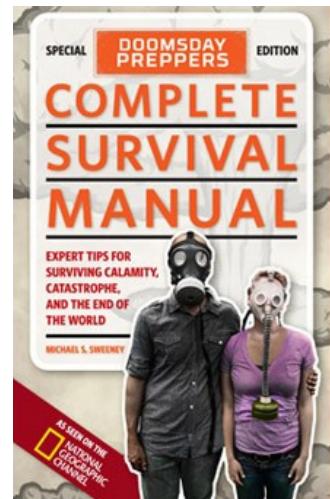
Across the world, there were doomsday preppers caught in a frenzy to stock up on essentials and to have at hand lifesavers in the forms of gas masks, creative flotation devices, secure hideouts, etc. Suddenly, I felt envious of my friends who live in HDB flats that are provided with bomb shelters whereas mine (the older generation of HDB flats) is not. Good enough or not, such indoor bomb shelters should offer a measure of comfort in case the doomsday of reckoning arrives in a whirl of firestorms and explosions.

My high-floor HDB flat looked precarious, and I mustered up courage to ask around for some kind souls who would offer my family the safety of their reinforced sanctuaries to live past the end days. Alas, none I approached was kindhearted enough to accede to my nervous request! They had excuses galore, such as having just enough space to accommodate their own. How selfish! In a panicky state, I called up every good brother and sister in the Church, and every loving shepherd who would surely not disappoint, for succor. Finally, one wise advice came: Don't worry. Watch and Pray.

Watch and Pray? Does it mean that I should keep watch of the happenings (the sky suddenly darkening or brightening, winds howling and thunders roaring ...) for signs and pray for God's protection?

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” (John 14:27)

The above words from the mouth of our Lord Jesus might not be directly about an end-of-the-world situation, but it should apply equally to every situation when we are at risk of being consumed and paralyzed by fear.



Fear not, I began to assure myself. And I wondered whether there was a good way that I could share the message of peace with those doomsday preppers who were in extreme distress. Yes, I got it! The wonder Internet tools like Facebook, twitter and blogs could just help me send the message “Don’t worry. Watch and Pray” around the globe within seconds.

Some intriguing questions flash across my mind: If you were among the very few who could succeed in your doomsday preps to survive the end of world, where would you be then with all your spiritedly-prepared physical salvation kits should the world come to its end (meaning that it no longer existed)? If indeed you managed to save yourselves by all the hard planning to survive and the world has ended but there is still some solid ground for you to lay your feet, how do you plan to survive alone living in the desolateness of an environment where all your fellow humankind have been wiped out? In short, what is the point for all the prepping insanity wrought by fear?

Weren’t we in the season of Advent, ready to welcome the Second Advent of Christ? Could the Mayan date have been just the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men (2 Pet 3:7) or the day that every believer ought to look forward to day by day for finally bidding farewell to our days of suffering in this world?

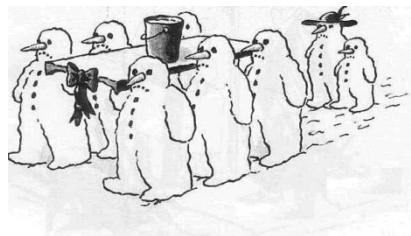
If you are reading this, you are convinced that what people speak of as the Mayan end-of-world prophecy is just another of the countless “prophecies” in the history dustbin of false prophets. It is another validation of what the Bible proclaims loudly and clearly:

“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. (Matt. 24:36-39, 42)

Those doomsday preppers who made their prediction about the 21st of December thought they knew. In fact, like all of us, they couldn't have known because it is not God's will for any to know the day and hour.

Now, what next? We can take a hint from history:

- William Miller, an American Baptist preacher, predicted that Jesus would return "sometime between March 21, 1843 and March 21, 1844." The Seventh-day Adventists and the Millerites were his followers.
- When Miller's prediction failed, a colleague, Samuel Snow, set another date – Oct 22, 1844.
- When Snow's prediction again failed, other date-setting attempts were made by Nelson H. Barbour (a Millerite Adventist) and Charles Taze Russell (founder of Jehovah's Witnesses)
- For generations, all kinds of self-proclaimed prophets found it in their "calling" to take a stab at new date-setting endeavours. None got it right
- The Millennium fever at the turn of the century was another great opening for prophet-wannabes to prove their prophetic mettle.
- With the latest failed attempt at making an end-of-world prediction on the Mayan date, I am sure that we will get to see more "convincing" attempts at date-setting corrections one after another.



When predictions fail, it is alright to laugh at their silliness provided that no harm is done. Sadly, it had happened and it will still happen that foolish people get cheated of their fortunes or lives by doomsday cults. Evil opportunists may even promulgate spiritism and occultism for their own aberrant ends. Christians need to be on guard not just for themselves but also for their loved ones.

End-time prophecies are found throughout the Bible so that we may be prepared and not rest on our spiritual laurels. We want to be the wise virgins, not the foolish ones that Jesus spoke about in His parable. (Matt. 25:1-14) We want to be spiritually ready to meet the Lord in His Second Advent, recognizing Jesus Christ as the Only Way of salvation. We do not want to trap ourselves in fear, placing false hope of end-day deliverance on spiritedly prepared salvation kits just like the doomsday preppers do. For Christians, the Day of the Lord is not doomsday, but one of great blessings to the righteous. We do not need to know the times and dates, for the day will come like a thief in the night. (1 Thess. 5:1-2) To be spiritually ready (not spiritedly troubled) is also to follow what Paul wrote to the Thessalonians under the heading "Final Instructions" in 1 Thess. 5:12-27NIV.



As we celebrate Christmas, and look forward to the Second Advent of our Lord, the wise advice worth repeating is: Watch and Pray! (Matt. 26:41 and Luke 21:36 NIV)



JOHN LEE

A VISION OF THE CROSS

Peter Cheong took this photo on 6th Dec, beside Gombak MRT, after his morning devotions.



He had wanted only to take a picture of the clear fresh ray of sunshine peaking boldly through the morning sky. He did not realize until later that there was a cross formation in the photo formed by the junction of two drains. A reminder of his time spent with God.

My experience in the LcS youth camp – Kampong Style

Honestly, I was originally apprehensive about going for the camp. Being the first time so many different churches were participating in a joint youth camp, I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to make new friends from other churches. I couldn't have been more wrong. Throughout the camp I forged invaluable new friendships that I won't soon forget.

Although I have made many new friendships through the camp, the people I will remember the most would have to be my group leader and group members. From the moment we came up with our group name, the "Cheeky Cheena Coconuts", I no longer viewed myself as an individual camper but as part of a loving group who encouraged and spurred one another on. During the ingenious "Kampong Games" where we played traditional games such as Five stones, Go Li and Slipper Tower, We never failed to give the games our best effort and had truckloads of fun. The "Kampong Games" showed us how our parents used to have fun and really showed how fortunate youths are today.



The theme for the camp was "A Fellowship of Believers". Three messages, shared by older youths from different churches taught me things such as the history of the church, what it really means to have Christian fellowship and our identity in Christ. All three sharings had a

profound impact on me, teaching me how the church began and how they originally ran the church, how Christian fellowship really works and lastly, that God Loves us all and that we as Christians should view ourselves as His children, not what non believers commonly label us - "Christians". I am sure that these invaluable lessons will guide me and mold me to become a better Christian youth.

The biggest event of the camp had to be the campfire night. Each group was given an item, and had to create an advertisement to sell that item to the rest of the Kampong. Our group got cooking oil. To make the



camp enjoyed it, so much so that our group won the first prize! We were overjoyed.

When the camp drew to a close on Sunday, I wished that it would last longer. I was just beginning to get to know everyone in camp and wanted to get to know everybody better. However, I am sure I will get to meet them at the next LCS youth camp so I guess I will have to wait for then!



advertisement more entertaining and the cooking oil more attractive, we decided to turn the cooking oil into "miracle oil", which had thousands of uses such as hair oil, lamp oil, lubricant, medicated oil and more. We spent much time to plan, fine tuning details and make it funnier. Every group member played an invaluable role in contributing ideas and giving constructive criticism. On the night, our group was one of the last few to go. Before we went up, we saw many other groups perform stunning advertisements making us feel slightly intimidated. However, the moment we got on stage we forgot about it and just performed to the best of our abilities. Luckily the rest of the



Jonathan Goh

FOLLOW THAT STAR

Sometime in late November 2012, some of the CG members and I went door to door at one of the blocks besides the church. We went without any expectations because in an earlier foray, there was no response even though the event was free. This time it was an invitation to a dinner and the guests had to pay \$20 per person.



As expected, no one responded to our invitation that night. We went home not discouraged because we have done our job and it was up to God to elicit the response. As the days went by and the Christmas Outreach dinner drew near, some of us were just preparing for the event by practicing the carols, packing the gifts and planning all the activities. Then we heard news from Peggy, who is part of the CG and also involved in the committee for the outreach event, that there were four persons from the block that we visited, coming for the event.



We were all excited with the opportunity to meet up with someone from the block willing to join in the Christmas party. The dinner was a success in terms of the logistics, carolling, entertainment and catering. However, there was no response to the invitation at the end of Rev. Anthony's short message. Again I ask, should we go back discouraged? In our "Instant" generation, we expect to see a great harvest that night. That is why we are not farmers, after planting the seed, we expect to see the corn immediately shooting out of the ground.

We have to be patient like the farmer and wait upon the Lord to add rain and sunshine before we can see the corn and then the harvest. Let us not loose heart for in time we will gather in the harvest.

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. (Galatians 6:9-10)

Martin Cheah



OUTREACH IN PHOTOS

Over 300 people filled up the dinner hall on the first floor of Fairway Club's Chinese Restaurant. Here are some of the photos taken by Nick Wong and Martin Cheah. Look at the people in the photos, pray for them that the message of



Christmas will touch their hearts.





Thanksgiving Night

31st Dec 2012 The last day of the year and while some people headed for the bay to see the fireworks, others turned up in church to thank God for the blessings received.

I had a farewell dinner for a colleague who I had for 4 years tried to convince of the need for Christ. He claims to be an atheist and therefore not willing to believe although he will listen and sometimes present his argument. This case is now out of my hands and into God's hands. Thus I was late for the Thanksgiving service and only caught the later part.



When I arrived, Margaret Lee was speeding through her testimony of her recent visit to Israel. I gather that she was reminding us that God will save Israel in the last days. *As far as the gospel is concerned, Israel are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.* (Romans 11:28-29)

Debra came up next to share her experience in Brisbane and how God had sought after her from birth and provided for her education through her parents.



Betsy followed with a thanksgiving for her healing from a brain aneurism.

Samuel Tan shared about how God had taken away everything - job, career, house, family and security as he studies in the US. He still thanks God for the lesson he learned about being totally dependent on God alone for provision.



The last person to share was Ronnie Lim. He thanked God for 3 blessings he had received. Firstly, he was blessed with a healthy grandson from his firstborn daughter. Secondly, another daughter's non-Christian boyfriend who is now willing to attend church service with her. Finally, he is blessed with a son who did so well in his university course that he received partial scholarship.

Have you something to thank God for, share it in The Vine.

Martin Cheah

SEMANTICS IN THE BIBLE

On an escalator, someone in a hurry brushed (pushed) against you leading you to fall and become injured. You claim insurance compensation for the accident, but the claim is rejected because:

- The insurer says that it was a push, an assault because the person who was in a hurry had intended to move you aside by force to make way for himself.
- The fall should be reasonably foreseeable because of the force used and therefore not fortuitous. The incident was a collision of two human bodies, not an accident.

The above is just for laughs, with my tongue firmly in cheek. However, I know a real case many years ago of an insurer rejecting an accident claim for the reason of it being an assault case (a kindergarten child pushing another) before finally admitting the claim on the claimant's argument that the pushing was a natural part of child's play. It amuses me to think of a small claim giving cause for a quibble over the definition of a word: "accident".

Children and adults enjoy playing games with words. Semantics games are one of them; they can range from simple amusements to more serious challenges. However, dealing with semantics is not a game, but humourless business, for consummate practitioners like lawyers, politicians, insurers, diplomats, copywriters and veteran *tai-chi** exponents.

* (*According to a Singlish dictionary, a tai-chi exponent is someone adept in the art of shadow boxing; i.e., shifting responsibility or liability to someone else.*)

Semantics is simply a study of meanings, or the interpretation of words and phrases. Ordinarily, words have their well-defined meanings as you may check them out in dictionaries. What do you understand if I tell you that Tom and Jerry have a frank discussion? It is good to be frank; i.e., being straightforward, taking each other into confidence and with sincerity. News report coming out of the Iran Summit in August mentioned "an unusually frank meeting Ban¹ held with Khamenei² and Ahmadinejad³." To

¹ UN Chief Ban Ki-moon

² Iran's Supreme Leader

³ Iranian leader

understand what the report means by “unusually frank”, not simply frank, but unusually so, you would need a specialised dictionary of political semantics to provide you with the true out-of-the-ordinary meaning. Exceptional bluntness sans the usual diplomatic courtesy in the voice more or less describes the “unusual frankness” in the summit meeting characterised by pugnacious arguments over irreconcilable positions. When politicians or national leaders had vigorous disagreements in a discussion, they would not be comfortable presenting the true face of it to the world frankly; they might have their respectable reasons that we ordinary folks with non-political blood, to be frank about it, would not understand.

Earlier in July, ASEAN had a foreign ministers' meeting without an official outcome (i.e., without a joint communique customarily expected of such a meeting). It was all because the ministers could not agree on words (or statements, or semantics) acceptable to all on the matter of the South China Sea. Typically of diplomats, of course, Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa explained it nicely:

“We diplomats love bickering over commas and semi-colons and things like that, but we don't need to wait another eight years. I would like to see the COC⁴ done fairly quickly so it can have a stabilising impact on our region.”

What a diplomatically-frank admission!

It seems to me that many people seldom use the semi-colon or feel the importance of it in accurately conveying thoughts (whether in students' school compositions or in adults' writings). Some do try to use the semi-colon occasionally, but use it wrongly as a substitute for the comma when the semi-colon has its own special functions as a separator with a force between a comma and a period. If you never thought about the importance of it, because you see yourself as not being in the class of consummate practitioners of semantics, let me try to change your thinking. It is in the Bible – if you want to understand well the Word of God, and you want to avoid false interpretations, you need to pay attention to the semi-colon. Take a look at Ephesians 2:8 from three translations:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,” (NKJV)

⁴ Code of Conduct

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;" (NASB)

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God -" (NIV)

Note that the semi-colon is missing from the NIV. What does the verse tell us is the gift of God: faith, grace, salvation itself or the means of it ("by grace through faith")? Christian theologians knowledgeable about Greek grammar have been arguing over the controversies that have a bearing on the justification of infant baptism; the placement of the semi-colon in the verse provides a major bone of contention about the correct antecedent of the word "it" as we read in NKJV and NASB above. How should the controversies be settled?

We may perhaps take a leaf from the controversy on whether the PM has unfettered discretion in determining when to hold a by-election. The High Court fittingly considered the double interpretations of the clause in the Constitution and drew a conclusion on its true meaning not by just looking at the words of the constitutional provision itself. Constitutional law professor Thio Li-ann, noting the importance of the phrase "shall be filled by election", commented on the necessity of the Constitution to be "read against its structure and history as well as against the associated statutes (Parliamentary Elections Act and Interpretation Act)." The leaf that I take away from this instructive by-election court case is that in making interpretations, there is often a larger setting to look at beyond words, phrases and sentences. With regards to the court of Christian opinions relating to handling semantics in biblical interpretations, the whole structure of God's Word (whole of Bible), the biblical history providing the contexts and the stringent Interpretation Rules of Christian Hermeneutics have to be considered together so that Christians do not get themselves led up the garden path about spiritual truth.

Semantics is in the Bible. The Word of God is infallible, but what do we understand by the word "Word" (such as in John 1:1). It does not carry the meaning in the ordinary sense that children first learnt in school, and is translated as 道 rather than 字 in Chinese Bibles, and its Greek origin is *logos* (λόγος), which does not stand isolated semantically but belongs to a semantic field⁵. Understanding semantics, we can spiritually reconcile better with the truth about the infallibility of God's Word while, as fallible

⁵ Group of words with related meanings.

human, we continue to grapple with the arguments over the variety of interpretations of Scripture in human languages. The fallibility is in human words, not God's Word! For a long time, I had expended energy contending with the infallibility of God's Word instead!

If I give you a fruit knife, you know it is good when serving its valuable function. Semantics is like a fruit knife; if it falls into the hand of a crook, you know what detriment it can impart. You may not be interested to use a fruit knife, as you prefer to use a bread knife to cut an apple. Your preference is respected, but my recommendation is for you to appreciate the power of the fruit knife for mischief. There is nothing wrong with semantics; it simply involves the interpretation of words and phrases to procure their intended meanings in full context. It gains a bad reputation just like the fruit knife in the wrong hand – used for murder, for example. Like it or not, it does you good to know how to defend yourself against the sharp and dangerous edge of semantics that may be wilfully used for the murder of truth. An example of this dangerous edge is patent in some Christians' belief that if you donate generously to a cause, your generosity will be returned to you amply; for e.g., you will be rewarded with a job promotion, you will strike gold in your business investment, you will be healed of your terminal illness, you will be granted a good selection of your HDB flat, blah, blah, blah ... Generosity for a good cause is worthy of praise; but generosity founded on misguided ideas is lamentable. Tell me honestly: Who can guarantee reward specifics? Or be sure that if you fail to get the return, it is because you have not been faithful enough, generous enough or cheerful enough in your giving and therefore you have to do something more to salve your guilt?

Semantics is abused by selective targeting of verses in Scripture so that God's Word is not grasped in its fullness:

"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." (Luke 6:38)

If semantics is being abused in promoting the prosperity gospel, likewise is it sometimes abused to endorse a poverty gospel by looking in isolation at what Jesus said to His disciples just a short while earlier (Luke 6:20-21):

*"Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.*

*Blessed are you who hunger now,
for you will be satisfied."*

Ponder on how Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness with the use of semantics. (Matt. 4:1-11)

Semantics as a valuable tool (if handled properly) for us to dig the infallible God's Word is not sufficient on its own for us to gain an in-depth comprehension of Scripture. Since Scripture is God-breathed, we certainly need spiritual help to discern the illimitable Truth hidden within the translations that are limited by constricted human languages. Give semantics its due respect, but don't forget that we need the Counsellor who is with us forever. (John 14:16, 17)

JOHN LEE

Christmas Greetings from Down Under

Merryl keeps busy, being involved with the family and church. She had a lovely break with her friend, Jean, on Lord Howe Island. We have been to Sydney twice this past year, for a wedding in February, and a birthday in May.

I am supposed to be retired, but have done some casual work, most recently, a couple of stints relieving on the Port Hedland tugs. They offered a full time position, which I declined. Will go back on the 3rd Jan for four weeks.

It is about time we did a bit of travelling and hopefully will get away on a regular basis this coming year.

May you continue life with good health, contentment, peace and enjoyment.

Have a Blessed Christmas and may 2013 bring you health and happiness.



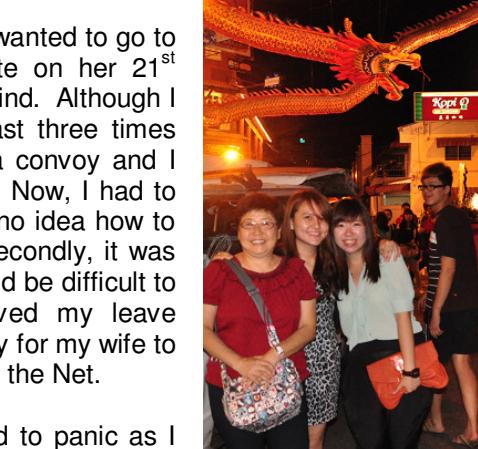
Merryl and Iain
19/40 Verney Street
Kings Beach 4551

To Malacca with GPS

When Debra informed us that she wanted to go to Malacca to surprise her classmate on her 21st birthday, many fears crossed my mind. Although I have driven up to Malacca at least three times before, it was always as part of a convoy and I was just following the car in front. Now, I had to make my own way up and I have no idea how to find my way there on my own. Secondly, it was near the month end and leave would be difficult to get. However, my boss approved my leave application and that opened the way for my wife to book the hotel reservations through the Net.

Over the next few weeks, I started to panic as I

realized the journey ahead of me may have to be done without any maps or GPS. I tested my GPS but it was not working so well. It could not locate my position even after I have turned it on for half my journey in Singapore roads.



On the appointed day, the 12 of us in 3 cars met at the Tiger Brewery and proceeded towards the Tuas Checkpoint. There was no congestion as we smoothly pass through the customs on both sides. I turned on my GPS but I could not get it to recognize

Then a sudden turn of events. The Dialect Team decided to have a retreat in Malacca during the same period. My journey up country was settled, Peter could lead the way and I only needed to follow his Subaru. However the team will come back one day earlier and I will still need to travel on my own on the way back.



my destination, ie Malacca. Eventually, half way through the journey, we turn off the GPS and just concentrated on following Peter's car.



We experience good weather and great fellowship along the way, taking pitstops at Machap and Pagoh. Finally we reached Malacca in time for lunch at Oleh Sayang peranakan

restaurant. After lunch, it was only a five minutes drive to the hotel. Once parked in the hotel's basement, I did not drive again until it was time to leave Malacca.

The rest of our stay in Malacca was travelled by foot or Debra's friend's father fetched us around in his BMW. No stress on me.



Finally, the day came when the Dialect Team headed for home. We bid them farewell and safe journey and they prayed for us likewise.

The next morning, after breakfast, we started for home, just one car alone. Lo and behold, when I turned on the GPS, it could locate my position.



When Debra set the destination as Tiger Brewery, my wife was worried that the GPS would lead us to the brewery in Kuala Lumpur. We made it back safely to JCC around 2.00 pm the same day.

Thanks be to God for **Guidance, Protection and Safety.**

View all photos at the following links:
<http://youtu.be/AxvTz7H6zKc>
http://youtu.be/QHHKAH5_CmA
<http://youtu.be/zFG6kteK0c8>

Martin Cheah



CHRiSTMAS 2012



19 Dec – The Dialect Team entertained hundreds of old folks at a YMCA lunch outreach, touching them with heart-rending Hokkien carols and praise songs.
21 Dec – The Team went caroling.



22 Dec – JCC Christmas Outreach Dinner @ Fairway Club. The whole church from the youngest to the oldest took part in singing carols to the guests.
24 Dec – JCC Candlelight Service.



Truly a very hectic time of year for JCC.

