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EDITOR'S

w o r d



Christmas is here again. Do you have problems buying gifts for someone who has everything? The Holy Bible mentions such people in Luke 9:25, *“What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?”*

Many people I believe would love to be in this position of owning the whole world or at least a commanding part of it. However they do not realize that the saying: “absolute power corrupts absolutely” (Lord Acton) generally comes as a result.

If at this present moment you are a humble man, would you still be so when you have all the money in the world? Won't having all that money make you proud, change your character, make you do things you would not have done when you were poor? If having all that money will not change you, as you remain in your simple HDB home, taking public transport and generally eating at the hawker centres, then why hanker to be rich?

Listen to what the Bible says, *“But godliness with **contentment** is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be **content** with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.”* (1 Timothy 6:6-9)

If you ask a rich man how much is enough, what would he reply? The multimillionaire, John D. Rockefeller, answered quite transparently, “Just a little bit more.” In other words, “I will never have enough.” What did he fail to have – contentment!

My dear friends, at this Christmas time there is a great gift given to man from God. *"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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."* (John 3:16-17)

This is the Good News and this is the gift I want to give to you. Know that God loves you and had sent Jesus into this world more than 2000 years ago to show His love for you. Jesus came into this world to save everyone, and that includes you. Receive this gift, *"Yet to all who received him, to those who **believed** in his name, he gave the right to become children of God"* (John 1:12) . I am not here to give you convincing proofs of God's existence or proofs of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, you can borrow many books on these topics written by more capable writers. I am asking you to believe in faith, *"without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must **believe** that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."* (Hebrews 11:6). Receive this gift, this Christmas.

Paul further admonished Timothy, *"Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their **hope in God**, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life."* (1Timothy 6:17-19)

I can imagine it is great to be number one but without contentment you will feel like a failure. Even if you won 5 gold medals, you still feel like you failed because you did not get 6 gold medals. My dear friends learn *"to be content whatever the circumstances."* (Philippians 4:11b) *Receive by faith, Jesus as Saviour and Lord, "and my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 4:19)

As another year passes away and a new one comes along, I wish you all a Blessed Christmas and a New Year filled with hope, joy and love.

*"Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you **believe** in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your **faith**, the salvation of your souls."* (1Peter 1:8-9)

Martin Cheah

The Colours of Christmas

There is a song titled **WHITE CHRISTMAS** with the following lyrics:



*I'm dreaming of a white Christmas
Just like the ones I used to know
Where the treetops glisten,
and children listen
To hear sleigh bells in the snow*

*I'm dreaming of a white Christmas
With every Christmas card I write
May your days be merry and bright
And may all your Christmases be white*

There is no snow in Singapore, so we won't be celebrating a **WHITE CHRISTMAS**; and we can stop dreaming for all our Christmases to be white. Maybe if you keep thinking about Santa Claus riding to town with his reindeer team, you will really dream in your sleep that you hear sleigh bells in the snow. Once you wake up, quickly wash your face and get real!



It is easy to understand what Christmas actually is, if you are not dead set to ignore the obvious fact and to favour fantasy which you then pass on to the kids about someone in red going to slide down the house chimney with gifts for them. Take a look at the etymology of the significant word shown on the left.

Do you still think of arguing whether Christmas is a celebration of Christ or a Santa Claus carnival?

“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.” (John 3:16)

When Christians celebrate Christmas, they are reminded of a few things:

- Firstly, God's love for man.
- Because of God's love for us, He sent us his Son, Jesus the Christ.

- We have a choice to believe in him or to believe in Santa Claus.
- If we choose to believe in Christ, then we have the gift of eternal life. (If we believe in Santa Claus, will we receive gifts furtively stuffed into our Christmas stockings at night?)

Kids can be innocent in believing in fairy tales; but grown-ups are expected to be able to tell apart the truth and the falsehood. Sometimes, adults choose to celebrate the falsehood “just for merriment”; but then the revelry built around the falsehood begins to encircle their life with delusions of worldly pleasures. Once they experience for themselves the truth, only then will the truth set them free. (John 8:32)

If you can't have a **WHITE CHRISTMAS**, then what colour of Christmas do you like? Have you thought of a **BLACK CHRISTMAS**?

November 29 was known as Black Friday, the Friday following Thanksgiving Day in America. A black Friday is normally a day of good cheer to stores as they traditionally offer steep discounts and enjoy massive sales. Businesses were very happy to deem November 29 this year as the beginning of the Christmas shopping season, with a record-breaking sales of 41 items per second reported by online retailer, Amazon. It was “the beginning of great sales”, not “the ending”. Hence, the days following would put more Christmas cheer on the faces of the store owners and it could aptly be called a **BLACK CHRISTMAS** by them because they rejoiced in seeing their accounts awash in black ink.

A **BLACK CHRISTMAS** may be a delight to businesses that get the chance to get their accounts out of the red; but to consumers who overspend, regret may follow



after a brief season of revelry. “Even in laughter the heart may ache, and rejoicing may end in grief.” (Prov. 14:13) A holiday season is also a time when police bookings for traffic violations and intemperate behavior tend to rise. Therefore, to people who lose themselves to worldly pleasures instead of focusing right on what the season is actually

about, the Christmas may indeed turn out to be a black one with a negative connotation for the colour.

I do not support a **BLACK CHRISTMAS**, especially since I don't have the means to afford to contribute the favoured ink colour to companies eyeing my wallet, or

the wherewithal to spend on immoderate amounts of revelry. Instead, a **GREEN CHRISTMAS** comes to my mind as I think of the evergreen fir tree that is traditionally used in Christmas decorations of homes.

We have had “once-in-50-years” floods increasing in intensity in Singapore. Wet summers and warm winters are getting more and more common in various parts of the world. Weather disasters attributable to global warming point to the diagnosis that the Earth is getting very sick. There is now strong scientific consensus that human activities have been affecting global climate. Long before the concept of a Green Earth and the reality of global warming were recognized, Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) had 20/20 foresight in advising that “In wilderness is the preservation of the world.” Unfortunately, nobody took heed. Celebrating a **GREEN CHRISTMAS** is to recognize a Green Earth that we need to protect for our own interest, even if we are



ignorant that taking care of the Earth is a mandate God has given to man. Many people are not conscious that their extravagance of Christmas consumption with loads of wastage is hurting the Earth badly. We can do little things to reduce the holiday season’s environmental impact – carpooling can cut down greenhouse gases; buying less gifts and giving sensible gifts can cut wastages from such gifts being discarded because they are useless or unneeded; reducing the use of resource-intensive decorations can save more trees ... Having a meaningful Christmas celebrating Christ is not necessarily a costly affair to our pocket or planet.

The colour red also comes to mind. What do you think of a **RED CHRISTMAS**? When Christ was born, an angel appeared to the shepherds in the fields and said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.” (Luke 2:10-11)

Keep Christ in
Christmas!
Have a
blessed holiday!

The birth of Christ was indeed great news. Curiously, the Bible does not tell us to remember Christ’s birth; instead, it tells us to remember His death. (1 Cor. 11:23-24) However, for a momentous event of great joy like the first advent of our

Messiah, we cannot fail to remember even if we are not specifically told to remember it. While the holy birth gave us hope, the problem of our sin would never be resolved without the blood that would be shed and the life that would be sacrificed on the Cross. Note that our lives were restored and changed by the power of God's grace not at the birth of the Holy Child, but at the point when Christ gave up His life on the Cross as propitiation for our sin, when the temple veil was rent apart. The gospel of grace can be said to be founded upon the blood sacrifice of the Son of God. Hence, if we cannot avoid remembering the momentous event of Christ's birth, much less can we avoid reflecting on Christ's death. Christmas was not an isolated event in God's plan. From the birth of Christ to His death on the Cross and thereafter to His resurrection were events that unfolded in a continuous inseparable chain to reveal the whole plan of God for our redemption. Celebrating a **RED CHRISTMAS**, reminding ourselves of the blood shed on the Cross, we wish for peace on Earth and good will to all men, and remind ourselves that Jesus was born to die:

*Hark! the cherubic armies shout,
And glory leads the song:
Good will and peace are heard throughout
The harmonious heav'nly throng,
The harmonious heav'nly throng.*

*With joy the chorus we repeat,
Glory to God on high!
Good will and peace are now complete,
Jesus was born to die,
Jesus was born to die.*

Jesus loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood. (Rev. 1:5)

I suddenly have a thought about having a **WHITE CHRISTMAS** distinctly different from adorers of Santa Claus – meaning that we have Christ at the centre of our celebration, and we cherish the hope of having **our sins washed white as snow** (Isa. 1:18) as we “draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.” (Heb. 10:22)

JOHN LEE

CG Fellowship Night



The warmth of a BBQ fire on a starry night on 7th December at Heritage View condo in Dover Rise was equal to the warmth of the fellowship which was shared by over forty people, mostly from the adult cells.



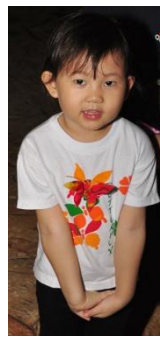
There was an over-abundance of food to accompany the friendly banter between buddies from the various cells. Halfway through, we proceeded into the function room to be spiritually fed.



Rev Anthony shared about the church rebuilding and encouraged all to have faith and pray for God's provision to build the physical church as well as a strong body of believers that will carry out

the Great Commission, as the new building becomes a Gateway to Heaven, in Taman Jurong. I am not quoting his words but merely giving a short summary of what he said.

After that, we again returned to the poolside to try and finish up the remaining food. Being older folks, we were unable to consume all the food and thus maybe some of you young ones had our leftovers for breakfast the next day.



It was a fun night for the oldies even if I have to say so myself. The last time we had such a gathering must be quite some time ago because no one can remember when.

Martin Cheah.



Dialect Team at YMCA

18th December – the Dialect Team spent a morning entertaining the old folks with games and songs at YMCA, Orchard Road. For that effort, we received the joy of the Lord, which was our strength, as we ourselves are mostly older folks, the youngest in our team being Lian Khup and Yulia.

Here are some photos to tell the story. The team played 2 rounds of games, then later served the old folks lunch before going up to sing Christmas Carols and dialect songs.



The old folks were very appreciative and even asked why we sang so few songs compared to previous years. Doesn't that make your day?



Martin Cheah



What can we drink?

Christians should be able to drink anything – water, wine, beer, coffee, tea, etc. – whatever in any quantity that does not cause health problems.

Can one drink too much of water to cause harm? Can a little liquor harm you? I come to writing on this topic because someone suggested it to me after reading my other article on “What can we eat?” published in November Vine.

The Bible tells us that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor. 6:19) This being so, it is obviously not right for us to harm our body – whether it is about eating unhealthy food or overloading with alcohol. Freedom to eat and drink does have its limits.

Drinking water



While doctors commonly advise drinking lots of water, there is a common-sense limit to it. It may surprise some that there is actually a medical condition called dilutional hyponatraemia, which can be fatal, due to drinking too much. Yes, it is about drinking too much water (especially at a single sitting) resulting in the body’s electrolyte imbalance.

While by common sense most people would be more likely to indulge in over-drinking of alcohol, the over-drinking of water is quite possible to people who suffer from polydipsia whereby they drink and drink to quench their excessive thirst to the point of over-hydration. If people can suffer from anorexia or bulimia, whereby they under-consume or over-consume food, it is quite imaginable for some people (even if rare) to suffer from plausible disorders that either alienate them from water or subject them to binge drinking (of water).

Even if you don’t get to that extreme, drinking too much water at night would still affect your sleep and hence your health.

So can we drink water anyhow? 😊

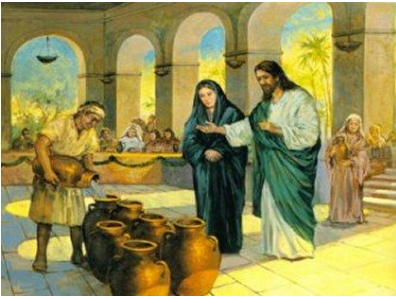
Approval of wine and beer

Water is essential for life, but it is not best to drink water only. Sometimes, you may do well to drink some wine for health, as Apostle Paul advised Timothy:

“Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.” (1 Tim. 5:23)

A website¹ lists 8 health benefits of drinking wine.

Evidently, the Bible itself does not forbid the drinking of wine, which does gladden human hearts. (Ps. 104:15) Wine connoisseurs know this, don't they?



Jesus did not preach against the drinking of wine. He even turned water into the best wine at a wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11), and incorporated wine into the sacrament of Holy Communion.

After the flood, the first thing Noah planted was a vineyard. (Gen. 9:20) In Exodus, the Promised Land is described as “a good land — a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills; a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey.” (Deu. 8:7-8) Abundant grapes are also alluded to in Num. 13:23. It must be a huge cluster to require two men to carry it on a pole between them. It is quite conceivable that wine and beer would be the ordinary produce of the abundant wheat, barley, grapes and other fruits. God provided the abundance for man's satisfaction; and it is reasonable to affirm the case that the drinking of wine and beer is never a prohibition.

Drinking alcohol itself is not sin, but drunkenness is! (Ga. 5:21)

Wine and Beer in Bible not non-alcoholic



Some people argue that the wine referred in the Bible is grape juice and not the distilled liquor with varying alcohol content that we have today. I beg to disagree. If it is grape juice, why not just call it simply “juice” instead of “wine”. As Matt. 9:17 tells us, new wine would be put into new wineskins for preservation. Surely this alludes to potent fermentation in the course of preservation that would damage any old wineskin. In the wedding at Cana where Jesus turned water into wine, the drink served out finally was the best wine, not just any ordinary wine. Logically, the

¹ <http://www.foodandwine.com/articles/8-health-benefits-of-drinking-wine>

best wine that thrilled the drinkers couldn't be simple juice or newly-fermented drink.

As further evidence that "wine" mentioned in the Bible is wine (alcoholic) and not unfermented drink, Proverbs 20:1, Galatians 5:21 and 1 Timothy 3:8, mention about the unsafe effect of drinking too much.²

As for beer, it is definitely a drink produced with the fermentation of malt which itself comes from various types of grains, and it contains alcohol albeit to a lower concentration than distilled liquor. Let's take a look at Isa. 56:12 translated two ways:

- "Come," each one cries, "let me get wine! Let us drink our fill of beer! And tomorrow will be like today, or even far better." – NIV



- Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and tomorrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant. - KJV

The beer in NIV is mentioned as "strong drink" in KJV.

From the following verses, it is also discernible that the wine and beer referred to in the Bible were capable of leading drinkers to grief:

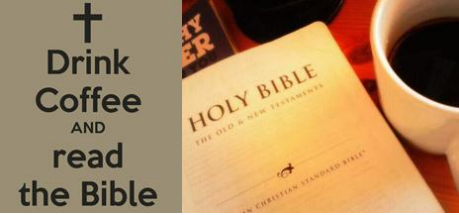
- Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise. – Prov. 20:1
- Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery ... – Eph 5:18

Drinking Coffee and tea

I am a teetotaler, but I enjoy coffee and tea; even a cup late at night would not affect me with insomnia. However, there are people who cannot tolerate a drop at

² The warnings associated with drinking in the Bible are about drinking in excess rather than total abstinence.

bedtime. Does the Bible say that I should not drink coffee or tea? NO, there is no



mention of drinking coffee, tea or consumption of caffeine in the Bible. Probably, these items did not feature in the lives of the people in Bible times.

The Mormons do not drink coffee and tea. It is because of a “law of health” that they believe God had given to Joseph Smith, the founder of the Latter Day Saint movement of which Mormonism is a principal branch. It has nothing to do with the Bible.

Caffeine does have health benefits; a website³ lists the top 10 of them, one of which is that “Caffeine is better than sleep when you need to be alert while driving.” (Those who drive, take note.)

Conclusion

By the enumerations above, I hold the view that any of the beverages mentioned is alright for our consumption because there is no outright ban against them in the Word of God.

Where health is concerned, there are always contradictory warnings – some say coffee is good; some say, bad. Some say carbohydrates are good for energy; some say they make you fat. Different experts have different opinions; so how? Personally, as far as food and drinks are concerned, I always believe in the idea that moderation is apt if abstinence is unnecessary or undesired, and if there is no absolute prohibition in the Word of God.

BUT ON THE OTHER HAND ...

A host of health benefits have been ascribed to drinking eight glasses of water a day. It is said that:

- It helps weight loss by suppressing appetite and boosting the body's metabolism so it can burn off more calories
- It can prevent headaches and fainting caused by dehydration
- It prevents renal and urinary infections - going to the toilet more frequently will help flush out the bacteria that cause them
- It has been proven to improve the condition of nails
- Being dehydrated causes skin to dry - so drinking water helps to moisturise it

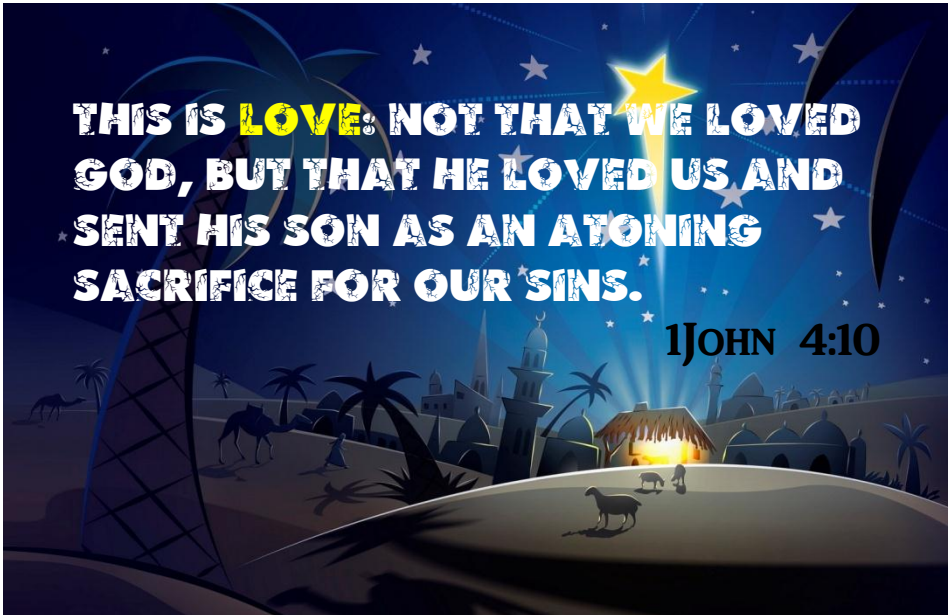
What is moderate and acceptable is never a certain measure, but a relative one according to one’s body condition. A moderate glass of beer for an adult female in the family way may well be a lethal excess for her unborn child. Christians should

³ <http://www.energyfiend.com/top-10-caffeine-health-benefits>

be conscious of the levels that suit them appropriately and be cognizant of their body's and mind's signals to hold themselves back from going overboard, to heed the warning at 1 Cor. 6:19. It is wrong to drink with nary a care for your health and sobriety, and to cast the label "moderately" as an excuse to fling yourself in watering holes and fling your Christian testimony out of the window. "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). Do not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is a drunkard. (1 Cor. 5:11)

If you wish to abstain from any drink, it is fine if it does not deny your body the essential nourishment. If you wish to drink with restraint without bringing harm to your body as the temple of the Holy Spirit, it is fine. Whatever your choice, you may still face contrarian opinions – people complain when you drink and people complain when you don't, like what Jesus commented in Matthew 11:18-19.

JOHN LEE



"Peace I leave you, my peace I give to you."

(John 14:28)



If you have a Christmas dream, what would it be?

John Lennon (a founding member of Beatles)

mused, "Imagine all the people living life in peace. You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us, and the world will be as one."

Mother Teresa said, "If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other."

Peace is such a precious commodity that the world is short of – Theatres of international conflict and tension span the whole world. Nobody can gainsay that World War III will not arrive by accident or design.

This brings me to a heartwarming story that is on the Internet about a war during Christmas. To be precise, it was World War I:



"Five months into the first World War, troops along the Western front took a Christmas Eve break from fighting to sing carols to one another across the battlefield. The following morning, German soldiers emerged from the trenches

and began to approach Allied troops while calling out "Merry Christmas" in English. Luckily, it wasn't a trick; dozens of British fighters came out to greet them and shake hands, some even exchanging cigarettes as gifts. Later dubbed the Christmas Truce of 1914, it was one of the last examples of wartime chivalry."

We are familiar with the Christmas message of peace and goodwill to all men.

I am a good dreamer, and I feel that it is good to be able to dream good dreams to alleviate the stresses of reading the incessant bad news about the potentialities of flare-ups from the stupidity of sabre-rattlers on the world stage.

I think I had a good dream that the spirit of Christmas would wield its magic whereby John Lennon's imagination which I share would become reality.

The Christmas Truce of 1914 is worth telling to militarists and jingoists. There is no waiting for WWII; acts of peace and goodwill would forestall a no-win calamity of mutual annihilation.

These are wise words from John Hendrix: "When the power of love overcomes the love of power the world will know peace."

If I have no chance of telling my dream to the big players in whose hand world peace rests, I may just satisfy with telling the dream of peace to smaller players like you and me whose meeting stations (workplaces, neighbourhoods, etc.) are also places where amity and freedom from strife remain as precious gems hard to grasp.

This is time that we receive Christmas wishes and New Year greetings galore:

- "As you celebrate the miracle of this special season may your heart be filled with joy and peace."
- "May the glorious message of peace and love fill you with joy during this wonderful season."
- "During this Christmas season may you enjoy the message of hope, love, and peace on earth."
- "With greetings of peace and prosperity, I'm wishing the very best for you during this special time."
- "As you celebrate the glory of this miraculous season, may your home be filled with love, peace, and joy. May these blessings follow you throughout the New Year."

On Dec 23, 1959, Pope John XXIII said, "From World War II right up to the present time, what a variety of utterances, what an abuse of this sacred word: peace, peace." (Jer. 6:14)

Note that “the present time” *referred* to by the Pope was 1959. As you read this now, it is 2013. Do you realise that the lament of the Pope has not diminished in validity?

The Pope added:

“We pay homage to the good will of the many guides and proclaimers of peace in the world: statesmen, experienced diplomats and influential writers.

But human efforts in the matter of universal peace-making are still far from the point where heaven and earth meet.

The fact is that true peace cannot come save from God. It has only one name: the peace of Christ. It has one aspect, that impressed on it by Christ who, as if to anticipate the counterfeits of man, emphasized: ‘Peace I leave you, my peace I give to you’ (John 14:28).”

Not just statesmen, experienced diplomats and influential writers, but also ordinary people like you and me, ought to pay attention to the fact that the source of peace can only be Jesus Christ. The world can have real peace only if it does not shut out the Holy Light. (John 8:12)

If the world is deaf to the real message of Christmas peace and goodwill to all men, we can still receive this peace and spirit of goodwill in our soul when we believe in Christ and have Him in our heart.



JOHN LEE

Christmas Caroling 2013

20th December 2013 – The first round of Christmas caroling began at Caroline's home. The carolers then had to rush back to Taman Jurong to visit two more homes. We started at the first house around 7:45 pm and finally finished the last house at 10:15 pm. The food was fantastic, from Western to Teochew cuisine.

About 30 carolers comprising youths and dialect ministry singers travelled by bus to Clementi and back, even singing along the way for Uncle William, the bus driver. Who says the adults are boring as they sang a medley of choruses in multi-languages on the bus, with the youth. Perhaps it is because they did not sing any in Korean, giving the impression they were less trendy.

It was a fantastic atmosphere of joy and good cheer. You had to be there to experience it. We pray that we had brought the joy



of Christmas to all the homes we visited. May God bless each and every home and may those who heard the message be open to accept the gift of God.

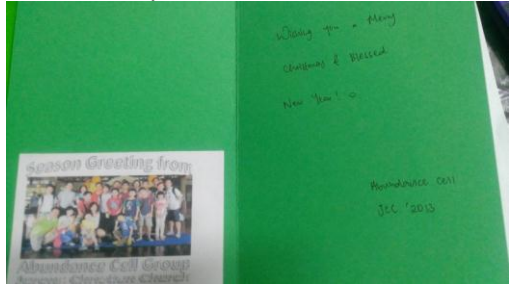
The caroling is still going on until the 23rd Dec but these will be recorded in the next issue of The Vine.



Christmas Greetings from Abundance Cell Group

Led by Caroline Li, the Abundance Cell Group has hand-made Christmas greeting cards to send their festive felicitations to all JCC members this Yuletide season.

It is just our little labour of love to tell fellow brothers and sisters-in-Christ that they are in our thoughts and prayers for all blessings to come as we celebrate Christ's birth – the Child of Christmas is our Lord and Saviour!



O what a wonderful, wonderful day – a day I will never forget. Heaven came down and glory filled my soul, when at the cross the Saviour made me whole. Emmanuel – God with us – God and sinners reconciled. This is the message of Christmas. Will you not join us to proclaim the CHRISTmas to all amidst the clamouring for merry-making, feasting and partying in the world of consumerism and materialism?



Gal 6:9-10 (Phi): Let us not grow tired of doing good, for, unless we throw in our hand, the ultimate harvest is assured. Let us then do good to all men as opportunity offers, especially to those who belong to the Christian household.

As the Year 2013 wraps up, we want to give thanks to God and appreciate all who are in Abundance Cell and JCC for a year of fellowship and sharing of blessings, with more such years of joy to come. To God be the glory – that we can share, care and show concern for one another in Christ.

Tony Koh