

The Vine

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Christmas Carolling

Singing all the way from
YMCA to members' homes



John Lee



Peggy Lee



Lissa Low

The Vine Committee

Editor:

John Lee

jpbislee@gmail.com

Writers this issue:

John Lee

Lissa Low

Peggy Lee

Photos:

Martin Cheah

Nick Wong

Cover Photo:

Dialect Team at

YMCA Christmas

Event 2015



HOM'S Reflections

Another year is over and many, if not all, of us may be wondering what we have done or achieved. Probably we can count all the worldly things we have

accomplished, like getting another certificate, winning a prize, getting married or reading a number of books. However how many of us know what we have achieved spiritually? Our last preacher for the year, Rev Philip Huan, offered to pray for us to know what is God's plan for our lives. Many probably already knew because only a few went up for prayers.

Perhaps we all know what is God's plan for our lives – to be Christ-like, but are we really working towards it or, like Jonah, we are going in the opposite direction? Is our love for God and for man strong enough to make us go forth and fulfil the Great Commission? Do

we always consider any opportunity as not an appropriate time to share the Good News? The appropriate time is NOW because you do not know if you have another chance to meet the person again.

We were at one of the Dialect members' housewarming recently when suddenly, appropriately or not, we burst out into carolling for his non-Christian family members and friends. What returns did we get for our investment? I don't know, only God knows and in His time will tell us. The Dialect Team spent many years visiting Michelle's mom at CNY and finally, this Christmas, we were informed that she had accepted Christ. Praise be to God our Saviour.

I gave an office cleaner uncle a small gift with a tract enclosed, this Christmas, when I found out that his daughter had been trying to get him to join her in church. Cost of gift about \$5, seed planted, harvest nothing yet, still waiting.

Martin Cheah

Glory to God in the highest,
and on Earth peace,
goodwill towards men.

LUKE 2:14

Christmas is coming. As the festival day draws near, we can expect

What Christmas do we celebrate ...



... without Jesus Christ?

good-wish greetings to fly. Here is just a beautifully-crafted pair from a large assortment that can be found on the Internet:

“May this holiday season sparkle and shine, may all of your wishes and dreams come true, and may you feel this happiness all year round.”

“During this season of giving, let us take time to slow down and enjoy the simple things. May this wonderful time of the year touch your heart in a special way. Wishing you much happiness today and throughout the New Year.”

Though the greetings are wonderful and warm, it is regrettable that to the vast majority of people in the world where Christmas is celebrated, the occasion is merely a holiday – a **CHRIST**mas (or “**Cristes Maesse**” in old English) with the most important holy-day child missing.



Christmas is a time for people to rejoice for the right reason, and **CHRISTI**ans know what the right reason is – a Saviour, the Messiah, has been born to all the

people. (Luke 2:11). **CHRIST**ians also know that they are not called **CHRIST**ians for nothing. (Acts 11:21-26) **CHRIST**ians are indeed a distinct group, being disciples of Christ. They are in the world, but they are not of the world.

Therefore, in this **CHRIST**mas season, let us as **CHRIST**ians rejoice!



Another thought comes to my mind. While we do not forget to send our **CHRIST**mas good wishes to others, why not also spare a thought to wish good for ourselves? Here are some common Christmas greetings I have adapted for MYSELF:

“Wishing **ME** a merry and blessed Christmas with the Christ consciousness.”

“In this Christmas, may the love of God be with **ME** always.”

“May the blessings of Christmas fill **MY** heart with hope and joy, with gratitude to Christ, **MY** saviour, for His profound grace!”

I see nothing wrong for ME to wish for myself all the good wishes that I would wish for my friends and brethren. ☺ How about you for yourself?

Truly, the words that we express in our best wishes for our friends and brethren are often of great value for self-meditation. It is very meaningful for us to say the same great words of greetings to ourselves, meditate upon them and cherish the fact that Christmas is as good for others as it is a beautiful occasion for OURSELVES to usher in the blessings, the love of God, the hope and the joy.

It is expected of Christians to focus on Christ as a Saviour born to the world. However, the birth of the Messiah is not the be-all-and-end-all for us. It is without doubt a supremely significant event of God’s rescue mission for sinners, and



our active engagement with it would be enriched by a fuller understanding of the place of it in the whole canvas that contains the creation story. This is more spiritually evocative than starting or stopping our understanding of God's grace at the Christmas event. For sure, the scarlet thread of redemption runs through the whole Bible and not just through the Gospels.

Jesus Christ is none other than the Creator of the world in Genesis, as we read about in John 1:1-14. (See also John 14:9)

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us...”

In Revelation 3:14, we also read about Jesus as the beginning of God's creation:

“And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.” – The Lutheran Study Bible [*emphasis added*]

Here is an explanatory note from The Lutheran Study Bible:

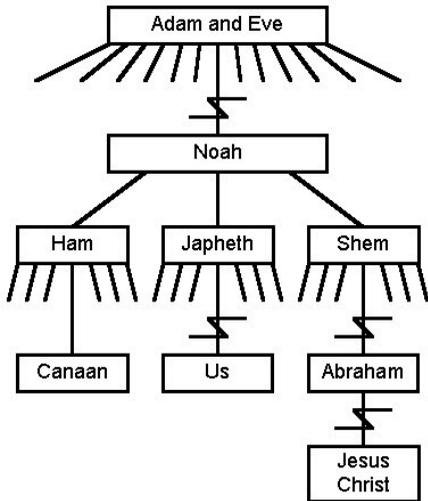
“***the beginning of God's creation***” is synonymous with “***the source of God's creation***”; emphasizes that “all things were made through [Jesus]” (John 1:2-3)



When God created Adam, He showed Himself to be full of benevolence. He provided fresh water and good food in a pleasant and nourishing garden. He even cared that it would not be good for Adam to be alone, so He

created Eve to be Adam's companion. With such a thoughtful God catering everything perfect for enjoyment, what more could the first couple have asked for?

It was not God's plan to create a robot couple. He created Adam and Eve as human, with the free will to make choices. Regrettably, Adam and Eve did not cherish all the good that God had given but chose to listen to the serpent of calumny.



They therefore deserved the punishment they got, of being banished from the Garden of Eden to wander with self-reliance and lifelong toil.

Despite the punishment from God, Man failed to repent. Instead, giving in to the devil's temptation, worse was to happen. Murder ensued with Cain viciously killing his brother Abel. Since then, sin has pervaded the human race and the world is

never at peace.

The malignancy of sin spread among the descendants of Adam and Eve. A resurgence of crime and evil ensued in Noah's day. God decided to send the Great Flood, sparing only Noah and his family on account of their righteousness. Sadly, what happened to the descendants of Noah and the descendants of Abraham give us nothing to cheer.

The history of Israel is dotted with iniquities against God. When the Israelites sinned against God, God would punish them severely, but out of His fullness of love and compassion would forgive them shortly after. Yet, the people of God persisted in their resistance to repentance and thereby extended the cycle of punishment, forgiveness and repetition of sin.

Morals and ethics have been well-preached to exhaustion by leaders and teachers. Many people consider themselves superior in their virtues so that religion does not have any meaning to them. They are self-assured that since they do not steal or murder or break any law of the land, their names will definitely rank high for a place in paradise. However, it is written (Rom. 3:10-18):

“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”

“Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

Is God expected to continue enduring the evil of Man and do nothing about it? We don't really need the distant history to inform us about the degree of evil that has permeated the world. Current news is never short of reports about inter-group hatreds, greed crimes, political intrigues, power abuses, civil wars, terrorist acts and even murders conducted in the name of “god”. Juxtaposed against the world that we see, the descriptions of Man's sinfulness in the above Scripture passage are perfect!

Why is the world getting so troubled and complex, that Man who gets overwhelmed by the natural and man-made catastrophes still persists in sins that contribute to the needless sufferings and deaths? No thanks to Adam and Eve, the consequence of their sin is the heavy price (travail and woe) that generations after generations cannot eradicate. The ultimate price of sin is death. (Rom. 6:23)

“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)



Everyone needs Jesus – from high officials and noble persons to the low-class common folks; revered kings, crooked ministers, people living in luxury and people languishing in prison.

Children of God who feel helpless with the state of this world have the assurance that our Father in heaven hears their groans.

On Christmas Day, Jesus Christ, God incarnate, came into the world in the flesh. Do you opine that the coming of the Messiah was a last-minute decision in heaven? Banish the wrong thought!

A PROPHECY FULFILLED

Man has a lot of hindsight but not much foresight. This is not similarly with God who is omniscient, whose understanding is infinite. (Ps 147:5). Hundreds and thousands of years before Christmas Day, the birth of Christ was already prophesied. (For example, see Num. 24:17 and Luke 3:23, 34)

Thus, I see Christmas not just as an event that took place at a particular time, but as an event marked on the canvas of God's creation blueprint that was well within God's infinite advance knowledge.

While human prophets (in the Bible) were able to tell the future by God's revelation, it is impossible for Man to truly fathom the mysteries of God or probe the limits of the Almighty. (Job 11:7)

In the course of time, we have studied the Bible, understood a little about how the creation came by and how events unfolded to the time of the First Advent of Christ and progressed to the present day, but we can only by faith accept the revelation in the Bible about how further events will unfold forward from now to the Second Advent of Christ, knowing the proven trustworthiness of the Bible, given the past prophecies that have already been fulfilled to perfection.

Peace on Earth will come!

As we celebrate Christmas in Singapore, we rejoice with the hope in our Saviour. Identifying Christmas not as a standalone event but as a tangram piece among all the pieces in the whole tangram that bears God's overall plan for His creation,



we can reinforce our hope that the peace of Christmas will come in the right time and our suffering in this world is only temporary. Still, there is much work for the Church to do to rescue the lost who dwell in the darkness and guide their footsteps to Jesus; and to bring the hope we have in Christ to those who are heartbroken.

Let us pray for our ourselves as well as our brethren in all places that the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will be with all, whose pain and tears, if any, will be brief.

John Lee
9th Dec 2015



Dialect CG Christmas Party 2015

9th December 2015 (Wednesday)



It was the first time that the Dialect CG held a Christmas party. Despite the fact that this first Christmas party was held on a weekday, the attendance was very encouraging with children bringing their elderly parents and joyfully



anticipating a great time.

The party programme started at 12.30 p.m. There were quite a number of new friends joining us. Old faces and new faces alike, young or old, they all exuded liveliness in swinging to the music and songs, led by Deacon Peter and sister Seline. The segment on singspiration and light ice-breaking activities was short; nevertheless, it was high-spirited; and the lunch break to fill the stomach and replenish energy for the next segment in the afternoon was well deserved.

It was a splendid buffet lunch. Deacon Peter was the chef for the mouth-watering curry chicken and Seline was the cook for the delicious beehoon. These two home-cooked dishes added a yummy variety to the spread of food with other dishes ordered from the nearby coffee shop.



After the hearty meal, the group went back to the MPH for a round of nostalgic childhood games which the elderly folk enjoyed very much. A short video show on the theme of heaven and hell was also screened. At the end of the show, a short quiz followed.



The whole party programme was well planned to be light on the elderly folk and at the same time enjoyable with opportunity for them to mingle and socialise. Apart from the quiz prizes, there were also attractive goodie bags for everyone.

The enthusiastic participation of the elderly folk in the CG Christmas party was an indication of their sprightly spirit despite their age. We wish them all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year with good health, and look forward to our continuing care of them through the regular CG fellowship and Sunday worship services. Their joyfulness in the Lord brings smiles to the faces of everyone, including their younger brothers and sisters in Christ in the Dialect Fellowship.

Dialect Christmas Caroling 2015

Officially, the Dialect Team started Christmas Caroling on 16 Dec at the YMCA event but unofficially, they had an impromptu performance at a house-warming about a week earlier at a member's house.



Performing at YMCA's Makan Fellowship 2015



Quick rehearsal before the main event



Impromptu caroling at a house-warming



1st home the Dialect Team visited in Jurong West

What are the basic minimum requirements to form a caroling team? Ideally, you should have at least one guitarist and about half a dozen singers. This configuration does not make you the best caroling team in town but it is sufficient if you have the heart to sing of the glories of Christmas.

Sometimes, the Dialect Team had pianist, bongo drums and guitar; at other times, only 1 guitarist was available as musical accompaniment. Voices - not all could sing well but the carolers were all enthusiastic to share the Christmas spirit.

Why were there so few carolers going around this Christmas? Could it be that many were less thick-

skinned to go around caroling with less than a full orchestral accompaniment?

I know that there are people who do not celebrate Christmas because they found out that Jesus was not born on Dec 25. However they may not realize that celebrating Christmas can be seen as propagations of religions and that is why it is banned in certain countries. Are we missing an opportunity here?

Is knowing the exact date more important than celebrating the event? Did you know that in some less developed countries, everyone has their birthdays on 1st Jan because they do not know the exact date of their birth? Did you realize that Easter is celebrated on different dates every year? Some festivals are celebrated based on the full moon rather than the exact date.

As far as I know, the Dialect Team only had one round of rehearsals before starting off. They were not perfect, with some false starts and mistakes but our Christian life is like that – not perfect.



When the team sang, they were not out to win any competitions but to win hearts. I am sure many hearts were touched by the visit of our itinerant singers. At a condo poolside, when we sang, many people looked from their balconies. Did they let off stones with catapults? No, they eagerly took camera shots from their balconies.



My daughter shared her experience that when her group of carolers went around the Waterloo Street area to sing, they were invited by some vendors in front of the famous temple to sing for them.



Christmas is the time when many people's hearts are strangely open; otherwise businesses would not be going into overtime to sell worldly gifts. Why don't we make use of this openness to share the true gift of Christmas?



We visited 6 homes over 2 nights (22 & 23 Dec) even when Deacon Peter had a sore throat. Tired but full of joy we celebrated Christmas. What do those who don't celebrate Christmas do? I know during this long break,



my colleague went for the cruise to nowhere (so aptly named).



May you be filled with the joyous spirit of Christmas.

Martin Cheah

<https://youtu.be/DtBJ6QEugWw>



Confirmations & Transfers on Christmas Day



Dialect Ministry Team

A Fellowship Time Before Christmas!

12th December 2015

Many JCC members are travelling in the month of December.



The Ministry Team of the Dialect Ministry didn't want to miss out on the travel bug, especially with the festive mood of Christmas. But the team members (all senior citizens) did not have the moola or energy to travel far;

so the decision was to travel to a nearby place – Osaka (大阪), Japan.



The eleven of us stopped at a restaurant for lunch where the Japanese staff all came out and bowed 45° to extend their warm welcome. A food tray with nine squares was fitting for a fun game of tic-tac-toe. ☺



☺Ha-ha ... reading up to here, you know that I am in a good mood for jokes. Nevertheless, the truth is that we did have a good time enjoying a delectable meal across seven sections of buffet spread at the Kuishin Bo Japanese restaurant, which is along the Japanese food street inside Jurong Point Shopping

Centre. It is just like “Little Japan” at this indoor “street” where Japanese food outlets are concentrated.

The buffet line-up of both cold and hot items (possibly over 100) was very attractive – salads, fresh seafood, Paper Hot Pot, vegetable curry,

fried items, desserts, etc. Drinks included juices, hot and cold milo, coffee and others.

It was great to have sumptuous food with free flow of drinks complementing a warm fellowship in a cosy place. The place was spacious and not crowded, and the seating arrangement was conducive for conversations and light discussions.



The lunch started at 11.30 a.m., and we stayed all the way until the scheduled end time of 3.00 p.m. At the end of it, it was obvious that everyone was fully satisfied with the meal and fellowship.

The Dialect Ministry Team members have been working very conscientiously through the year 2015 in ministering to the dialect-speaking members of JCC.

Here is wishing the team a very blessed Christmas and another year of good harvest in 2016!

John Lee



I DIDN'T HAVE TO TRAVEL FROM THE EAST TO JERUSALEM TO COME TO MY LORD JESUS



Matt 2:1-12 tells us the familiar Christmas story of the Magi who came from the East to Jerusalem. Pastor Andrew pointed out that it was all about Jesus. If not for Jesus, the Magi would not have set off on their journey.

This Christmas, the story about the Magi has tingled my mind to ponder about how strong the Magi's desires were to search out the "King of the Jews" day after day, perhaps riding on camels' backs, camping in the cold night after night, on a long journey. The Magi were led by the star which might have first appeared over Bethlehem. They responded to their sighting of the star, and finally found this "King of the Jews".

I have the privilege to have the Holy Spirit living in me and do not need to travel from the East to Jerusalem to seek my King. I have the Bible within my reach, yet I would say I did not have this strong desire like the Magi to seek out my King.

How can I learn from the Magi to take action and be obedient to His leading?
How can I always maintain this strong desire to seek my Lord?

This Sunday (27th December), when the sermon speaker Rev Philip Huan called us to prayer, I felt the Holy Spirit prompting me to go forth in prayer to restore my relationship with my King. When Sister Se Ping prayed for me, my tears just flowed; I did not realize my nose bled too until sister See Ping passed me a tissue. The tissue was soon covered with blood. It was the first time my nose bled. Since it was a communion service, my first impression was "Yes, Lord Jesus, you bled for me." When I went to wash up, my nose was no longer bleeding anymore.

I thank God for sacrificing His own Son on the cross for me, shedding His holy blood for me. Thank God for His Love and mercy over and over again. All blessings, honour and glory be to God!

Oh, how sweet to trust in Jesus,
Just to trust His cleansing blood;
And in simple faith to plunge me
'Neath the healing, cleansing
flood!

Lissa Low
27 Dec 2015

UPDATES OF CHIH CHIANG'S ACTIVITIES IN CRU

REV UP MISSION TRIPS

In September 2015, 22 students and 6 staff went to Guam, Thailand and Mongolia for Rev Up mission projects organised by Cru Singapore. There were 5 students from SP and 7 students from NP participating in this mission project. The students experienced how God worked through them in different cultures and languages. Through the Rev Up trips: 1376 people heard the gospel presentation and 260 people prayed to receive Christ!



"WHERE YOUR HEART IS?" CAMP

We had a combined polytechnic camp in October. It was a training camp where we equipped our students in evangelism and follow up of new believers. 23 out of 57 students that came were from SP and NP.



The theme verse of our camp is from Matthew 6:21 "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also". Our hope for our students is that they will not waste their life or time away but focus on what truly matters.



STREET WITNESSING IN CAMP

We went to different heartland areas to share the Gospel: 61 Spiritual Conversations, 29 full Gospel shared, 2 prayed to receive Christ.

NEW BELIEVERS



We have twins!
Praise God for the twin infants in Christ! Amanda & Rebecca (yes, they are biological twins!) received Christ with us a few weeks ago. We are currently meeting them for follow up and assimilating them into the Ngee Ann Cru ministry.

THE NEW SNAP TEAM

In September Angelina and Chee Wah joined the SNAP team as trainees and they will undergo a 9-months training program under the School of Leadership and Development. One of their coaches is Chih Chiang.



This year Chih Chiang took up leadership in both SP and NP ministry and also head a task force group of CRU staff which focus on preparing undergrads for the marketplace.

Chih Chiang feels that the leadership roles in CRU is a calling from God. Despite that there still are many challenges he faces, one of them being to raise financial supporters for his work. He continues to trust God to provide for him.

Pray for God's strength and provision for Chih Chiang.

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Pray for our Chak Mun, the LWM Field Coordinator in Cambodia that he may experience joy and strength from the Lord.



# Happy New Year



If I have not had a terrific 2015, I still thank God for the one-by-one countable blessings received and seek His forgiveness for any blessings that in my human weakness I may have inadvertently missed out acknowledging.

The dawning of a new year is always a time for us to look ahead. It is alright to look back and learn lessons from our foregoing experiences and reflect on how, by the wonderful grace of God, we have been able to survive through thick and thin. Nevertheless, there is no need to dwell on the past. As we look ahead into 2016, we may anticipate some good happenings (a graduation, a new career, a job promotion, a new baby, etc.), but there will still be new challenges. Thank God for the success we have in overcoming challenges in 2015, and pray that He will continue to bless us with strength to handle the challenges of 2016 nicely.



One of the challenges JCC has is the rebuilding project. We have taken on the project as a faith journey to bring to fruition a new building with new facilities to enhance His people to serve the community better in respect of the Great Commission. We thank God for the many humble servants who have responded to the call to stand to serve in the multifarious ways that the rebuilding project entails – in design & construction, in leasing, relocation, fundraising ... The amount of work in 2015 has been tremendous and God's workers, huffing and puffing, working together in harmony with each performing his/her utmost in duty and responsibility contribute much to our accomplishment thus far.

God sees. God understands. He has extended to us His gracious provision.

We are full of joy and praise to our Lord Jesus Christ for His blessings in 2015. As we look into 2016, we see ourselves continuing in our regular attendance in the Lord's temple to worship Him in spirit and truth, continuing to seek His grace as we pray for brethren to remain united, with harmony, in their various capacities of service for Kingdom purpose and in their love and care for one another.



Pertinently, it is for us in a new year to contemplate what is going to be new other than the year itself that is new. Rom. 12:2 tells us:

*“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

I check the Strong’s Concordance for the word “renew” and it tells me that its meaning is akin to “to renovate”. When people renovate a house to welcome a new year, the idea is to make it new (in freshness). Contrast this to moving to a new house when your house becomes new (in age). So as we usher in the year 2016, it is not so much as moving into a newly-made 366-day period of life, but about how, as we move forward, we are going to do a “renovation” (renewal) to our life that brings freshness to our experience in Christ. We can make all the furniture of a house new, and all the physical and visible attributes of a time period new, but that will not add a real and meaningful sparkle to our life. It is more important for us to ensure that, despite outward negatives we may observe, “inwardly we are being renewed day by day.” (2 Cor. 4:16) The attitude of Christians in welcoming a new year is necessarily different from that of non-Christians.

“Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.” (Ps. 90:10)



A new year as a checkpoint in time for us to reflect and renew our lives is a good thing.

A new year also indicates a year gone by which means that we are “new in age”. We may see this description as a euphemistic alert to us that we are one year older. Put less discreetly, we are all one year nearer to the end of all the days that we have.

Whichever way we look at the new year, it can only be good for us to be reminded that our lives need constant renewal (refreshing) to maximise the productivity we can make out of the number of days we have, and possibly reduce the days of “trouble and sorrow” that may perhaps be attributed to time unexploited due to foolishness.

Ps. 90 begins with: “A Prayer of Moses the man of God. Lord, thou ...” (KJV)

This introduction to the Psalm intimates to us our dependency on God, our Lord, to whom we go for divine favour – recognizing that we cannot dwell on our own strength.

Therefore, let us pray to God that He will “teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” (Ps. 90:12)

It is clear that this is not simply about sitting back and doing a countdown to our last day (like NSF doing a countdown to their ROD). ☺ It is about “weighing up” our days, evaluating them

## Glory to God

*Glory to God in highest heaven,  
Who unto man His Son hath given;  
While angels sing with tender mirth,  
A glad new year to all the earth.*

2 - Martin Luther

and deliberating on how we may make them fruitful.

For all that God has done for us mercifully and graciously in 2015, forgiven us for our sins and supported us through the challenges we faced, let us reflect on what more we can do for His glory come 2016.

*John Lee*

## Some last words Thanksgiving Night



Thank God for providing a Church



Thank God for wisdom to lead



In God we Trust



Thank God for His Provision



God will Provide



Thank God for His Precious Gift



Thanks be to God



Thank God for Protection



Thank God for Journey Mercies



Thank God for good results

31<sup>st</sup> Dec 2015

A number of us were called to share a Thanksgiving for what God has done for us in 2015. Pardon me if I quoted wrongly, I wasn't taking notes just photos.

25<sup>th</sup> December 2015

# Baptism

