



A Matter of the Heart  
By Joyce Tan



2017 Thanksgiving  
By Alicia Wong



Immanuel – God with us  
By John Lee

# Bringing Christmas cheer to Cambodia



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Mission Team to

Cambodia trip 0217



**Brother  
Martin  
Writes**

Only a few days ago, I lost some colleagues who had committed an infringement which cost them their jobs. To the management, it doesn't matter how good your service record was, when you commit an infringement that is the end. How true it is

with God's laws too. In James 2:10, *"For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."* So when the Bible says, *"There is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"* (Romans 3:23), you better believe it. Just one tiny sin (infringement) and you have fallen short of God's standards.

To those who think good works can save you, I ask you to consider the above scenario. Even by human standards, goods works does not save. Similarly, if you always drive at 90 kmh but on only one occasion you sped at 120 kmh, you will surely be fined and get demerit points if you were caught. Your perfect record will have a stain on it.

If that is the bad news, what is the good news? *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.* (Romans 5:6) Over 2,000 years ago, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, at the right time, to save us. We celebrate Christmas day in remembrance of Christ coming into the world as a baby to pay the price for our sins. We could not pay it ourselves as all our righteous acts (good works) are like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6).

However, do not despair of your sinful condition because God loves you and He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). Sometimes the world think that Jesus is a present from God and we can easily reject the gift. Jesus is not a present but a ransom paid in blood for the sins of the whole world.

*Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. And this is the verdict: The Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness more than light, because their deeds were evil.* (John 3:18-19)

The good news of Christmas – because God loves you, He has saved you! Believe it!

*Martin Cheah*

# The Vine Team

## *2017 thanksgiving thoughts*



**Joyce Tan**  
Writer. Awesome team player. iFly Adventurer.

“For me, I learn to give thanks to God for the people that I sometimes take for granted. The wonders of the nature always bring me back to the reality of reflecting on what had happened. It does not always need to be good times or better things happening to mean that God is good. Perhaps, that is the reason why I enjoy cruises where it gives me the opportunity to know God better without the interference of a busy lifestyle and noises around the dilemmas of what we need to do. This year, I thank God for being there through my husband, family, friends, brothers & sisters in Christ when I am alone, unwell, sad, discouraged, confused and angry. I pray that I will continue to find the meaning in life as I walk with Him in fellowship with others in His Love.”

“Thank God for the new church building that He has provided us and for bringing us through all the various events this year, from the open house, to the 50th anniversary. Also thank God for the opportunity to serve Him and to study His words.”



**Edwin Yeo**  
Photographer. Foodie Explorer.

"This is the last issue of The Vine for 2017. The Vine Team is filled with gladness for the Lord's blessings of camaraderie in teamwork.

The 12 issues we produce this year would not be possible without the encouragement and support from readers. Certainly, this is **NOT THE LAST ISSUE.**

We pray that supporters will continue to be blessed by - and be a blessing through - this monthly publication as we move into 2018 for The Vine to be more fruitful. Amen!"



**John Lee**  
Writer. Proofreader.

"2017 is almost over and as I look back and count my blessings, I am humbly thankful to our gracious Father, who sent Jesus to take the punishment for me and instead gave me the blessings. Counting backwards, I am thankful that my mother is still healthy, my daughter is finally a registered pharmacist, my wife's eye problem is getting better, the Jurong West CG seems to be growing, two mission teams have been sent out and lastly, The Vine team has very dedicated writers who always supply me with articles every month.

I am also thankful that the Roman Catholic Church had agreed that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone. Now that we have it on record, we have to ensure that everyone hears about this, whether at home or in the mission field."



**Martin Cheah**  
Photographer. Writer.  
Indian chief.

“My husband said that I seem to have a guardian angel guarding me from the worst of the storms, though at times I seem oblivious to it. Actually, I am aware of it and that I am always counting my blessings, whether they come in big ways or small. Even on bad days, I have never really gotten too low for long.

I do know that it is easy to take things for granted through my thoughtlessness and forgetfulness so it is important to take time to reflect, give thanks and be grateful for the good and the bad.



**Alicia Wong**  
**Writer. Editor. Restless.**

In here, I want to take the chance to give thanks to the people that God has placed in The Vine team, the seen and unseen members (who contribute photographs and articles on an ad-hoc basis). My life has been enriched by their presence and contributions. They reminded me that I am not the only one being cared for and You too, touch people in different ways.

Dear God, accept my praises and thanksgivings and teach me to love You more and serve You better, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.”

“I am the *vine*;  
you are the  
*branches*.  
If you remain  
in *me* and  
I in you,  
you will bear  
much *fruit*;  
apart from  
*me* you can  
do *nothing*.”

-John 15:5



## **A Matter of the Heart**

***“For Where Your Treasure is, There will your heart be also” Matt 6:21***

This was the article that got lost in the world of technology where I explored using my tablet and a new Word programme to start writing it. Lo and behold, this article left me twice after two sessions of writing and never appeared in my “Saved” box. Yes, I think it is the user problem. I had to let it go to take a break and rest. Perhaps, it was not meant to be under the title, “Heart Attack!”

I had wanted to reflect on the news received over the last few months on colleagues and friends that I knew who collapsed because of heart problems. Two of them survived with medication and a string of check-ups to be administered through frequent visits to the hospitals. The others were not as lucky and they did not make it. It is a matter of the heart.

According to the Wikipedia, the heart is a muscular organ that pumps blood through the blood vessels of the circulatory system. The blood provides the body with oxygen and nutrients as well as assists in the removal of metabolic waste. When the heart is not well, we will not be well too. The heart does matter.

When it matters and the events strike, we will be brought to our senses of coming to terms with the reality and the emotions that will hit us. The sense of awareness and shock will chill our hearts as they open our eyes to the world we thought we knew and yet there is really nothing we can do to control the situation when it strikes.

At such moments, would you have thought of Jesus? Are you running to Him for wisdom, strength and protection through His mercy and grace? Continue to rely on Him and praise Him with thanks-giving in our hearts at all times.



I am sure many of you received encouragements in various forms and in this world of social media, we are all hopping on this bandwagon to catch up with the times to post and chat using these channels of Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Oh yes, let us not forget there are also Wechat, Whatsapp and Messenger platforms. Information is transmitted faster and wider to bigger audiences around the globe easily. It is amazing, yet, scary, right? I always feel that we do not know enough and must always learn along the way. You know, we could use social media as one of the channels to reach out to those who do not know about Christ and encourage Christians too. I see happy and sad moments, stories, advertisements and comments on the social media channels. More of the Christian materials and content can be easily found as well.



On the other hand, these channels could be used for selfish and unethical reasons for brain-washing of ideals and idolatry too. I will not continue on this point. You get the picture.

Think about it? It is a matter of the heart and in such cases, the mind as well. This partnership always gives us chaos in our decision-making

when the heart and mind do not agree with each other. Pray and let God guide us. Trust Him!

I am glad that we are struggling during such times which also mean that our minds and hearts are working to reach the right direction. I know it is not as easy as it sounds. I have been there many times and I know we will continue to struggle through life as how God already knows.

I used to enjoy watching Oprah Winfrey's shows many years back as a teenager. She was a gregarious woman with an acute sense of humour citing and contending with real issues and people she invited on her shows to share experiences with the audiences. She said, "No experience is wasted. Everything happening in life is happening to grow you up, to help you to become more of who you were created to be."

As we continue to guard, protect, nourish and nurture our hearts to be closer to Jesus, we know that the journey will not be without trials and tribulations. Do it because we will know Him better. It is a matter of the heart. Find your treasure and give thanks to Him for all He has done for us!

*"These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith – greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed."*  
1 Peter 1:7

Joyce Tan



The author wrote on page 74:

The unconditional nature of Personal Forgiveness is also why it is a terrible sin to not forgive others of the penalty for their sins, because we are saying to God one or more of these statements:

- \* I don't believe that Jesus died for them
- \* I don't believe that the death of Jesus was good enough to pay for their sins
- \* I have a higher standard than God does
- \* I don't want Jesus to pay for their sins. I want them to pay for their own sins.

All of these thoughts are terrible insults to God, who has paid such a high price to pay off everyone's debt.



# Immanuel – God with us!



It is time to celebrate Christmas. This time to celebrate comes along every year in December. Of course, there are Christians (a minority) who don't wish to celebrate the so-called "Christmas" because they opine that the celebration is associated with a pagan festival in history. So what? It is not surprising if another group of people also dissociate themselves from any celebration of Christmas because they opine that it is associated with Santa Claus.

For those people who do not celebrate Christmas for the reasons they hold, I think it is better that they do not celebrate than to celebrate without knowing the right reason or for commercialism sake. Still, it should be fine for most Christians to celebrate with the proper idea of what the joy of Christmas is all about – the birth of Jesus:

*All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). – Matt. 1:22-23*

## Contemplating heaven and hell

As people of religions deal with questions on heaven and hell, **Immanuel** enables Christians to directly reckon the face of God in their envisioning of eternal hope. The expression "**Immanuel**" conveys the intimate relationship between God and man, a very comforting assurance of **God with us** from beginning to end:

*Jesus – His name is "Jesus" because he will save his people from their sins. (Matt. 1:21)  
Hence, He is Christ, the Messiah  
Immanuel – "Whom shall I fear, for you are always near, I will praise You all my days ..." (Lyrics from a Christian hymn)*



## “The Sign of Immanuel” – Isaiah 7 (NIV)

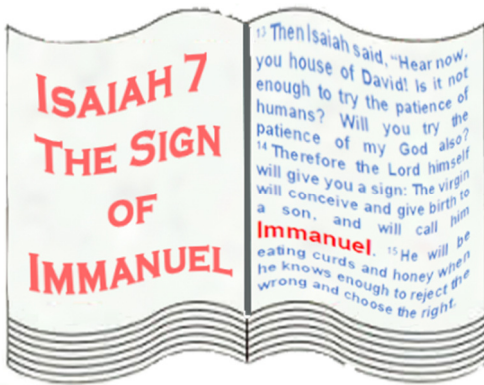
The kingdoms of Syria and Samaria had already begun their offensive against the kingdom of Judah as prophesied by the prophet Isaiah. King Ahaz of Judah was weak and unwise. He intended to approach Assyria for help, but Assyria was a stronger rival of Judah. So, the unwise king Ahaz was in fact inviting a disaster by asking one strong enemy to help deal with two other enemies.

*“Yet, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “It will not take place, it will not happen ... If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.” – Isa. 7:7-9*

Isaiah advised the king to have faith in his own people (not outsiders) to fight off the enemies with the help of God whereby the attack by the enemies would not succeed, but he was exasperated by the king’s intransigence:

*Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also?” – Isa. 7:13*

The sign of **Immanuel** thus appeared (for the first time) in Isa. 7:14:



*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: **The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.** He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, for before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.*

*The Lord will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah—he will bring the king of Assyria.” – Isa. 7:14-17*



- *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” – Mt. 4:17b*
- *“Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees ... What will you do on the day of reckoning, when disaster comes from afar? To whom will you run for help? Where will you leave your riches?” – Isa. 10:1-3*

**Immanuel** – a resounding exclamation of God’s constant presence with His people!

**Immanuel – God with us – always with us** – as our intercessor:

- 1) in the present time through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:26) and
- 2) for our future divine deliverance with Christ as the one mediator between God and us. (1 Tim 2:5)

“If God is with us, who can be against us?” – Rom. 8:31

“For I am convinced that neither death nor life ... neither the present nor the future ... nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” – Rom. 8:38

### The hope of Immanuel

As a matter of history, the nation of Israel had been subject to a lot of internal and external oppressions. She was in a restless state, being in a mess both domestically and abroad. The hope for the revival of a nation and the salvation of a people became pressing in minds and souls. The Messianic prophecy gave Israel hope, and thereby the spiritual ballast. **Immanuel – God with us** – was the persistent hope that Israel had that God would not forsake them. The hope, built upon faith in God, gave them the strength to persevere through all the challenging situations with eyes looking towards future glory.

### Immanuel – As we celebrate Christmas

As we celebrate Christmas, we know that the birth of Jesus is the fulfilment of prophecy. Unfortunately, there are still many people who fail to recognize this fact despite loads of historical documents attesting to the veracity of the

events leading to and out of The First Noel being in congruence with prophecies.

This most pleasing news of Jesus' birth for God's people to grasp warranted a great company of the heavenly host to appear with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests." (Luke 2:13-14)

The hope of **Immanuel** becomes our anticipation of salvation that our Saviour brings – salvation to those on whom God's favour rests!

### Who are those on whom God's favour rests?

#### **Not everyone!**

The Book of Romans Chapter 9 speaks of Paul's anguish over Israel. No doubt the people of Israel were a special nation, being the recipient of a multitude of special blessings which were stated by Paul as follows:

*"Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen." – Rom. 9:4-5*

Unfortunately, the tasting of the blessings had also led to complacency and a denial of the fulfilment of the Messianic prophecy in the birth of Jesus. There was a misplaced notion among many of "automatic entitlement" to salvation in consideration of their ancestry. Paul, through his epistle, attempted to disabuse the people of the false notion, with his lecture on the truth about God's election in the salvation of those whom He chose.

The topic on God's Election is a complex one, not for me to discuss here. I am still ruminating on the confluence between the idea of God's election and the idea of our free will to make a choice to get into God's favour. Pray that God grants me wisdom to understand.

However, in simple terms, suffice it for me to say that salvation is not by demand. We have no locus standi to claim a right to salvation against God's decision by His sovereign will. Besides, salvation is not by inheritance. To borrow Paul's words, "it is not the children by physical descent who are God's children." (Rom. 9:8) In other words, when a child's parents are of the faith, it does not automatically mean the child by descent belongs to the Kingdom.

## Immanuel – God with us – but are we with Him?

Do you welcome the birth of Jesus like many do, or do you reject him as the Messiah as many others do?

It does not matter whether you celebrate Christmas or don't. Those who celebrate vs. those who don't celebrate – one is not necessarily more blessed than the other in terms of getting God's favour.

However, it is significant whether you remember that Christ was born on the day He was born to fulfil God's promise.

**Immanuel – God with us** – regardless of whether we are Jew or Gentile.

Christ was born to be our Saviour:

*“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. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.” – John 3:16-18*

## Final Question

Do you believe?

John Lee 

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### Romans 14:5-6a

*One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord.*

# Dialect Outing

## 6<sup>th</sup> December 2017

Whenever we organize an outing for the Dialect Group, our senior folk can always be trusted to be eager and punctual. Well before the appointed meeting time, they would be already in JCC waiting. This is very encouraging.

On Wednesday, 6<sup>th</sup> December, The Church of the Good Shepherd (Queens-town) held its Mandarin Christmas Outreach service from 10.30 a.m. to 12.00



p.m. Our Dialect Group was invited, and more than 40 of us (with several in wheelchairs), including 10 pre-believers, were bubbling with energy as we set off from JCC at about 9.40 a.m.



It was a great blessing for our Dialect Group to participate in the service and listen to the Christmas message titled 特别的礼物，给特别的你 (“A SPECIAL GIFT, FOR A SPECIAL PERSON LIKE YOU”).

Apart from the great Christmas message about God's gift of His Son, we also heard the life testimony by Desmond Shen (沈金兴), former MediaCorp actor – about how he rose from the valley of death to be born again in Christ.

The sanctuary of The Church of the Good Shepherd was fully packed. After the heart-warming testimony and a spiritually edifying sermon, we were each given a gift (a jewellery carrier) and all were treated to a buffet lunch. It was indeed great hospitality from our host.

After partaking our food for the soul and food for the tummy, we then adjourned for a trip to the spanking new T4 of Changi Airport for a relaxing time of strolling around and having our fellowship time chit-chatting with one another as we took in the sights.



We reached home around 5 p.m., well pleased with the great outing we had.



The JCC Dialect Ministry has been growing strong. However, we still pray for more servants, especially younger ones with great energy, ideas and talents, to provide a fresh breath and lift the ministry to higher grounds into the next season.

God is good, all the time. We give Him our praises and thanks!

*John Lee*



9<sup>th</sup> Dec – Dialect Fellowship at Esther and Cassidy’s condo.







**3<sup>rd</sup> Dec 2017**

# Baptism & Transfers

We Bronsy and Shijo are born and brought up in a Syrian Orthodox Christian family.



In February 2017, our son Rahul had a heavenly vision asking us to go to a L.C.D.C. (Lutheran Christian Denomination Church). We were not aware about Lutheran churches and their belief. Then we Googled to find out more about what Lutherans believe in. So, we discovered the nearest church in Jurong West area. That's how we came to Jurong Christian Church.



We are very glad to be a part of this blessed church with blessed pastors, and loving brothers and sisters in Christ.

Thanks and regards,

Shijo & Family  
3 Dec 2017



## **Continuing my two cents' worth of reflection on Marriage**

On 3rd December 2017, we had a gathering among couples who were mentored by Wong Mui and Beng Lay. Most of us underwent pre-marital counselling with them before our wedding. It was a good mix of couples ranging from a few months into their marriage life to as long as 23 years, not including Wong Mui and Beng Lay, who will be celebrating their wedding anniversary of 28 years in December 2017.

We had a good lunch, lovingly prepared by Beng Lay, after which we gathered to share about our experiences on marriage life. Wong Mui asked us to share our experience of marriage and perhaps lessons we may have learnt in our marriages and family life, as well as an area that we would like to work on in our marriage.

I'm the sort of person who takes a long time to reflect and process on such reflective questions. Though I gave my two cents' worth of reflection within 5 minutes, a few days after that gathering I'm still pondering about lessons learnt in my marriage through the years. So, I thought I'll share part two of my reflections here.

Our marriage had its ups and downs like most marriages. Joys shared in marriage are doubled and sorrows or struggles shared are halved. But what impacted me the most in my marriage were the down periods.

Until now, it is still difficult for me to share verbally about my personal struggles for the past 9 years and I find that easier through writing. Through the down periods of my life, I've learnt to adjust my expectations of my spouse. Maybe I've read too much romance novels in my teenage years and watched too much sappy Hallmark romance movies. I've come to realise and accept that my other half is not the mushy romantic type. Through the course of my personal struggles, he has stuck through it all and not run away. He is very patient and has never rushed me in my recovery process. That, I've come to realise, is more important than giving me roses or mouthing the three words we girls love to hear. Don't get me wrong, romance is good for a marriage. Please do add some spice and romance to your marriage. To my other half's credit, he did give me sunflowers after I gave birth to my son in the hospital. It meant even more to me because I know he's not really the kind to get flowers. He shows his love by feeding me well, thus explains my current shape.

I have learnt to focus more on the strengths of my other half than his weaknesses. Just as he has accepted me and chosen to stay with me in the times

when I've been the weakest. After all, the test of a person's character and strength of their marriage is during the tough times.

Looking ahead in our marriage, both my other half and I had discussed after the gathering, that we would both like to make more time alone with each other and be more spiritually in tune with one another. Starting this Advent in 2017, both of us will be reading and reflecting on the same Advent devotional by John Piper.

Do pray together with us that married couples in our church, with God's help, will continue to honor the commitment we made to each other before God and in the process, we will be transformed in our marriages.

Thank you, Wong Mui and Beng Lay!

## Saw Peh Ern

### Latest Updates

Dialect Leadership Team having a fellowship dinner at Ding Tai Fung on 17<sup>th</sup> December – reinvigorating bonds and encouraging one another to continue their faithful service as they march on into 2018.

**Congratulations to the DLT, and thanks to God, for a blessed year of service in 2017. May more blessings flow as the Dialect Ministry grows!**



Debra Kang from Dialect Ministry was transferred on 10/12/17



Jeremy Chua was baptised on 17/12/17

# Cambodia Mission Trip 0217

8 to 11<sup>th</sup> Dec 2017

Thank God for the safe return of our 17 intrepid mission trippers who brought Christmas to Kampong Chhnang. The initial reports are more than 400 photos and videos of the 4 day event.



We wait in anticipation for the stories from the mission team in the 2018 issues of The Vine.