

Dialect Ministry's Christmas Waits

In old English, “waites” referred to choirs and musicians who would go around the town during the winter season to entertain people with their voices and musical instruments.

In later time, when the English Church organised groups to go door to door to sing Christmas carols to usher in the Christmas season, the choirs of carollers with their accompanying musicians became known as Christmas Waits (*modern spelling*). After a two-year hiatus from carolling due to heavy programmes during the JCC's rebuilding period, the Dialect Ministry's Christmas Waits finally bounced back in force on 21st and 22nd December 2018.

I consciously use the term “Christmas Waits” to describe our Dialect Ministry's carollers, for a reminder of the oldness of the old old story of the extraordinary event – the Advent of Baby Jesus – that Christians have been celebrating for a long long time.

The story of Jesus' birth may be old (in the sense that it originated more than 2000 years ago); yet, the Good News that the carollers bring through the music and hymns is still freshly relevant to everyone in today's chaotic world – the Good News that God sent His Son, and we have true hope in the Messiah.

21st December (morning)

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." – Mt 19:14



Although the Dialect Ministry is dedicated to the dialect-speaking folks who are mainly the elderlies,

the Christmas Waits stayed obedient to Jesus' instruction to engage the little ones, rather than dismiss them, when they were ready to receive the team with their little ears pricked up to hear the Good News.



God bless the Lakeside Family Service at Jurong West Street 52 for inviting the Christmas Waits team to share the Christmas story and bring good tidings to 65 students (ages from Pr 2 to Pr 6 levels).

The Christmas Waits team members might be "old", but they were young at heart and filled with Spirit-driven zest to engage the little ones. Take a look at our animated senior-citizen deacon with the attentive children. Mt 18:1-14 reminds us that the

Christmas story is not just for adults, the proud among whom might consider themselves to be worth more than children. If Jesus had time for all the children, the Dialect Christmas Waits could not have felt more joy to be the vessels to spread God's blessings to these little ones.

Small token gifts were distributed to the students and staff, but the Greatest Gift of All for the Christmas and New Year is: Peace on Earth, glad tidings to men!

21st December (evening)



The first stop was Block 157 Yung Loh Road, at 6.45 p.m. As the Dialect Ministry's Christmas Waits spread themselves around the public space amidst several HDB blocks, they effectively engaged the neighbours with their hymns and music. HDB residents could be seen listening at their windows and balconies, and passers-by at the void deck area stood by to watch. Balloons were handed out to some kiddies.

After about an hour of carols at the public area, the carollers proceeded to the home of sister Deborah Kang.

It looked like the Christmas Waits team was getting much bigger as all those around joined in the singing, creating a very joyous mood. Three sisters-in-Christ from Deborah's office also lent their voices to sing a few hymns in Tagalog.

We thank God for sister Deborah's service of warm hospitality with a sumptuous dinner. We also thank God for the fitting Good News message delivered by Deacon Peter.



As dinner was being enjoyed, the touching moment came when the food caterer, sister Poh Choo, spontaneously requested for time to share a testimony. She shared about how she had never experienced a carolling like this. She felt very touched by the carols and music. Prior to that, she was facing spiritual weakness and some misery even though she



had been attending church every Sunday with her husband. As the Christmas carols rang out, she was much touched by our love and the joyous spirit around. After a time of prayers for her and her husband, Peggy welcomed them to join the weekly badminton game in our church.

22nd December (evening)

The first stop was at the home of Martin Cheah's brother and



mother at Duku Place (off Joo Chiat Road). There, unexpectedly, Deacon Peter and Jessie met their distant relative who is also Martin's relative. What a small place the world is!

The world is indeed just a small place for Christians to reach out to with the Christmas Good News. We thank God for being welcome again with warm hospitality as in the first day of carolling outreach. The warmth of hospitality is indicative of a welcome degree of receptivity to the beautiful feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation through Jesus, our Messiah! (Isa 52:7) Without doubt, the Dialect Ministry's Christmas Waits could not have been happier to have this opportunity to proclaim to Martin's pioneer-citizen mother and her folk the Good News of Christmas:

The carols and music, the Christmas message by Deacon Peter delivered in short and clear style, the opportunity presented by the free-and-easy "refreshment break" interaction time to get to

know one another, the affability of Martin's mother despite her age, the prayers for her that she willingly accepted with all this and more in petitions and prayers to God, we cherish our Christmas hope rooted in the certainty of His Word.

After Christmas blessings to the family of Martin's mother and



brothers and sister, the carollers proceeded to the next stop – a private gathering of Esther Ang's ex-colleagues at a condominium in Pasir Ris. When we reached the function hall, a big group was already

waiting for our carollers.

Blessed to be a blessing; the Dialect Ministry's Christmas Waits indeed showed themselves to be blessed with the singing talent for their mission to share the Good News of Christmas as they sang in English and dialects, and even performed like professional singers taking up the audience's song request. All the carols with sprightly music impressed my heart; and I believe, the hearts of all the people there. Particularly remarkable was the Hokkien song "*U Chu Jia U Hi Bang*" (有主才有希望/*There is hope only in Jesus*) sung energetically to the music of a popular secular Hokkien oldie 爱拼才会赢 ("*Ai Piah Jia Eh Yia*" /*To win you have to give your all*") with enthusiastic participation by the audience.

The Christmas joy that we brought to the audience was unmistakable, with cheerfulness on all the faces, and we pray that the Good News message of Christmas that Deacon Peter shared would find its way into the hearts too.

“U Chu Jia U Hi Bang”

(meaning: There is hope only in Jesus)

I like this Hokkien song with its adept advice, with interesting analogies, for those who are in dire straits and dwelling in fear:

Why lose your hope, blaming the gods and everyone, and sinking yourself to become like a lifeless scarecrow? The song tells the listeners that life is like the morning mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes (James 4:14) When our life is dictated by the affairs of the world, then our worries and contentment just come and go; and we succumb to feelings of emptiness in the end. When life is aimless and going nowhere, there is hope only in Jesus, the saviour of the world.

Do you agree with the message of the Hokkien song?

“Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.” – Ps 42:5

We rejoice that Jesus came to give us something better than the chaos, conflicts and troubled hearts that the world offers.

Give up the one upmanship game. "You think that was bad, let me tell you what happen to me.." Abolish this game forever from your life.

- Jacki Whitford

The Christian way is not the way of the world in which people play the game of one-upmanship in self-centred pursuits instead of following Jesus-centred instructions.

As we went out carolling to bring the Good News to our neighbours, the songs and music did not fail to bounce around where we were and awaken ourselves to the true message of Christmas, the message of hope in Jesus.

Is Christmas already over? The story of Christmas may be an old old story, but it is not a story that is buried in the past. It is a story that should be kept alive for pointing us to our future. It is a story of God's love and our salvation hope, a story that many in the world are still in need of hearing.

New Year Blessings to the Christmas Waits team and all!

John Lee

