

Seasons Greetings

May I take this opportunity to wish you all a truly joyful Christmas and a New Year full of the Lord's richest blessings! As well as being distributed to 80-90 people in Gateshead each month, this News Letter wings its way via the marvels of the internet to people as far apart as Peru and Malaysia, India and the United States of America.



The Forgotten Man of Christmas?

A few years ago, I reflected on what the first Christmas must have been like for Joseph. It was certainly something of a roller-coaster ride for him, as life often is for us.

- **Joseph's dismay.** It must have come as quite a shock to Joseph to find out that his fiancée was expecting a child. He knew that he wasn't the child's father; so he concluded that Mary must have been unfaithful to him, a grave issue in those days. He was ready to break off their engagement, albeit discretely out of consideration for the girl he still loved.
- **Joseph's discovery.** But through a special revelation from God, Joseph discovered the baby his fiancée was carrying was no ordinary baby – hence the special circumstances of its conception. The baby in his fiancée's womb was none other than *God's eternal Son!* This is what lies at the heart of our Christmas celebrations. God came amongst us in the person of his Son to commence the most significant chain of events ever to take place on planet earth.
- **Joseph's disappointment.** However, no sooner had Joseph received this incredible news, than he learned of a major inconvenience that was about to strike them all. He and Mary would have to make a long and arduous journey south, to his birthplace of Bethlehem, to register as part of an enforced Roman census. Yet in years to come, he would be able to look back and see how all this had been within God's plans, to fulfil an ancient prophecy regarding the birthplace of God's long-promised Messiah.
- **Joseph's delight.** Forty days after Mary's firstborn child had been delivered, Joseph took the baby Jesus up to the temple in Jerusalem to offer his thanksgiving to God for the safe arrival of such a precious child. It must have been a moment of pure joy and wonder!

- **Joseph's dilemma.** But shortly after this 'high', Joseph was forced to flee his homeland as a refugee, taking his precious son over the border into Egypt, to escape the murderous intent of evil king Herod.

Looking at Christmas through the eyes of Joseph reminds us that life isn't always plain sailing for us – not even when we are in the centre of God's will. Life will often be a roller-coaster ride for us - even at Christmas-time! Yet we can be sure that *in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose* [Romans 8.28]. Whatever our circumstances this Christmas, may we be assured of this great fact once again, and celebrate the goodness of God with confident joy.

Celebrating the Saviour's birth

Let me remind you the events we have organised this year to celebrate the birth of Jesus, and make him known to people in our local community.

- ❑ **Christmas Coffee Shop, Saturday 4th December, 10.30am-12noon.**
- ❑ **Carol Singing around the streets, Monday 6th, Tuesday 7th and Monday 13th December.** See Val Hill for further details.
- ❑ **Christmas Special, Tuesday 14th December, 7.00-8.30pm** – part of our *Fun and Food for all the Family* programme. There will be games, quizzes, musical items, carols from around the world, a video of the Christmas story (*Starlight Escape*, from the popular TV *Storykeepers* series) – and plenty of Christmas food to enjoy!
- ❑ **All-age Christmas Service, Sunday Morning 19th December, 11.00am-12noon** - a service for young and old alike to enjoy.
- ❑ **Christmas Carol Service, Sunday Evening 19th December, 6.30-7.45pm**, with our own DRBC singing group.
- ❑ **Christmas Day All-age Service, 11.00am-12 noon** - an opportunity to celebrate Jesus' birth together as a Church family.
- ❑ **Boxing Day All-age Special, Sunday Morning 26th December, 11.00am-12noon** – another service for people of all ages to enjoy. (At our Church Meeting in October, it was decided not to hold an evening service on 26th December, unless there is overwhelming demand for one!)

Please make good use of the publicity we have produced to encourage others to join us for these special occasions.

Thank you for the feedback

In last month's letter, I asked for some feedback on the difficulties we sometimes encounter in inviting people to evangelistic events. There was a good response from our e-mail contacts. I received feedback from places as far apart as Northallerton and Salisbury in the UK, and globally from Malaysia, Peru and the United States!

Making Progress

Our attendance levels last month were very encouraging.

- We averaged 42 on *Sunday mornings*, the best monthly figure of the year so far and beaten (over the last three years) only by last December's average of 43. I have been praying that we will consistently achieve a 40-plus attendance level on Sunday mornings, so it was heartening that our lowest Sunday morning attendance in November was only just below this mark, at 39.
- On *Sunday evenings*, we averaged 29, well up from our mid-year low of only 16, recorded in July.
- Our *Total Sunday attendance* averaged 59, the best monthly figure of the year so far and only exceeded during the last three years by the last two Decembers (at 62).

Pray with us that we will exceed last December's figures this month, and build on our recent better attendance levels throughout 2005.



Financial Update

At our half-AGM in October, several important decisions were taken regarding the future finances of the Church. As the Meeting was rather sparsely attended (for a whole variety of reasons), let me take this opportunity to bring you up-to-date on the information shared.

- **2004 update.** Our average weekly offering this year has averaged £282 so far, well exceeding our target figure of £250, for which we give God all the praise and glory. We have also received unbudgeted donations of just over £2,000, so we anticipate that our income for the year will exceed our budget figure by about £3,500. As our expenditure is currently about £3,000 within our budgeted figure, we anticipate that our deficit this year will be around £1,000 instead of the £7,700 we had anticipated. The deficit will need to be

made up from our reserves, but we thank God that it will be less than expected.

- **2005 budget.** Full details were given at our Half-AGM of our budget for 2005. We are grateful to have been awarded a grant of £6,500 from Home Mission to help cover some of the costs of employing a Pastor. We have set a target of £270 for our weekly offerings, which we hope to exceed, based on this year's good level of giving.
- **2006 estimate.** We are required to estimate our income and expenditure for 2006 when applying for a Home Mission grant for that year, something we will be doing next month. In line with the Baptist Union's policy of encouraging aided churches to become self-supporting over a period of five years, we have reduced our grant application from £6,500 for 2005 to £6,000 for 2006. We have set a target figure of £285 for our weekly average offerings for 2006.

Building refurbishment.

I mentioned last month that we have decided to go ahead with the first phase of our much-needed building refurbishment work early in the New Year, trusting the Lord to provide the outstanding income required to complete the work: **£4,770 for the ramp work and £3,587 for the roof repairs.**

Part of the money we require for the accessibility work is a gift of £1056, by way of a 'Third Party Reimbursement'. This will then release the £10,000 grant *The SITA Environmental Trust* have offered us. Join with me in praying that an individual, a group of people, or some other body, will be moved to make this donation to enable us to receive SITA's sizeable grant. It is not a sum the Church, as the beneficiary of the grant, is allowed to remit; the donation has to be from a third-party source.

As part of our preparations for the work going ahead, Lewis Wilson has kindly agreed to co-ordinate a 'Spring Cleaning' party, to clear the church of any unused and unwanted items. If you would like to be a part of the work party, please let Lewis know.



Once again, let me wish you all a very joyful Christmas, and a New Year in which we learn to trust in God's goodness more and more.

David Hunt